

From Petition to Confrontation:
The Palestinian National Movement and the Rise of Mass Politics, 1929-1939

by
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies
and
Department of History
New York University
September, 2013

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~ Dedication ~

In memory of William Gilbert Anderson

and

for my mother, Beth L. Anderson, for all of her love and support.

Acknowledgements

The idea for this project owes first and foremost to the suggestions of Salim Tamari and Sherene Seikaly who respectively encouraged me to consider writing a history of the Great Revolt in Palestine and to do so from below, looking at popular social forces. Neither they nor any of my other committee members and colleagues are responsible for the outsize dimensions which it subsequently took on. Academically and intellectually I am in the greatest debt to Zachary Lockman, whose steady hand and continuous confidence in the direction of the project kept it afloat over several years of gestation and several more of writing. I have learned much from the example set by his scholarly rigor and from his enduring commitment to writing and engaging with the histories of popular classes, and I am deeply grateful for the subtle guidance with which he steered this project to fruition. To the extent that it positively contributes to the fields of inquiry into which it delves, he is certainly deserving of a good deal of the credit. I am also humbled and honored by the great patience and indulgence of the other members of my committee, without which this work would not have been possible: James Gelvin, Manu Goswami, Michael Gilson, and Salim Tamari. Each has served as an exemplar for me of intellectual endeavor over many years and, given their varying intellectual affinities, specializations, and interests, together they have provided me with a great wealth of insights and inclinations that have benefitted this dissertation. I have enjoyed their company, queries, and encouragements as well as the intellectual journeys that I have taken with each of them immensely and I hope that the final product at this

stage does justice to what they have respectively taught me.

My time in the dissertation writers' workshop of the Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Department of NYU added to this project, and in particular I am appreciative of feedback and critiques I received from Guy Burak, Leena Dallasheh, Susynne McElrone, and Peter Valenti. Haytham Bahoora, Ryvka Barnard, Munir K. Fakher Eldin, Erik Freas, Aaron Jakes, Anjali Kamat, Leili Kashani, Tristan Kirvin, Shane Minkin, Sherene Seikaly, and Ahmad Shokr all provided company, conversation, and stimulation along the way at MESA, NYU, and otherwise.

This past year I was especially delighted to find great camaraderie with Miles Rodriguez and Nate Shockey, and before that with Allison Brown and Leyla Mei. I also had the great fortune of teaching at Bard College, where my colleagues always lifted my spirits and where the students in my classes helped make my first year as a fulltime professor and the final year of this project's birth an amazing, rich, and truly gratifying experience.

Abroad I was graciously assisted at the CZA by Ro'i and Itzik, at the Haganah Archives by Orly, Shraga and the *banot* of 2007, at the Institute for Jerusalem Studies by Salim Tamari, at the ISA by Michal and Ylena, and at the MEC by Debbie Usher. I am grateful to the FLAS fellowship program, Fulbright IIE, the (old) MacCracken program (R.I.P.), and to the MEIS Department for funding that enabled my research.

My community in New York has been essential to sustaining me and to making the days more rounded and pleasant while working through the ardors and occasional solitude that go into a modern liberal arts Ph.D. I am especially thankful for Justin

Green, Christine Maxson, and Silky Shah for all of their love and support. Without them my life would have been rather different and rather more difficult, and I will always be grateful for the time we shared. Silky Shah has been an inspiration in finishing this work and in showing me the way to a wider, brighter world beyond it, and I am inestimably appreciative for all of her vital energy, investment, patience, and support. Finally, my mother has been an unflagging baseline and advocate for me ever since I can remember, and I am so happy to have had her love, care and unflappable encouragement, all of which have helped me to realize my passion for teaching and study.

Abstract

This dissertation provides a history from below of Palestinian national movement and Arab society during the tumultuous decade of the 1930s. It argues that the influence and authority of the small group of factionalized and disunited notable politicians that are conventionally understood to have monopolized the leadership of the national struggle during the era of British Mandatory rule has been greatly overstated. This is especially so for the restive and rebellious middle period of the Mandate (1929-1939), during which the movement turned from a conciliatory and quietist strategy of gentlemanly diplomacy preferred by elite politicians to confrontation, mass mobilization and armed struggle, culminating in “the Great Revolt” (1936-1939), a prolonged anti-colonial rebellion against both British rule and the Zionist project it sponsored. By examining the political practices, organizing, self-understanding, and leadership capacities of “youth” and peasants, the dissertation explicates the eclipse of elite preeminence within the national movement and the rise of the new, horizontally-organized social forces that reshaped and radicalized Palestinian politics in the 1930s.

The dissertation first explores the proliferation of youth associations in the early 1930s and illuminates how the rise of youth as an assertive, ambitious, and politically frustrated element had profound ramifications for the tactics, strategy, and trajectory of the national movement. The narrative then turns to track the decomposition of the Arab rural order from the late Ottoman era to 1936, paying particular attention to the crisis of the countryside under the British, who fecklessly intensified pre-existing tendencies

towards peasant destitution, bankruptcy, and dispossession, thereby helping to create a disaffected class of uprooted ex-peasants. The final section analyzes the Great Revolt, focusing on the critical roles of youth, peasants, and workers in initiating and propelling it and on the popular and revolutionary institutions that organized and sustained it against great odds for over three years. This section also interrogates British counterinsurgency, highlighting the role of specific forms of colonial violence, especially collective punishments, in ending the rebellion, and with it the ascent of popular forces within the national movement.

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Acronyms and glossary

AE: Arab Executive
AG: Attorney General
ADC: Assistant District Commissioner
AHC: Arab Higher Committee
AOC: Air Officer Commanding
ASP: Assistant Superintendent of Police
AWC: Arab Women's Committee
AWS: Arab Workers' Society
CCJ: Central Committee for the Jihad
CID: Criminal Investigation Department
CO: Colonial Office
DC: District Commissioner
DDSP: Deputy District Superintendent of Police
DIG: Deputy Inspector General of Police
DIG-CID: Deputy Inspector General of Police; head of the CID
DP: Defense Party
FO: Foreign Office
GOC: General Officer Commanding
HC: High Commissioner
IPC: Iraq Petroleum Company
JA: Jewish Agency
JCA: Jewish Colonization Association
JNF: Jewish National Fund
LTO: Land Transfer Ordinance
MCA: Muslim Christian Association
NC: national committee
OAB: Ottoman Agricultural Bank
OAG: Officer Administering the Government; Acting High Commissioner
PAP: Palestine Arab Party
PAWS: Palestinian Arab Workers' Society
PLDC: Palestine Land Development Company
PLL: Palestine Labor League
RPT: Rural Property Tax
SMC: Supreme Muslim Committee
WO: War Office
YC: Youth Congress
YMMA: Young Mens' Muslim Association
ZO: Zionist Organization

'alim (pl: *'ulama*): religious scholar; man of religious learning
'ayn (pl: *a 'yan*): notable
bayan: communiqué; announcement

bilad al-Sham: geographic or Greater Syria
fellah (pl: *fellahin*): peasant
hamula: clan; extended family network
iltizam: tax farm
majlisi: adjective referring to the faction of the mufti and the Husayni family
majlisiyyin: members or followers of the mufti's faction and the Husayni family
mu'arida: the Opposition faction
mu'aridin: members or followers of the Opposition faction led by the Nashashibi family
mukhtar: loosely, mayor or chief
multazim: tax farmer
simsar: land broker
Shami: Syrian or Greater Syrian
Qassami (pl: *Qassamiyun*): follower of shaykh 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam
qirsh (pl: *qurush*): piaster
'urf: customary law
yishuv: the pre-statehood Jewish community in Palestine

Introduction

On 27 October 1933 thousands of Palestinian Arabs gathered in the streets of the port city of Jaffa for a raucous demonstration against the immigration policy of the British Mandate government. The mobilization showcased the energies and increasing clout of the youth activists that had pressed to bring it about, including the Youth Congress, the leading organ of the younger generation. Turnout was strong. The government estimated 7-10,000 people thronged in downtown Jaffa that morning, making the assembly the largest civic protest of its kind in the history of British rule in Palestine. The crowd was full of workers, peasants and youths and studded with politicians and members of the upper and middle classes, visible in their distinctive headgear, the *tarbush*. Delegations came from far and wide. They arrived from Huleh in the Upper Galilee, from the Bedouin community of Wadi al-Hawarith in the coastal plain where embattled inhabitants were being evicted by Jewish colonists, and from other points in Palestine. Small groups from Transjordan and Syria attended. A group of women from Jerusalem took part under the auspices of the upper class Arab Women's Committee (AWC), one of whose leaders, Matiel Mughannam, delivered a rousing speech to the assembly.¹

The Jaffa protest was the second in a what was intended to be a series of popular processions expressing the Arab public's adamant opposition to the rapidly swelling numbers of Jewish settlers arriving to Palestine's shores. As the United States and

¹ For citations pertaining to the account of the 1933-34 demonstrations related here, see chapter 2. Mughannam's speech is noted in Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its "New" Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 122.

Britain closed their doors to those fleeing the anti-Semitic regimes of central and eastern Europe, the tide of Jews turning to Palestine as a refuge showed no signs of breaking. Annual immigration rates rose exponentially in the early 1930s from around 4-5000 before 1932 to over 37,300 in 1933 after the ascent of Hitler to the Chancellorship in Germany, before climbing yet higher in 1934 and 1935.² The Zionist dream of building a Jewish society – and ultimately a Jewish sovereignty – in Palestine had long been fervently rejected by the indigenous Muslim and Christian Arab majority. From its very origin, the Palestinian national movement had decried Jewish immigration as part and parcel of Great Britain's policy, enunciated in the Balfour declaration of 2 November 1917, of seeking to build a "Jewish National Home" in Palestine.³ The Arabs feared that mass immigration would foster their demographic and political displacement at the hands of Zionism and its British patron, and as immigration surged in the first half of the 1930s and the *yishuv* (the pre-state Jewish community) grew by leaps and bounds while the Arabs weathered sustained economic and political crisis, these anxieties appeared more founded than ever.

The first demonstration, smaller but still sizable, had transpired two weeks earlier at Jerusalem and resulted in non-lethal clashes between crowds and the police. It had been called by the Arab Executive (AE), the staid elite forum that had been the center of

² Yehoshua Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement: From Riots to Rebellion, 1929-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 1977), p. 39.

³ For close accounts of the early years of the national movement, see Abdul-Wahhab Kayyali, *Palestine: A Modern History* (London: Croom Helm, 1978); Bayan Nuwayhid al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat al-siyasiyyah fi Filastin, 1917-1948* (Acre: Dar al-Aswar, 1981); and Sahar Huneidi, *A Broken Trust: Herbert Samuel, Zionism and the Palestinians* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001). See also Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian Arab National Movement, 1918-1929* (London: Frank Cass, 1974) and Ann M. Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine, 1917-1939: The Frustration of a Nationalist Movement* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979).

the Palestinian national movement for over a dozen years, after weeks of mounting pressure from below and after the Arab press assailed its torpidity in the face of the immigration boom. The government tried to no avail to prevent the Jerusalem protest, underscoring its illegal character as a procession without a permit. After the announcement of the Jaffa demonstration the Palestine administration again warned of the potential consequences of holding an illegal protest. At a meeting on 25 October a member of the AE explained its discomfited position to the High Commissioner: "We have never in the past resorted even to peaceful demonstrations; now we have been pushed to it by the people themselves. Being so pushed, we hope that Government would help us and not force us to lead people to more serious trouble." As neither side gave ground, confrontation loomed.

Anticipating further clashes after the Jerusalem protest and reflecting the refractory mood spreading throughout Arab society, some men came to the Jaffa demonstration armed with clubs and sticks of wood and metal. Following speeches at the Great Mosque and other locations the assembly marched on Clock Tower Square, where its path was blocked by a police cordon of some 100 officers. When the police attempted to disperse the marchers with mounted baton charges the protestors fought back by stoning them. After regrouping, the commanding officer on the scene, J.A.M. Faraday, broke the police into three squads, one for each of the three principle streets off of the square. On his order the squads advanced and opened fire. As many as 19 Arab protestors and one Arab police officer were killed in the deadly melee that ensued, and over 70 protestors and 25 police were injured. Word of what was called "the Jaffa

massacre” spread rapidly and brought on further skirmishes between outraged Arabs and the police. An Arab general strike was called almost immediately. Crowds assaulted the railroad terminal and police station at Haifa and barricaded the city’s streets and in Jerusalem the police were attacked with home-made bombs and government targets were sniped at night. Protests spread to other areas of the country and the colonial authorities quickly deployed troops into four cities, including Jerusalem, to hold the line. Suppression of the most vigorous unrest at Haifa, Jerusalem and Nablus cost the Palestinians another 7 dead and over 100 wounded.⁴

The local risings didn’t last long but the colonial state was determined to avoid further conflagration. A number of critical organizers and leaders were arrested on 27 October while planning the next demonstration. More subtly, with the connivance of the Grand Mufti of Palestine, al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the much-delayed third protest in the series, held at Nablus in January 1934, was all but stage-managed by the colonial authorities. Its tepid character signaled the end of the protest cycle.

The 1933 demonstrations mark several turning points. The first concerns the strategic orientation of the Palestinian national movement. For the first time in the Mandate’s history Arab unrest was directed at the British regime. Prior incidents of collective violence – in 1920, 1921, and 1929 – had all been aimed at Jews and Jewish communities and settlements. Where previously Arab frustration and anger at their political and economic marginalization was manifested at the settler movement staking a competing claim to the Palestinians’ homeland, in 1933 the protestors laid the blame at

⁴ See chapter 2 for a more detailed explanation of the casualty data.

the feet of Zionism's British patron. In doing so, the demonstrations illuminated a new trajectory for the Palestinian movement, one that named British rule the primary obstacle to Arab independence and held the colonial regime responsible for the economic and demographic gains made by the Zionist movement and the corresponding dislocations suffered by the Arabs.

The second turning point was evident in the changing bases and dynamics of leadership within Palestinian society. The elite circles that had dominated local Arab politics for most of the Mandate were not enamored of mass mobilization, street protests, or confrontation, each of which they had long considered coarse, undignified, and counter-productive. They preferred to practice what Ann M. Lesch has aptly referred to as the "politics of petition": a strategy of gentlemanly diplomacy that was thoroughly reminiscent of Ottoman models of personalized politics and elite intermediation on behalf of the population.⁵ The plaintive note members of the AE sounded before the Jaffa protest, at once pleading and cajoling, was not political theater but a genuine warning about the strength of roiling public opinion. As attested to by the intelligence branch of the colonial police, the Criminal Investigation Department, the AE was compelled to call the national protests in response to the upsurge of popular fervor and for fear of being upstaged by newer, more stalwart political forces, namely the pan-Arab Istiqlal Party and the Youth Congress. The latter were recent entrants to the political field, yet they were part of a deepening current of radicalization and militancy that was reshaping the national struggle. In place of the older leadership, whose star had dimmed

⁵ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 107.

by 1933, an amalgam of organizations comprised of increasingly autonomous and assertive youth, peasants, workers, and women arose. The new associational culture that they forged was mass-based and promoted forms of mass mobilization and collective action designed to defend Arab interests and the “homeland.”

The willingness of organizers to risk a serious confrontation with the colonial state at Jaffa highlights a third and final turning point attained by the demonstrations. The push from below that produced the street protests was part of a larger search for new tactics capable of responding to the sharpening colonial dilemma of the Palestinians and the straitening conditions they faced after a decade and a half of British occupation. The broad eclipse of elite leadership within the national movement was inseparable from the discrediting of its pacific mode of politics. Since its founding in 1920 the AE had lodged numerous entreaties with government, held meetings with officials, and sent several delegations to London, all to no avail. Its quietist diplomacy had produced neither significant change to the Jewish National Home policy nor any tangible step towards self-rule and independence. Leading organs of the popular constituencies that had gathered in the streets of Jaffa were increasingly attracted afterwards to direct action, for instance mounting campaigns to fight the evictions of Arabs at Zionist hands. While the British stymied their initiatives, the growing mobilization and tactical innovations of the early 1930s ultimately culminated in what Palestinians call “the Great Revolt” (*al-Thawra al-kubra*) from 1936-1939, the longest anti-colonial Arab rebellion of the interwar era.

The constitution of a vibrant and militant anti-colonial politics in the 1930s was

predicated on tectonic shifts within Arab society and the economy. These shifts – the results of both peripheral capitalist development in Palestine since the nineteenth century and a host of British policies favoring Zionist enterprises and the development of the *yishuv* – destabilized the *ancien régime* in Palestine, unsettling its class structure and diminishing the influence of the vertical networks of family and clan (*hamula*; pl: *hama'il*) that had organized society. Although the British desired to retain the existing socio-economic structures and internal balance of forces among the Arabs, imagining themselves to be conserving the Arab social order and preventing the growth of a restive lumpenproletariat, their regime added greatly to the strains already wracking Arab society. Peasant poverty and indebtedness, which had spiked during World War I, were exacerbated by a welter of factors: the award of major economic concessions to Jewish firms; the erection of protectionist policies for Jewish industry; discriminatory wage scales; alterations to the land tenure system and other aid to Zionist colonization; regressive agrarian taxation; and the absence of affordable credit. Compounded by poor harvests in the early 1930s, Arab landlessness greatly increased. Many dispossessed peasants became part of a “peasantariat,” left struggling to eke out a living as wage-laborers and not fully integrated into either the countryside or the shantytowns of the port cities between which they lived. Ironically the dislocations produced by British policy and the intensifying economic development of the Zionist project played essential roles in reconfiguring Arab society and its politics, leading to the emergence of a new and increasingly vociferous and multitudinous mass politics.

As I will explore herein, youth were a bellwether of the restructuring of Arab

society. “Youth” was a broad and elastic category which in many respects came to represent an ideal and a set of nationalist dispositions as much as it designated generational difference. Beginning in the late 1920s with the founding of the Young Men’s Muslim Association a new current of self-organization began to coalesce among Arab youth. They formed sports clubs, cultural and religious organizations, village associations, and scout troops in increasing numbers throughout the country, many of which were interested in social reform and the protection and promotion of Arab identities and collective rights. By doing so, the nascent youth trend helped to forge a new horizontal model and ethos for the organization of Palestinian politics.

The rise and consolidation of a new horizontal associational culture within Arab Palestine, in which youth were instrumental, produced and enabled new forms of social mobilization, new subjectivities, and new articulations of collective identity. These developments were driven for the most part from below. Elite women established the first women’s association in 1929.⁶ Workers in several professions and sectors had begun to come together to form unions and workers’ syndicates since the mid-1920s. Peasants joined in the youth societies and unions and formed their own village and migrant associations. These various fora, which bloomed in the late 1920s and early 1930s, highlight a growing impulse towards horizontal affinities and self-organization. Individually they often became dynamic spaces of social and political engagement and platforms for autonomy from dominant social elements; collectively they transformed

⁶ This was one major exception to the grassroots directionality of the new horizontal formations, and owing to both entrenched patriarchal cultural norms and the enduring social distance between the founders of the women’s movement and the non-elite majority, particularly that of the countryside, it remained an elite bastion and did not replicate the mass forms of sociability and membership seen by the other social forces considered here.

the shape and practice of local Arab politics. In place of the patriarchal and patrimonial leadership of elites, more participatory, polycentric and inclusive configurations of politics emerged in which the lower classes and non-elites were increasingly assertive and irrepressible.⁷

As Rashid Khalidi has observed, the most salient division in Palestinian society at this time was not that between feuding Jerusalemite notables (which has absorbed so much scholarly attention), but between the conservative politicians and their challengers from below.⁸ The new social forces took a dim view of the elite leadership of the national struggle, who youth in particular increasingly castigated as self-interested, ineffectual and sluggish. Their criticism escalated after the quashing of the 1930 White Paper – which contained limitations on Jewish immigration and land purchasing – at the behest of Zionist lobbying.⁹ As immigration boomed while the Arab countryside suffered severe economic crisis and the British rebuffed the Palestinians' demands and spited their aspirations, the mood grew bleak. Youth, workers, and peasants began to push for a strategy of confrontation and direct challenge to the colonial power, and after 1933 insurrection was not long in coming.

The Great Revolt is arguably the seminal event of Palestinian politics during the Mandate. Consisting of two primary phases, a half year general strike and armed insurrection beginning in April 1936 and an insurgency from fall 1937 until the eve of

⁷ Elites competed over and attempted to coopt the new horizontal associations, but the changes in political sociability and the scale of horizontal organization were too great for them to fully subordinate or gain mastery over. See chapters 1-3.

⁸ Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), p. xl.

⁹ These issues are treated in chapter 1.

World War II in 1939, the revolt was the largest mass mobilization of the territory's Arab populace in its history and engaged the participation in various forms of great swathes of the Arab population throughout the country in both urban and rural areas. Both the general strike and the insurgency emanated from below and it was largely the energies, determination, and leadership of popular social forces that propelled the revolt in each of its principal phases. Although they were caught off guard by the rebellion, elite leaders were quick to try to retake the reins of the national struggle, forming the cross-factional Arab Higher Committee (AHC) to coordinate overall policy. But despite a partial reassertion of their authority, perhaps foremost in their preexisting capacity as brokers and mediators between the British colonial state and the bulk of the Arab population, neither the strike, nor the subsequent insurgency (when a new supervisory body, the Central Committee for the Jihad, was created) can properly be said to have come solidly or steadily under elite control.

In spite the leading roles played by popular forces in generating the momentous upheavals of the 1930s much of the historical and scholarly work on Palestinian national movement under the Mandate and on the Mandate itself has privileged Arab elites and their forums, presuming them to be the guiding forces of Arab society and politics. Concentrating on the diplomatic history of Palestine, which almost by definition telescopes in on elites and the realm of the state, many older works (and some newer ones) have lavished attention on the AE, the AHC, the mufti, and the internecine conflicts of the elites, most especially the inveterate schism between the al-Husaynis and the al-Nashashibis and their respective allies. Together these bodies, the mufti, and elite

factionalism have been presented as the keys to understanding Palestinian history under British rule.

The limitations of this top-heavy focus are clear. As Rachelle Taqqu put it long ago, “the preoccupation with the traditional elites of Palestine has placed the history of the Arab community in a one-dimensional framework.”¹⁰ In spite of the undoubted importance of elites and the insights to be found in the works that have examined them, the tumultuousness of the 1930s – so antithetical to the upper classes – suggests that common assumptions about leadership, political practice, and social power during the decade need to be reexamined. On this point James Gelvin has suggested in a trenchant critique of the elitist fixations of the literature on Arab nationalism in the Levant that histories that elide “the domain of popular politics” fail to grapple with and illuminate the dynamic and dialectical character of the nationalist movements of the interwar era.¹¹

The notion of a dialectically constituted nationalist formation is scarcely present in most of the work on the Palestinian national movement during the Mandate.

Although many accounts do concede some recognition of non-elite initiative and agency during the revolt (and particularly during the insurgency phase which was undeniably and overwhelmingly peasant-based), the popular social forces that were in fact critical to the radicalization of the Palestinian national movement and its course are not well considered, explained, or understood in most of the existing scholarship.¹² This owes

¹⁰ Rachelle Leah Taqqu, “Arab Labor in Mandatory Palestine, 1920-1948,” Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University, 1977), p. 4.

¹¹ James Gelvin, “The Other Arab Nationalism: Syrian/Arab Populism in Its Historical and International Contexts” in Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, eds., *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 233.

¹² See below.

greatly to elitist bias that denies non-elite agency and the importance of non-elite actors. As well it derives from another basis: the lack of apprehension that a new mode and ethos of politics – mass politics – arose within Arab society in Palestine in the period between 1929 and 1936. Produced through a complex and somewhat amorphous mesh of factors (discussed below), the ascent and arrival of mass politics as a phenomenon and as a category for the analysis of the transformation in Palestinian politics and society between the decades of the 1920s and the 1930s has long eluded conventional scholarly approaches.

The occlusion of attention to the social forces and the denial of their role in remaking Palestinian politics during the 1930s has led to a deficient understanding of the era and its momentous upheavals. This is all the more problematic in light of the weight which is attributed within the scholarly literature to the Great Revolt in bringing about internal Palestinian disorganization and external repression, paving the way for national “failure” and collapse a decade later, culminating in the dispersion of the bulk of Palestine’s indigenous Arab population.¹³ In this view Palestinian politics and society is diagnosed as fundamentally and fatally lacking – at turns unity, organization, discipline, and concerted vision – and these inadequacies are traced back significantly to the period of the revolt. While it is beyond the scope of this project temporally and thematically to fully explore the relationship between the revolt and the *nakba*, the mass dispossession

¹³ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*; Lesch, *Arab Politics*; Ylana Miller, *Government and Society in Rural Palestine, 1920-1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History* (Harvard UP, 2003 [1994]); Rashid Khalidi, “The Palestinians and 1948: The Underlying Causes of Failure” in Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), p. 12-36; Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). Khalidi makes the most concerted and robust argument in this respect.

of the Palestinians in 1948, it is clear that the failure narrative has cast a long historiographic shadow back upon the events of the revolt. What is also clear is that more than the teleological leaning detectable in accounts which tend to give the 1940s short shrift, the view of Palestinian society as essentially lacking presents a counter-factual analysis centered around *absences* in place of a proper historical examination into the activities of broad sectors, if not the majority, of the population.

This dissertation departs from the narratives of failure and lack that have so commonly been put forward to explain the travails of the Palestinians.¹⁴ It examines the political practices, organizing, self-understanding, and leadership capacities of popular social forces, particularly youth, peasants, and workers, in Mandatory Palestine. As a history from below of the 1930s era it challenges the conventional elitist paradigms that have dominated much of the scholarship and left the Palestinian majority in the shadows. By engaging the broadening and deepening political and social activism, nationalism, and struggle of popular constituencies, it provides a new look at the pivotal middle decade of the Mandate and the dynamics that brought the Palestinian national movement from the realm of genteel diplomacy to the path of armed struggle.

Elitist paradigms of Palestinian history under the Mandate: the origins

Much has come before to obscure the ascent of popular leadership during the 1930s and the social classes from which it emerged. The absence or slighting of inquiry

¹⁴ I am indebted to the insights of Sherene Seikaly and Munir Fakher Eldin on failure narratives. See, for instance, the critique in Seikaly, “Meatless Days: Consumption and Capitalism in Wartime Palestine, 1939-1948,” Ph.D. dissertation (New York University, 2007), p. 1-25.

into the social classes comprising the bulk of Palestinian Arab society in the Mandate era, until relatively recently, owes greatly to what I will call the *effendi* thesis. Here I follow and elaborate upon the work of Haim Gerber.¹⁵ The *effendi* thesis posits that Palestinian society and its politics were rigidly hierarchical in organization such that only the upper classes, mislabeled the *effendiyya* (a malleable category more closely analogous to “intelligentsia”), possessed real social agency.¹⁶ As Gerber relates, Zionist scholarship that does acknowledge the existence of the Palestinians as a people has tended to conclude that only the educated upper class members of society were capable of intellectually grasping and digesting the nation as a form of collective political identity. This stratum, described simplistically and reductively as “corrupt” and “greedy” are held to have been the beacons of nationalism, which in Palestinian history consisted of little more than noxious anti-Zionist agitation that the Arab elites spread for their own selfish and acquisitive purposes.¹⁷ Thus a corollary to the *effendi* thesis within Zionist scholarship understands Palestinian nationalism as less a derivative discourse (ala Chatterjee’s argument) than a negative conception.¹⁸ As Gerber elucidates: “One basic claim [made by this literature] is that the Palestinians lacked positive values in their nationalism, their ideology being confined to a fundamental hatred of Zionism, an

¹⁵ Gerber does not refer to an *effendi* thesis or even to any general thesis binding the works he critiques. Nevertheless I think this is precisely what he analyzes and my argument here is indebted to his historiographic and epistemological interventions, particularly “Zionism, Orientalism, and the Palestinians,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* v. 33, n. 1 (Fall 2003), p. 23-41, and *Remembering and Imagining Palestine: Identity and Nationalism from the Crusades to the Present* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁶ On the definition of *effendi* in the Palestinian context Adel Manna‘ has usefully referred to them as “intellectual capital holders”: “Scholars and Notables: Tracing the Effendiya’s Hold on Power in 18th-Century Jerusalem,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* v. 8, n. 1 (Autumn 2007), p. 6.

¹⁷ Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining Palestine*, p. 1

¹⁸ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Press, 1986).

alien and dangerous force.”¹⁹ Palestinian nationalism is little more than a kind of revanchism, intended to cloak and promote elite interests, including the exploitation of the popular classes. In this wooden, if not robotic view of social relations and social life in Arab Palestine the masses are mostly inert and passive. They alternate between acting as vessels of the upper classes and lingering in a kind of Orientalist timelessness, constitutionally impervious and hostile to social change. They are not seen as active social forces capable of free thought or independent decision-making, organization and action. Taken together, this set of notions has served to replicate the classic Labor Zionist narrative explaining the encounter with the *effendiyya* and Palestinian society: “But for the incitement of these social elements the common folk of Palestine, too ‘primitive’ for exalted feelings such as nationalism, would have embraced the liberal and benign cause of Zionism, and joined forces with the Zionists against their own corrupt leadership.”²⁰

The *effendi* thesis is not solely attributable to Zionist thought. The core proposition concerning hierarchical authority and the elite’s monopoly on social agency can be found, in somewhat different forms and renditions, in Palestinian, Arab, and Anglophone scholarship as well as in Zionist works. This has greatly to do with many of the sources available for writing Palestinian history. The British officers and administrators that governed Palestine, almost to a one, were big proponents of the thesis. Given their entrenchment in Orientalist knowledge and its peculiar and stultifying notions, they were, generally speaking, scarcely able to conceive of the depth

¹⁹ Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining*, p. 4.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 1. The quote is Gerber’s but the genealogical attribution made here is my own.

and character of the dynamic changes which Palestinian society underwent both before their occupation and during it. The Zionist movement was similarly steeped in Eurocentric and Orientalist notions and demonstrated a great propensity to see Arab politics and anti-colonialism as conspiracies run by elites, if not foreign powers. As for the Palestinians themselves, many of the available written sources that we have to work with – newspapers, memoirs, document collections, chronicles – were authored by members of the middle and upper classes. Not surprisingly they tend to reflect some of their biases and self-conception, as well as a sense of the exigencies of the times they lived through. Before turning to look at the *effendi* thesis's effects on the historiography of the middle period of the Mandate with which we are concerned here, I will briefly limn some noteworthy ideological, discursive and contextual aspects of the sources in question, in order to shed greater light on the proclivities of the different scholarly corpuses.

To begin with the Palestinian and Arab sources, a number of tropological features stand out. Many memoirs and books from the Mandate era put forward a kind of national unity narrative, where internal social divisions and class tensions were denied and hidden from view.²¹ With regard to publications there is no doubt that this was intended to promote social solidarity in difficult times, or in the case of memoirs, to promote positive reconstructions of Mandate-era Arab society. The evocation of Palestine as possessing an idyllic past in which social harmony prevailed and class distinctions were immaterial was a hallmark of nationalist discourse and the middle and

²¹ Ylana Miller has described several works, including that used here by 'Isa al-Sifri, as cleaving to such a narrative: *Government and Society*, p. 21.

upper classes' collective self-image. This type of view perdured long after the Mandate was dead and gone and the *nakba* had uprooted the majority of the Palestinians. In interviews conducted in the 1970s for Bayan al-Hut's magnum opus, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat al-siyasiyyah fi Filastin, 1917-1948*, her respondents, former members of the Mandate-era leaderships she examines, repeated over and over again that Palestine had no social classes under the British. They rejected any comparison of their former society with feudalism (a common charge made by the British, Zionists, and Arab Marxists alike) and asserted that there had been no "extreme maldistribution of material wealth." Some landowning families went so far as to claim, without irony, that their closeness to the peasantry in the old country had been manifest in their breaking bread with them during feasts and holidays.²² As the sampling she collected revealed (and as will be explored at length in the following chapters), there was a tremendous denial of the salience of class and class difference within Palestinian society on the part of elite and middle class elements.

The images and conceptions of political leadership that emerge from some Arabic sources are remarkable. Memoirs commonly evince their authors' perceptions, perhaps sometimes refashioned *post hoc*, that the Palestinian movement cried out for strong, charismatic leadership. Almost unconsciously this is seen to have necessitated a single unparalleled figure to shepherd the nation through its trials and travails. The mufti, al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, is inevitably cast as the only Palestinian of such stature, despite his immensely divisive and destructive leadership and legacy. Rashid al-Hajj

²² Bayan N. al-Hout [al-Hut], "The Palestinian Political Elite During the Mandate Period," *Journal of Palestine Studies* v. 9, n. 1 (Autumn 1979), p. 100-01.

Ibrahim, a prominent Haifan businessman and ardent nationalist, exemplifies this attitude. His memoirs illustrate the belief that the movement needed a single leader to cohere around and lend it direction. Perhaps not without a certain ambivalence, writing after the fall of his city and of Arab Palestine in 1948, he affirms that the mufti was the most logical candidate for the task.²³ In evincing such a position and elevating the mufti to the status of *point de capiton* (quilting point)²⁴ for the nationalist struggle, al-Hajj Ibrahim is joined by numerous other figures and works, including important youth activists like Akram Zu‘aytir and Ahmad al-Shuqayri, each of whom transitioned from opposing the mufti to seeing him as the obvious, singular and unquestioned leader of the Palestinian struggle.²⁵ Through such seemingly sensible rereadings of the past al-Hajj Amin’s historical role is stripped of its more ambiguous, convoluted, and complex dimensions. Instead the image of the mufti as the stalwart nationalist icon is reified and the controversial leader is converted – misleadingly and reductively – into the ostensible personification of the Palestinian struggle and Palestinian history. In its most emblematic renditions, such representations of the mufti substitute iconography for history.

²³ Walid al-Khalidi, introduction to Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, *al-Difa‘ ‘an Haifa wa-qadiyat Filastin: mudhakkirat Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, 1891-1953* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 2005), p. xl.

²⁴ Also sometimes translated as “anchoring point,” this is a concept drawn from Lacanian psychoanalysis which describes a point that unifies and stabilizes meaning within an ideological field. Lacan summarized it as “the point of convergence that enables everything that happens [within a given] discourse to be situated retroactively and prospectively.” See Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book III: The Psychoses, 1955-56*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), p. 258-70 (quote from 268).

²⁵ For the evolving positions of Zu‘aytir and al-Shuqayri towards the mufti see chapters 2 and 7-9.

Zionist sources bear some similarities to Palestinian and Arab sources with regard to the centrality of the mufti and of the political agency of the *effendiyya*, but differ starkly in their view of Palestinian society as a social whole. Where Arab sources and accounts have tended to elide class differences, their Zionist counterparts have, for reasons both epistemological and political, often emphasized internal fractures and cleavages. They often betray a paradoxical approach, accentuating or exaggerating what are taken to be disintegrative aspects of Arab society while simultaneously presuming that social and political authority – and more broadly, social agency – within it was highly concentrated at the top among the elite.

Since the earliest days of Zionist settlement and land purchases, Jewish colonists discerned a fundamental distinction between what they called the *effendis* and the bulk of the Arab population, who were poor and middling peasants. Convinced of the righteousness of their cause, they dismissed the protests of the indigenous population, believing them to be little more than the histrionics of a “highly volatile, easily excitable people” that would die out with time, after the strength, benefits, and permanence of the Zionist enterprise had come to be appreciated.²⁶ Incapable of seeing the harm they did to uprooted communities and unaware of the seismic reshaping of Arab society since the nineteenth century, peasant resistance was chalked up to a fear of social change. For the most part, however, the bulk of the population was considered to be apolitical and really only genuinely concerned with their daily bread and standard of living.²⁷ The *effendis*, on the other hand, had a deeper grievance with Zionism. They were aggravated,

²⁶ Walter Lacqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 244.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 232, 247.

according to the settlers, because the higher wages of Jewish agricultural workers set an example that inspired demands by their Arab counterparts.²⁸ The emergence of a voluble anti-Zionist press after the 1908 Young Turk revolution²⁹ only reinforced the idea that it was the men of letters and the paymasters of Arab society, rather than the grassroots, who were the real opponents of the Zionist enterprise.

The early period of colonization yielded a set of formative images of Palestinian society that were not easily dispelled despite their shallow basis and their tendency towards oversimplification to the point of distortion. A key misconception underlying them, which cast a great shadow over later views of the Palestinians, was their conflation of economic with social power within Arab society. The possession of wealth and economic influence were understood simplistically to equate to an almost total power over the lower classes. This was aided by the presumption that as a largely preliterate society, most Palestinians were not capable of free thought. The elites, in this view, became caricatures of venality, their sole motivation being self-adulation and aggrandizement. Social bonds in Arab society were seen as rudimentary and sedimented around chains of exploitation. The primitive quality of social relations was mirrored in this Orientalist imaginary by technological and cultural backwardness.³⁰ Chaim Weizmann, master diplomat of the Zionist movement until the late 1930s and longtime

²⁸ Ibid., p. 232, 245-46. This narrative, predicated on disdain for the lower living standards of the Arab masses and for the ostensibly feudal bonds between Arab lords and peasants, ignores demands made to secure the *fellahin* against dispossession, such as circulated in pamphlets around the time of the Arab conference in Paris in 1913 (ibid., p. 225).

²⁹ See Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 22-42 and especially Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (NY: Columbia UP, 1997), p. 119-75.

³⁰ For a review, see Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 21-57.

head of both the Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency, illustrated this attitude well.³¹ In 1918 he wrote to Balfour that “the fellah was at least four centuries behind the times and the effendi... is dishonest, uneducated, and as unpatriotic as he is inefficient.”³²

Labor Zionism – the shifting bloc of parties that gradually attained dominance over both the *yishuv* and the external apparatus of the Zionist movement – revised and in some cases dressed up the views of the early settlers without departing from their basic themes. As Zachary Lockman has pointedly explored, for the socialist leanings of Labor Zionism the existence of an Arab majority residing in Palestine raised thorny questions. Since socialist Zionism did not identify with imperialism and colonialism, the displacement of the indigenous population by a Jewish majority had to be explained in conceptual terms that would both show that Zionism was a progressive force and that the establishment of its aims would not necessitate the denial of Arab self-determination. One of the means by which this was accomplished, ironically, was by recourse to Orientalist notions of the Levant as an area of such great social mixture that the local population in Palestine could not properly be considered home to a distinct people. Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi, an important Labor movement ideologist and activist, argued in 1921 that there was no Arab national community in Palestine since it lacked a singular “racial” background. Local identity was religiously delineated and parcelized. Having

³¹ The Zionist Organization was the parent of the international Zionist movement and the Jewish Agency was the pseudo-government of the *yishuv* in Palestine, often dubbed a “state within the state” that was empowered according to the Mandate charter to run a host of affairs. It took its name in 1929 and was previously known as the Zionist Commission and the Zionist Executive. On the establishment of a Jewish role in governance under the British, see the Mandate charter, articles 2, 4, and 11, reproduced in: Walter Lacqueur, ed., *The Israel-Arab Reader* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971 [1969]), p. 35, 37.

³² Quoted in Huneidi, *A Broken Trust*, p. 31.

defined any notion of Palestinian identity out of existence, Arab nationalism (whether Palestinian or pan-Syrian) could only be a hollow, mimetic force.³³

According to such thinking, the Palestinian nationalist movement that arose under the Mandate was little more than the ill-conceived machinations of “self-promoting politicians, greedy landowners, [and] obscurantist clerics” who desired to manipulate and misdirect the impressionable Arab public in order to perpetuate their class dominance. Consequently, the Labor movement concluded that the Arab movement was “a fraud which had to be fought, not merely for the sake of the Jews but also for the sake of the guileless and oppressed Arab masses themselves.” In doing so Labor Zionist strategists hypothesized in the early 1920s that their quandary as a minority population could be resolved through an alliance of Arab and Jewish workers that would create a new society, eventually to have a Jewish majority, which would liberate the Arab peasantry from its feudal bonds to the Arab upper classes. The contest, as the Labor movement understood it before 1929, was over which party, Zionist workers or the Arab elite, would capture and harness the loyalties of the Arab masses.³⁴

The 1929 rebellion³⁵ led David Ben-Gurion, the powerful Labor movement leader and future first Prime Minister of Israel, to realize that Arab opposition to Zionism was nationalist in character, though he continued to see the Palestinians as generic, lacking a specific identity and essentially interchangeable with other Arabs

³³ Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 61-63.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 63, 78-79. This is not to say that organizing with Arabs was popular. As several scholars have shown, the Labor movement refused to get “joint work,” as it was sometimes called, off the ground, much less prioritize it. Lockman provides the most extensive discussion of this in *Comrades and Enemies*. See also Taqqu, “Arab Labor,” p. 118-31 and David de Vries, “Proletarianization and National Segregation: Haifa in the 1920s,” *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 40, n. 4 (Oct 1994), p. 860-82.

³⁵ See chapter 1.

throughout the Levant.³⁶ Mapai, the Israel Workers' Party (*Mifleget Po 'alei Eretz Yisrael*) of which Ben-Gurion was a principal, grudgingly saw that an Arab (not Palestinian) national movement existed, but believed it was xenophobic, superficial, not sincerely anti-imperialist, and intended as a vehicle for the advancement of the native Arab intelligentsia that desired hegemony over the political and economic spheres within the country.³⁷ The dismissal of Arab anti-imperialism and the misperception that indigenous nationalism was merely a masked form of careerism remained throughout the 1930s. As Yehoyada Haim poignantly observes, these attitudes were rooted in Labor Zionism's self-image: "Since... Zionists found the notion that Zionism represented an imperialist invasion absurd, they could not believe such notions were anything more than rhetoric."³⁸

By the time of the 1936 revolt Zionist leaders and thinkers of all stripes had mostly abandoned any idea that common ground could be found between the Arabs and their movement. Their view that Arab society was immanently hierarchical was as adamantly held as ever. Chaim Weizmann told British PM Stanley Baldwin in May 1936, one month into the general strike, that "Arab discontent was not really deep

³⁶ Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), p. 18. Tempering his recognition of the Arab movement as nationalist, he distinguished between its "moral" quality, which he deemed inferior, and that of Zionism, which exhibited noble ideals (ibid.). For more on the thinking of Ben-Gurion and other Labor leaders in this period see Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948* (Stanford UP [Oxford UP], 1992), p. 173-94 and Avraham Sela, "The 'Wailing Wall' Riots (1929) as a Watershed in the Palestine Conflict," *Muslim World* v. 84, n. 1-2 (Jan-April 1994), p. 83-92.

³⁷ Lacqueur, *History of Zionism*, p. 247. See also Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*.

³⁸ Yehoyada Haim, *Abandonment of Illusions: Zionist Political Attitudes Toward Palestinian Arab Nationalism, 1936-1939* (Westview, 1983), p. 133.

seated; the Arab peasant was not interested, but he was terrorized into it.”³⁹ Sounding an old note, left-wing Zionist parties like Hashomer Hatz‘air (the Young Guard) and Po‘alei Tziyon Smol (Zionist Workers – Left) contended that the *effendiyya* had caused the revolt in fear of the rapid economic development of the *yishuv*.⁴⁰ The elites, and most especially the mufti, were blamed almost universally for the rebellion and foreign powers like Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy were constantly argued to be the hidden hands pulling Arab strings.⁴¹ Palestinian nationalism (or Arab nationalism) was increasingly equated with Nazism.⁴² The fact that the mufti and a small smattering of his colleagues did go over to the Nazi camp during World War II only confirmed, retroactively, the truth of prior allegations that the Palestinian national movement was a cat’s-paw for Hitler and Nazism.⁴³

A great variety of Zionist sources (in Hebrew and otherwise) show a striking uniformity in insisting on the primacy of the mufti as the man behind the Great Revolt. Intelligence reports of the Haganah and the Jewish Agency’s Arab Bureau, minutes of the Histadrut’s executive committee and those of other national bodies, public and

³⁹ Quoted in Ian Black and Benny Morris, *Israel’s Secret Wars: A History of Israel’s Intelligence Services* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), p. 6.

⁴⁰ Shapira, *Land and Power*, p. 227; Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 35. Hashomer Hatz‘air went even farther and blamed the British for stirring up the revolt. These parties were among the only that still insisted that Arab and Jewish laborers had common interests.

⁴¹ Shapira, *Land and Power*, p. 231-33. Labor Zionism had rhetorically championed the anti-fascist cause, hence in the increasingly dichotomous atmosphere of the 1930s, the Arabs were quickly analogized to fascism. This was not so much the case with the Revisionists, however, who sometimes adulated and even sought to emulate fascist leaders and politics. Among the many works on the subject, see Lacqueur, *History of Zionism*, p. 338-83; Lenni Brenner, *Zionism in the Age of Dictators: A Reappraisal* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books [Croom Helm], 1983) and idem, “Zionist-Revisionism: The Years of Fascism and Terror,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* v. 13, n. 1 (autumn 1983), p. 66-92; Colin Schindler, *The Land Beyond Promise: Israel, Likud, and the Zionist Dream* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), p. 7-35

⁴² Masalha, *Expulsion*, p. 19

⁴³ Philip Mattar provides a useful discussion of the mufti’s eventual turn to Nazi Germany in *The Mufti of Jerusalem: al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988), p. 86-107.

private statements by political parties and Zionist representatives, and memoirs, diaries and works of key figures all repeat the mantra that the Grand Mufti was a nefarious mastermind and the hidden hand animating the resistance to Zionism. At the center of the spider's web, the terror and revulsion he evoked led to frequent overestimations of his power and influence in the world. To take one outrageous example, Zionist authorities passed on information to the British military at the peak of the revolt in 1938 purporting that the mufti had acquired submarines from Germany, though in reality this was sheer phantasm.⁴⁴ The power of the mufti myth is hard to overstate.

In counterpoint to the peerless political sway and mobilizational abilities of mufti, Zionist sources often read Palestinian society through a disintegrative lens that exaggerated divisions between different groups and communities. Religion and family were believed to be the bedrock of the social formation and were understood as primordial categories commanding the population's loyalties. These features are a constant theme of contemporaneous sources and reflected an epistemological blockage which prevented the recognition of any sense of underlying community binding the indigenous Palestinian population. This view was buttressed by Eurocentric and essentialist apperceptions of the depth of primordialism within Palestinian society. Ezra Danin, a pioneer of Zionist intelligence, wrote not long after the revolt that it laid bare the Arab "mentality," comprised of unflattering tendencies to feuding, jealousy, and treachery, which traced back to the divisiveness of village life.⁴⁵ The editorial comments

⁴⁴ Todd (WO) to Downie (CO), 9.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4. Oddly, the War Office vouched for this fabrication to the Colonial Office.

⁴⁵ Ezra Danin, Introduction to the first edition, in E. Danin and Ya'acov Shimoni eds., *Te'udot u-demuyot mi-ginize ha-kanufiyot ha-'Araviyot ba-me'ore'ot 1936-39* (Jerusalem: Harry Truman Institute for the

that he and fellow Haganah intelligence official Ya'acov Shimon'i lace throughout the volume of captured documents and rebel communiqués from the revolt that they published in 1944 illustrate the great attention that Zionist intelligence gave to the theme of primordial difference and discord within the uprising.⁴⁶ Shimon'i's well known work, *Arvei Eretz Yisrael* (1947), maintains much the same framework of approach to the Palestinians, as even a cursory glance at the book's organization (by religious community and region) illustrates.⁴⁷ In it the Arab masses are portrayed as having fallen prey to "extremism" and "incitement" against Zionism, spurning the benefits that the Jewish national movement offered them and sowing conflict in place of peace.⁴⁸

Although Zionist perceptions that the Palestinians were a house divided were overblown and led to distorted assessments of the revolt⁴⁹ these themes are common to documentation from the period. They coexist somewhat incongruously with equally present ideas of elite manipulation of other social elements, at the apex of which stood the image of the mufti.

In many respects the British echoed the disintegrative ethnographic impulse of Zionism, first seeing the Palestinians as fragments and emphasizing the social agency of elites and the absence of such in the rest of the population. The British arrived in Palestine with decades of experience ruling over Arabs, most prominently in Egypt, and with an intellectual apparatus, Orientalist thought, that had become part and parcel of the

Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University and Magnes Press of Hebrew University, 1981 [originally Tel Aviv: the Hebrew Defender, 1944]), p. viii-ix. I have maintained the spelling of the editors names as it appears on the English title page to the work.

⁴⁶ *Te'udot u-demuyot*.

⁴⁷ Ya'acov Shimon'i, *Arvei Eretz Yisrael* (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1947).

⁴⁸ Gerber, "Zionism, Orientalism," p. 24.

⁴⁹ Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 38.

mission of imperial expansion. As Martina Riecker points out, compared with India, colonial administrators in the era of the New Imperialism considered Arab societies to be relatively simple and straightforward. Lord Cromer, Egypt's viceroy for nearly a quarter century, believed that its "social organization [wa]s not complicated" and that "the needs of the population ought to be easily learned."⁵⁰

In Greater Syria such conceits were overlain with additional notions about the identity, or really identities, of the population inhabiting it. The primary feature of the Syrian lands in British Orientalist thought at the time was what was perceived to be a sharp distinction between the sedentary, settled population and the Bedouin. According to prevailing conceptions the Bedouin were the authentic Arabs, lineal descendents of an ancient racial stock. They exemplified noble and "martial" traits nurtured by their closeness to the desert, to nature, and to primeval ways of life that had remained unchanged and uncontaminated by the outside world. Their hardiness was contrasted dichotomously with the dissolute village and town dwellers. Unlike their nomadic brethren, the settled population were "Levantines," a category designating "racial impurity, moral obliquity, corruption, degeneracy, and parasitism."⁵¹ The binary view of the indigenous community in what became the Palestine Mandate, the vast majority of which was settled, represented a blunt denial of local identity. That foundational denial,

⁵⁰ Quoted in Martina Riecker, "Reading the Colonial Archive" in Enid Hill, ed., *New Frontiers in the Social History of the Middle East* (Cairo: American University in Cairo, 2001), p. 140.

⁵¹ Bernard Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine: The Mandatory Government and Arab-Jewish Conflict, 1917-1929* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1991 [1978]), p. 12-14, quote from ft. 44, p. 13. See also, for comparison and context, Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (Columbia University Press, 2003) and Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: the Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East* (New York: Oxford UP, 2008).

and the lowly estimation of the worth of those inhabiting the land, was plainly inscribed in the imperial discourse that shaped the horizons of British administration and policy.

In the Balfour declaration, the cornerstone of Britain's avowed mission in Palestine, the Arabs, constituting some 93 percent of the total population, are referred to as "non-Jewish" communities. Reference to the indigenous majority through negative euphemism continued throughout the 1930s, although it was not universal parlance and the category Arab proved impossible to fully suppress.⁵² The discursive elision of the Palestinian Arabs and their effacement as a political entity was not limited, of course, to matters of semantics. Admission of the category Arab did not imply any recognition of rights and claims, as Lord Balfour again illustrated famously and unambiguously in 1919 when he proclaimed: "Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far greater import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land."⁵³ The official non-recognition of the Arabs, derivative of the pretenses of Orientalist knowledge about the region and of race-thinking, was also intertwined with an older ideological investment identifying Jews as a proxy for British interests in "the Holy Land." During the nineteenth century, as other European powers aligned themselves with local Christian denominations in the Levant, the British found themselves, owing to the meager Protestant presence in Palestine, choosing to seek out local Jewish communities as agents for the projection of British influence. As Alexander Schölch puts it, the "Gentile

⁵² Two decades later Arab spokesmen complained about the euphemism's negation of Arab identity and the implications of the semantics of colonial discourse before the Peel Commission in 1937, none of which stopped the commission from continuing to employ the language itself. See chapter 8.

⁵³ Quoted in Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 36.

Zionists” of the nineteenth century “carried out the ideological advance work” for the subsequent “convergence” of the Zionist movement with imperial Britain during World War I.⁵⁴

With the establishment of British rule over the Palestinians, some of the easy verities of ideology and Orientalist ethnography were challenged. As indigenous resistance to policy presented itself and quickly mounted, boiling over in two early episodes of mass violence successively in 1920 and 1921, the prior dismissal of the Palestinians was contested. Herbert Samuel, the first High Commissioner and a Jewish Briton chosen for his closeness to the Zionist movement, held contradictory views towards the Arabs. But even before the bloody events during the Nabi Musa festival in 1920 (and prior to his appointment) he warned that Arab nationalism was “very real and no bluff.”⁵⁵ The question as to whether the local Arab movement was truly national and authentic or, as in the Zionist view, a minority trend bent on the political and economic self-promotion and acquisitiveness of “the *effendis*,” was much debated.

Suppression of the 1921 rising, in which urban street fighting and attacks in Jaffa led to rural paramilitary mobilization in the locality and threatened to spread, set down a parallel logic through which Arab collective action was apprehended. Paradoxically, while Arabs were denied salience as a political collectivity, they were recognized as a corporate community for purposes of repression. The 1921 rebellion resulted in the enactment of a set of collective punishments in the form of heavy fines on villages,

⁵⁴ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 13; Alexander Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation, 1856-1882: Studies in Social, Economic, and Political Development*, William C. Young and Michael C. Gerrity, trans. (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993), p. 47-75, quote from p. 48.

⁵⁵ On Samuel and his tenure, see Huneidi, *A Broken Trust*. On his views of Arab nationalism(s), see especially p. 90-94. Quote from p. 35.

Bedouin groups, and the town of Tulkarm. The pretext for this draconian response and for the blithe disregard of liberal jurisprudential principals and the hallowed notion of individuals as rights-bearing legal subjects was supposedly drawn from local cultural practice. In reality the British seized on the existence of collective sanctions that pertained in cases of inter-clan conflict while ignoring and distorting the norms governing them to inflate the field of their application to much larger units (villages, cities, and entire administrative districts). Critically, this set of maneuvers was said to be of a piece with indigenous ideas of “collective guilt.” The British weren’t imposing any cruel novelties, they claimed, just using local normative practices legible and intelligible to the colonized.⁵⁶

Although the 1920s passed quietly for the most part until the 1929 uprising, the Orientalist concept of collective guilt became integral to the colonial regime, and was greatly manifest in its responses to Palestinian resistance to the state and to Zionism after 1921. Especially after 1929 the pull of approaching the Palestinians through the lens of collective sanctions became ever more potent. This had the important ancillary effect of displacing or undermining the apprehension of the Palestinians as political claimants in the struggle over their patrimony and rendering them and their movement objects of a criminalizing discourse that recognized and treated them as a recalcitrant and obdurate mass requiring disciplinary action.

By 1929 the administrators in Palestine and the officials in London that together governed the Mandate saw the Arab public as split between “political circles” and the

⁵⁶ On the 1921 rising see chapter 6. The development and deployment of collective punishments, and its associated ideological notions, are discussed in chapters 6-10.

great bulk of the population. Arab leaders, by which it was meant elite spokesmen, were presumed to be the fountainheads of political opinion and sentiment, as High Commissioner John Chancellor's nervous cables to London after the 1929 rebellion make clear.⁵⁷ HC Chancellor, criticized by Zionists for his reappraisal of their movement and for his supposed partiality to the Arabs,⁵⁸ described the latter in an extensive memorandum in January 1930 as a mostly ignorant and fanatical rabble, capable of being stirred into a frenzy by religious passion.⁵⁹ While the Shaw Commission's inquiry into the 1929 events cleared Arab elites of culpability it succinctly depicted the rise of Palestinian nationalism as an emanation of elites: "Step by step the whole Arab people become [sic] identified with their leaders in opposition to the Jewish National Home and, in consequence, united with them in a demand for self-government."⁶⁰

As the decade progressed, the *effendi* thesis rigidified. The Peel Commission, dispatched to investigate the causes of the 1936 uprising, advanced it further. Although stopping short of directly attributing elites with the insurrection the commission's report portrays the AHC as presiding over a movement that demonstrated a "centralization of

⁵⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 12.10.29 (#245) and 19.10.29 (#264), CP 343 (29), PRO – CAB 24/207.

⁵⁸ E.g. Kenneth Stein, *The Land Question in Palestine, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press 1984) and idem, "One Hundred Years of Social Change: The Creation of the Palestinian Refugee Problem" in Lawrence J. Silberstein, ed., *New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State* (New York: NYU Press, 1991), p. 70. Chancellor's place in the reevaluation of policy after 1929 is discussed in chapter 1.

⁵⁹ HC to Colonial Secretary, p. 45, PRO – CO 733/182/9.

⁶⁰ *Report of the Commission on the Palestine Disturbances of August, 1929*, Cmd 3530 (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1930), p. 152, 158-59. Quote from p. 152. (Hereafter: Shaw Commission report).

control... as fully effected as is possible in any Arab country.”⁶¹ This view was then revised as a consequence of the later phase of the rebellion, from its resumption in late 1937 until the outbreak of World War II. Its members and a wide group of associates were rounded up when the insurgency was renewed and deemed culpable for it. Consequently, the 1946 *Survey of Palestine* represents the Great Revolt as directed by al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, first through the AHC and then after its banning through his concert with fellow political exiles.⁶²

As the present project underscores, the *effendi* thesis wasn’t just a contention about leadership; its effects were ramified. One notable consequence was a marked tendency to overlook the salience of the popular social forces that reshaped the Palestinian struggle in the 1930s. For instance the Shaw Commission report argues that neither the AE nor the mufti had any substantive connection to the “deliberate agitation” that helped foment the uprising, gesturing instead to “various Moslem associations” whose members both “desire[d] to see the adoption of more violent methods” and promoted such among “the more ignorant [segments of the] Arab people.”⁶³ These unnamed figures, or most of them, likely belonged to the YMMA, which as a youth society of little presumed importance was rendered invisible by the focus on elites and the allegations made against them by the JA and Zionist representatives. By the time of the Peel Commission the youth trend was no longer invisible, though characteristically its significance was still underappreciated. The commissioners, and perhaps the sources

⁶¹ *Report of the Palestine Royal Commission*, Cmd 5479 (London: HMSO, 1937), p. 132. (Hereafter: Peel Commission report).

⁶² *Survey of Palestine*, v. 2 (Palestine: Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 950. See also, p. 598-99.

⁶³ Shaw Commission report, p. 156.

they relied on, couldn't keep the youth forces straight, confusing the YMMA with the YC when discussing the 1933 demonstrations, which in a further error they erroneously depict as having been led by elites. The report does acknowledge to a certain extent the role of youth as a pressure group, noting that they are "quick to denounce the official leadership of their cause when they think it too slow or timid." However, their influence is ultimately seen as limited, especially when compared with their Egyptian peers (who in 1936 secured the reinstatement of the abrogated constitution). Absent a charismatic leader at their head, Palestinian youth are judged to remain second tier to the elites.⁶⁴

The above is only the most rudimentary outline of the British and Zionist subscription to the *effendi* thesis, as this dissertation will show. Norman and Helen Bentwich, the first Attorney General of Palestine and his wife, make an apt summary comment – in hindsight – on the extent of the idea's circulation and hold over both colonial parties in Palestine:⁶⁵

English statesmen and Zionist leaders equally underestimated in those years the strength of Arab nationalism. It was a fallacy that it was the work of a few agitators. It was a movement of whole peoples who were subject to foreign rule, and it had a religious intensity. Jewish settlers in the land, with some notable exceptions, were often blind to it, as forty years later the French *colons* were blind to the nationalist Arab movement in Algiers.

The effendi thesis and the historiography of the early Palestinian national movement

The *effendi* thesis has had wide repercussions on historiography and scholarship concerned with the Palestinian national movement during the Mandate era. Two general

⁶⁴ Peel Commission report, p. 84, 134.

⁶⁵ Norman and Helen Bentwich, *Mandate Memories, 1918-1948* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 99. Not atypically, but certainly ironically, the Bentwichs were themselves subscribers to the mufti thesis! See p. 189-200, especially p. 193.

versions of its propositions appear in the literature. The broadest depicts the national struggle as the fruit of elites and its course as determined by their activity. Other social forces, when acknowledged to have a role, are seen as adjunctive and subordinate to the elites. The second version of the *effendi* thesis is a sub-variant of the first. It retains the propositions of its epistemic parent, but adds a concentration on the figure of al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, who is seen as the true guide of the national movement, responsible for its direction and especially for its radicalization, even during his long years of tenure in service to the Mandatory regime.

With respect to the scholarly literature the thesis has ample exponents and defenders, especially among older works, many of which became standards in their respective languages. Although the thesis has been challenged, or more modestly nibbled away at, particularly with the accumulation of social history contributions since the 1990s, it is far from discredited and has appeared in recent works and even those styling themselves as revisionist accounts of the period or the Mandate era. Furthermore, those studies taking issue with the thesis often still fall back on elitist propositions and tropes or underplay the centrality of social transformation and popular mobilization in the 1930s. I will review them in turn, with an eye in particular to the treatment of the question of leadership during the revolt.

J.C. Hurewitz's *The Struggle for Palestine* (1950) was one of the earliest works to treat the national movement. It first argues that the movement's leadership was "almost exclusively... landed gentry," before going on to claim that it was a "virtual

preserve of the Husayni clan.”⁶⁶ The political sphere is limited to the circles of gentry and is generally portrayed as clannish and hobbled by disunity.⁶⁷ The origins of the 1936 revolt are treated obliquely but elites are presented as at the helm of the strike while the second phase is more narrowly tied to the mufti’s faction, with the rebels in the field acting as the “Husayni military arm.”⁶⁸

For decades the works of Yehoshua Porath have been among the most comprehensive and detailed studies available on the early Palestinian movement. Published in Hebrew in 1971 and translated into English in 1974, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement, 1918-1929* is one of the first academic Israeli works to explore the history of the Palestinians. It is remarkable both in its unprecedented detail and depth and for breaking with the then-reigning Israeli orthodoxy denying that the Palestinians were a separate national community. Trailblazing as it was, *The Emergence* is a picture portrait of Gerber’s negative conception argument (that the lifeblood and *fons et origo* of Palestinian nationalism was opposition to Zionism) and of the *effendi* thesis model of Palestinian society. It argues that the Palestinian majority lacked a modern education and found nationalism an alien conceptual terrain and idiom.⁶⁹ What moved the public was the physical appearance, comportment, and “strangeness” of the Jewish settlers, all of which created in the Arab masses a “hatred for Zionism.”⁷⁰ This xenophobia is what Porath deduces to lay at the core of Palestinian

⁶⁶ J.C. Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976 [1950]), p. 57-58.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 60-63.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 71, 83.

⁶⁹ *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement, 1918-1929*. 306-07.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

nationalism, which emerged as a kind of ideological shadow and antithesis of Zionism.⁷¹ The Arab leadership, drawn from the landed class, were essentially hypocrites with a low degree of “national consciousness.” They found relations with Zionism financially profitable (i.e. from selling land), but, in two-faced fashion, attempted to propagate opposition to Zionism among the general public. This didn’t produce much in the way of results since the ignorant villagers were devoid of “political consciousness” or sensibilities.⁷² The schema of the work rotates greatly around the factionalist narrative of the *majlisiyyin* (supporters of the Supreme Muslim Council, or SMC, and the mufti; the Husaynis and their allies) and the *mu‘arada* (the Opposition) and by ending at the 1929 revolt, underscores its author’s subscription to the mufti thesis.

In his second work, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement: From Riots to Rebellion, 1929-1939*, Porath takes the narrative forward without much revision to his prior framework. Unlike his first volume, this study does entertain a (brief) foray into sociology, looking at of a sampling of the fighters during the Great Revolt, but this type of lens is generally missing from the work which, rather than excavating the dynamic changes of the era, tends to reinforce a static view of Arab society. The result is a rather contradictory picture. For example, *From Riots to Rebellion* provides an incongruous view of peasants, at points reiterating their ostensible ignorance and apolitical disposition while at others emphasizing that their creeping dispossession and loss of lands contributed directly to the choice of many to take up arms or to support the

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 39-42.

⁷² Ibid., p. 39, 306.

revolt.⁷³ The explosion of activity among youth groups in the first half of the decade is surveyed, and their propensity to challenge the Arab elites in the AE rather than support them is noted, yet a significant segment is held to have come under the sway of the Istiqlal Party, which was predominantly led by a group of elite dissidents and youth.⁷⁴ Overall, the narrative is saturated with the elite factionalist struggle, which is held, along with the cruelty, zealotry, and disunity of the rebels themselves, to have caused the downfall of the rebellion.⁷⁵ At the work's center stands al-Hajj Amin, who is telologically portrayed as the man behind the curtain and secret heart of national movement and struggle long before the revolt, even as he is recognized as opposing or restraining violent and armed resistance beforehand.⁷⁶

Within the Arabic historiography Bayan al-Hut's work is analogous in standing to Porath's. Her monumental *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat* (1981) traces the rise and fall of what she regards as three leaderships during the Mandate, the second of which followed the dissolution of the AE in 1934 and lasted through the revolt. Although it does put forward some criticism of al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni,⁷⁷ this is all but drowned out by his consistent lionization as a man of great "political cunning" and unstinting nationalist ardor. This heroic narrative is unruffled by his close association with the colonial state for most of his tenure as president (1922-37) of the Supreme Muslim Council, a parastatal religious bureaucracy created by the British, since he was, in this

⁷³ Ibid., respectively p. 52-54, 81 and 81-82.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 122-23, 125-26.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 301.

⁷⁶ Ibid., especially p. 116-18.

⁷⁷ The political murders of the revolt era, many of which were hits ordered by the mufti's camp, occasions the sharpest critique of al-Hajj Amin in the period with which we are concerned. See *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 402-05.

telling, able to turn the SMC into a vital base of nationalist resistance.⁷⁸ Mirroring Porath (if with a different inflection), she teleologically represents al-Hajj Amin as a permanent antagonist of British colonialism as well as Zionism, and attributes him with precipitating the 1929 uprising and leading the Great Revolt.⁷⁹ Popular social forces are acknowledged to have initiated the general strike, which itself is seen as a moment of unparalleled mobilization and social unity, but the narrative residually slides back to highlight the place of elites and spends relatively little time on popular elements.⁸⁰ For all of its considerable depth, her account plays scant attention to the ramifications of class distinctions among the Palestinians, and other than the elite schism between the Husayni and Nashashibi camps, it presents Arab society, somewhat like her interview subjects' answers, as generally united by mutual solidarities. The epic contest of the Jerusalemite factions is, it may be further noted, represented as a conflict between the patriotic heart of the movement (the Husayni faction) and elements loyal to the British (the Nashashibis and company) – in other words, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat* is a *majlisi* history, par excellence.

Also published in 1981, *Herev mi-bayit*, Yuval Arnon-Ohana's study of the Palestinian national movement between 1929-39, rotates, as its subtitle broadcasts, around what the author calls "the internal struggle" that afflicted the movement. In several respects Arnon-Ohana's account comes to grips more forthrightly with the rise of new social forces and the contests they unleashed than does Porath, yet this advance is

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 175-79; 287; 293-96...

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 230-31; 287; 331-409.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 31-348. See chapter 7 for more detail.

marred by its modernization theory framework and its tendency to represent the national movement as a failure of its own making. Almost half of the work is devoted to the *majlisi*-Opposition divide (“the traditional camps”), but it subsequently moves on to survey what are called “urban extremist” forces in the 1930s (youth, the Istiqlal Party, the AWC, and the press). These forces broke with the *hamula*-based organizational framework of “the traditional camps” and challenged their leadership, though they never sought to directly unseat them.⁸¹ They became sources of initiative within the movement, brought it to oppose British rule, and are credited with precipitating the revolt.⁸² The modernization of Palestinian society and politics was ultimately blocked by the stubborn persistence of the *hamula* structure (partially in the form of familial factionalism), which remained the organizing principal and idiom of the countryside, and by the figure of the mufti, whose basis for authority was religious (i.e. unmodern).⁸³ The revolt is represented as unremittingly violent and thuggish, its course doomed by the criminals and backwards peasants fighting in the fields, who all too quickly turned their weapons on their fellow Arabs, falling prey to the consumptions of the “internal struggle.” The “internal terror” they unleashed was so virulent that it effectively extinguished the Palestinian national movement until its rebirth in the 1960s.⁸⁴

In a review of some of the other Arabic works on the movement during the Mandate that are contemporaneous with al-Hut, Ted Swedenburg has argued that they

⁸¹ Yuval Arnon-Ohanah, *Herev mi-bayit: ha-ma'avak ha-panimi ba-tnu'a ha-Palastinit ha-le'umit, 1929-39* (Tel Aviv: Yariv Heder w/ the Shiloah Institute, 1981), p. 240-255, especially p. 253, 297.

⁸² Ibid., respectively p. 240, 254; p. 298; p. 240, 253, 275. Without providing any reconciliation of the competing explanations, the followers of 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam, the pious, revolutionary shaykh, are also argued to have caused the revolt (p. 265).

⁸³ Ibid., p. 296.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 275-88, 299.

yield a dualistic view according to which “Palestinian peasants were always ready and eager to resist imperialism” but “they required guidance because they lacked political awareness.” Their courage was paired with provincial and localist tendencies and a predisposition to demagoguery.⁸⁵ Rural conservatism still required, in the final analysis, a more refined leadership. Several decades later one of the most comprehensive volumes on the revolt in Arabic, that by Shahada Musa, reiterates many of the themes critiqued by Swedenburg. Musa’s sociological study, *Thawrat ‘am 1936 fi Filastin*, offers a detailed and insightful look at the organization of the rebel movement and is sensitive to shifts in the positions of different social groups with respect to it. Its nuance is lost by the second phase of the revolt, when the deficient rural culture of the rebel commanders is credited with impeding the revolt’s development and it is presumed that a competent military strategy was beyond their grasp.⁸⁶ Its arguments about leadership in the revolt are conflicted, but the overarching proposition is that the “traditional leadership” was able to reimpose itself for want of an alternative during the first phase, only to clash, to a certain extent, with the tribalistic and provincial field commanders during its second phase.⁸⁷ Like al-Hut’s *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, Musa’s study is

⁸⁵ Ted Swedenburg, “The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier,” *Anthropological Quarterly* v. 63, n. 1 (Jan 1990), p. 26. Regarding Abdul-Wahhab Kayyali, included in the group of works in question, the critique is a bit unbalanced, since more than most of his generation Kayyali accords greater autonomy to popular forces, including peasants.

⁸⁶ Shehada Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936 fi Filastin: dirasa susiyulujiyya* (Beirut: Bahith al-Dirasat, 2004), p. 228, 230-31, 241-42. See chapter 9 for more and for a rejoinder.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 180, 236-38; see also 240-42. Musa’s arguments on leadership during the strike are detailed in chapter 7.

also *majlisi* history, naming the mufti as “spiritual father” and prime mover of the revolt in spite of the fact that its own narrative gainsays this.⁸⁸

Among recent non-Arabic works purporting to offer revisionist histories of the Palestinians and the Mandate a surprising number simply recycle versions of the older narrative about the revolt. Some still unconsciously replicate the biases of their sources, presuming that the mufti and the elite organs represented the movement’s leadership.⁸⁹ Others substitute diminutive thumbnail suggestions and characterizations in place of serious analysis. Tom Segev, for example, describes the origins of the revolt as a “wave of violence” which angling elites then endeavored to give “the appearance of organized nationwide protest.”⁹⁰ Ilan Pappé, in what he styles as a fresh and unblinkered take on the Husayni family and the mufti, al-Hajj Amin, winds up reifying the standard narrative of the latter as the invisible hand behind the movement and of the family as the leadership of the Great Revolt.⁹¹

Not surprisingly, most survey histories show little interest in questioning the elite-driven paradigm of the national movement.⁹²

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 238-41.

⁸⁹ E.g. Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows*. To its credit, *Army of Shadows* takes a more nuanced view of the *hamula* structure and demonstrates that extended kin units were diverse in their political opinions and inclinations. It thus doesn’t fully replicate the all of the dimensions of the *effendi* thesis common in its Zionist/Israeli mode.

⁹⁰ Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Henry Holt Publishers, 2000), p. 368.

⁹¹ Ilan Pappé, *The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian Dynasty: The Husaynis 1700-1948*, trans. Yael Lotan (London: Saqi, 2010; in Hebrew 2002), p. 8, 246-303. In its very choice of subject this work is hardly a challenge to the established historiography, regardless of its original intent as a corrective for an Israeli audience.

⁹² Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004); Samih Farsoun and Naseer Aruri, *Palestine and the Palestinians: A Social and Political History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2006).

The pat narratives in much of the literature that present Palestinian society as immanently hierarchical and captive to fractious cultural institutions and norms and its national movement as a top-down machine have long been subject to dissenting views. George Antonius, a former government officer who resigned and participated in the events of the revolt on the diplomatic side, wrote an eloquent and accurate riposte to the *effendi* thesis proponents during the uprising itself, which was unfortunately mostly ignored.⁹³

One of the most prevalent misconceptions is that the trouble in Palestine is the result of an engineered agitation. It is variously attributed to the intrigues of the effendi class, to the political ambitions of the Grand Mufti.... The moving spirits in the revolt are not the nationalist institute leaders [sic]... but men from the working and agricultural classes.... Far from its being engineered by the leaders, the revolt is in a very marked way a challenge to their authority and an indictment of their methods.

One of the first subsequent works to provide an alternative accounting of the national movement during the 1930s was that of the famed Palestinian activist and litterateur, Ghassan Kanafani. In 1972 Kanafani published a short study of the Great Revolt, originally circulated as a pamphlet. In it he describes the national movement as headed by a “feudal-clerical” leadership that was initially pushed from below into the rebellion, but then managed to wrest control of it once it was underway.⁹⁴ While the band leaders of the insurgency were peasants, they gave their loyalties, for the most part, to the mufti.⁹⁵ Relying on a version of stagist Marxism in vogue at the time, Kanafani’s broader argument deduces that Arab society’s weaknesses owe its insufficient

⁹³ Quoted in Kimmerling and Migdal, *The Palestinian People*, p. 121-22.

⁹⁴ Ghassan Kanafani, *Thawrat 1936-1939 fi Filastin: khalfiyat wa-tafasil wa-tahlil* (n.p., n.d. [PFLP, 1972]), p. 55-56.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 63.

advancement towards industrialization. This left it with a fledgling bourgeoisie and a small workers' movement, which, given the failure of the Arabization of the Communist Party, left no force substantial enough to displace the old "feudal-clerical" order and topple its elite.⁹⁶ The two-dimensional view of Palestinian society as divided between an archaic leadership and a narrow segment of wage-laborers is complicated somewhat by his attention to an oppositional intelligentsia from the petit bourgeoisie and an illuminating discussion of insurgent popular culture before the revolt.

While Kanafani's Marxist teleology has not stood the test of time, numerous works have mirrored his supposition that the revolt began from the bottom up only to be commandeered by elites.⁹⁷ In each the argument to varying extents holds that restive social forces were incapable of effectively institutionalizing their power and therefore gave way to the practiced hands of the elite. Kanafani's attention to Palestinian society as a class society has been followed by other examples, opening a fruitful new line of inquiry which at the very least complicates the standard depictions of the *effendi* model. Salim Tamari, in a 1982 study contrasting factionalism and class formation, echoes some of Kanafani's conclusions, arguing broadly that factionalism deflected and retarded the advance of class politics common to bourgeois societies.⁹⁸ The Arab bourgeoisie's weakness, a function of its lack of control over the state and stiff Jewish competition,

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

⁹⁷ Taggar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine Arab Politics, 1930-37* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986; this study is a published Ph.D. dissertation from 1973), p. 359-465; Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 331-409; Nels Johnson, *Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1982), p. 47-49, 51-52; Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 34, 124-25; Kimmerling and Migdal, *The Palestinian People*, p. 111 (for the strike phase of the revolt only); Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 368; Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 93, 180; Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 90.

⁹⁸ Salim Tamari, "Factionalism and Class Formation in Recent Palestinian History" in Roger Owen, ed., *Studies in the Economic and Social History of Palestine in the 19th and 20th centuries* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1982), p. 178.

along with the general impact of the Zionist challenge to Palestinian society, slowed and “thwarted” this process.⁹⁹ The Arab movement was stunted by its elite leadership, which feared mass mobilization would threaten its own privileges and predominance.¹⁰⁰ Counter-models to factionalist political mobilization existed (the Istiqlal and the Communist Party) but they were too weak to alter the balance of forces.¹⁰¹ Against this framework, moments such as the 1936 general strike and peasant upsurge during the insurgency in 1938 constitute unusual episodes in which “class ‘intrusions’” broke through the factional matrix organizing Palestinian society and its politics.¹⁰²

The model of a blocked dialectic regarding bourgeois development that is evident in Tamari’s essay is present in a range of other works. Taqqu’s examination of the labor movement in Palestine (1977) takes class formation as a framework for assessing the growing “imbalances” within Palestinian society produced by the Mandate and the changes they caused to its social structure, rearranging the relations of the “traditional elites” and “the mass of the population.”¹⁰³ The dislocation of peasants and their conversion into wage-laborers was a highly fraught process full of alienation and social ambivalence but early labor unions and activism was small in relative scale and thus did not break the power of elites.¹⁰⁴ A proper working class only emerged in the 1940s.¹⁰⁵ Prior to this labor mobilization played an “essentially negative” role politically, as

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 179, 199.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 191.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁰³ Taqqu, “Arab Labor,” p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., abstract.

¹⁰⁵ The schema of the dissertation breaks the Mandate era into a prehistory (1917-39) and the period of the working class’s emergence thereafter.

witnessed by its contribution to the “inarticulate and primitive rebellion” of 1936-1939, which she reads as representing widespread opposition to social change.¹⁰⁶

Most other examinations of class formation similarly conclude that given the small scale of organized labor in the 1930s, it wasn't until the 1940s that the process of proletarianization had proceeded far enough to yield a vital working class element within society. Issa Khalaf, for instance, argues that Palestinian society was “on the brink of disintegration” by the late 1940s as its agrarian social economy was eroded by large landowners, the Mandate, and Zionism, yielding “disjointed urban-working-class development” and centrifugal tendencies.¹⁰⁷ Arab labor emerges as a cohesive force only in the 1940s, but its place in the insurgent movement in the 1930s is noted and the rebellion's social context as a reaction to “peasant destitution and political and social tension in Arab society” is acknowledged, as is its subaltern character as a peasant revolt.¹⁰⁸ Older scholarship is, at times, even more skeptical of substantive class transformation before the 1940s.¹⁰⁹

To summarize, a good deal of the literature on class formation highlights the absence of a large, urbanized organized labor movement in the 1930s and uses organized labor as a barometer of social change, thereby marginalizing the much larger

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁰⁷ Issa Khalaf, “The Effect of Socioeconomic Change on Arab Societal Collapse in Mandate Palestine,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* v. 29, n. 1 (Feb 1997), p. 93.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 103, 107.

¹⁰⁹ Shulamit Carmi and Henry Rosenfeld, for instance, repeat the common argument that the Palestinian working class coalesced in the 1940s during the war, contending that earlier proletarianization was driven by the “backwards” farming techniques and organization of Arab villages. This did not yield significant urbanization since circuits existed for reabsorbing those without adequate lands for sustenance. The political ramifications of these developments are assessed to be nugatory because peasant migrants and the urban poor were powerless and crushed by their circumstances. (Shulamit Carmi and Henry Rosenfeld, “The Origins of the Process of Proletarianization and Urbanization of Arab Peasants in Palestine,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* v. 220 (March 11, 1974), p. 470-85).

disorganized quotient of the nascent proletariat and underestimating the extent of transformation. Almost all of the texts noted here see class as generating significant political change, and many see class effusions in the revolt. Only Khalaf and Tamari, in varying respects, see lower class challenges to elite power as critical developments in examining the rebellion.

A second set of narratives that revise the classic *effendi* thesis propose that Palestinian society did undergo extensive social change under the Mandate, as a result of which the middle classes and/or elites (the political class) lost control of the movement during the revolt. These works tend to distinguish between the strike phase of the revolt, which they narrate as initiated or quickly commandeered by politicians, and the insurgency phase, in which the peasant fighters and their lower class allies exceeded the control of the elites. Ann Lesch offers an exemplary illustration, setting out broad arguments that I have taken up here. Dividing her account of the national movement before 1940 into two phases, that of mobilization from above and that from below, she distills the emergence of the latter with great clarity.¹¹⁰

At the end of the 1920s, the nationalist movement shifted from organization and mobilization from above – by the elite – to mobilization from below. Youth, labor, scouts, and middle-class groups pressured the elite to act more militantly. These groups responded to the considerable disruption in Palestinian society by drawing support from the dispossessed farmers living in shantytowns around the main cities, the artisans and traders who feared Jewish competition, and the under- and unemployed educated youths. They challenged the established leadership, prodded it into increasingly militant tactics by the mid-1930s, and formed the backbone of the 1936 general strike and 1937-1939 revolt.

¹¹⁰ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 82-83.

Narratively, however, Lesch spends little time exploring the new actors whose importance she emphasizes, and the chapter on mobilization from below turns largely back to elites after its first seven pages.¹¹¹ She accords responsibility to the popular social forces in managing the quotidian affairs of the strike, but depicts it as a venture of politicians who then lose control of the movement during the second phase of the insurrection from 1937-1939.¹¹²

May Seikaly's social history of Haifa under the Mandate follows along much the same lines. Focused on one of the key port cities it is attuned to the depth of displacement taking place in the countryside since peasants migrating in search of livelihoods came to dwell in slums there, from which a serious current of unrest emerged, most famously around shaykh 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam.¹¹³ Seikaly's sociological lens also draws out the increasing prominence of youth in the Haifa region, providing a fascinating and unique account of the context of the wider youth trend's origins and acknowledging its political influence on the eve of the revolt.¹¹⁴ The rebellion's inception lay with "radicalized urban politicians" who attempted to reunite society under the banner of "civil disobedience" on a magnum scale. While only tentatively producing an elusive social unity (via the AHC) it did succeed in upsetting the traditional factional

¹¹¹ Popular mobilization is also treated in another chapter ("The Political Use of Violence") but three other thematic chapters focus on the diplomatic arena and the overall balance is with the elite field and elite actors, despite the laudable framework the study establishes.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 115-16, 124.

¹¹³ May Seikaly, *Haifa: Transformation of an Arab Society, 1918-1939* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995). Aspects concerning the transformation of the peasantry and urban migration appear in many places in the work.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 217-62, especially 246. On the origins of the youth trend, which Seikaly does not name as such, p. 200-04.

camps in Palestinian society and “flung the social order into upheaval.”¹¹⁵ By its second phase the revolt was “hijacked by rural-based activists and sometimes makeshift leaders” and “lawlessness” and “fratricide” came to prevail as less sophisticated and more conservative social elements predominated.¹¹⁶

In a third sample of this variety, Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal’s *The Palestinian People*, some of the contradictions of simultaneously straddling the *effendi* paradigm and seeing past it are on display. Like the other texts in this group, the prominence and militancy of youth is recognized and they are held to be a fiery nationalist vanguard.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, they resurrect the classical understanding of the Palestinian politics when they declare: “Palestinian Arab political leadership during the mandate was the province of the Jerusalem ayan [*a‘yan*: notables].”¹¹⁸ The rebellious undercurrents are discussed as having their own genesis and as challenging the social order and the elite leadership but at the same time the notables are said to have unparalleled influence: “none rivaled their ability to fashion a popular national movement out of a rapidly changing population.”¹¹⁹ Adding to the confusion, the mufti is seen as playing a role as a pillar of the colonial order and, again undermining the view of the popular movement of the early 1930s that they develop, as single-handedly able to “determine the character of the emerging Palestinian political framework.”¹²⁰ The strike is attributed to the AHC, which usurped the popular energies that initiated it, but after

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 156-57.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 156, 253, 255.

¹¹⁷ Kimmerling and Migdal, *The Palestinian People*, p. 106-108, 110.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 98.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., quote p. 98; contrast with p. 97, 106-07.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 90.

the exile of major components of the nationalist movement from the middle and upper classes (in 1937), their influence over events was eclipsed. Their enforced distance from events left the peasant formations to conduct themselves as “traditional rural gangs.”¹²¹

This body of texts engages with the sociology of change in Palestinian society beyond the agrarian sphere and the working classes. It does so in varying depth, but represents works broadly cognizant of multi-faceted social change that see a new politics developing in the 1930s. It generally accepts the notion that the AHC represented the rebel movement’s leadership in the strike phase of the uprising, and that as it was banned by the colonial state in 1937, this entity faded from view and peasants, whom each work deprecates or slights to some extent, gained significant control of the struggle.

The final group of critics of the *effendi* thesis more or less take it on head-on and cleave to analyses of the 1930s that emphasize the popular ferment of the era and the popular leadership of the revolt. Rather than recapitulating their individual arguments, I will point here to some lingering problems with their depictions of popular politics. Mustafa Kabha, in a 2003 study of the Palestinian press during the 1930s, sheds a good deal of light on the emergence of the youth trend and the inversive dynamics that had upended the position of the elites and rendered them subject to the will of popular forces. In spite of this the work flirts with the idea that the uprising in 1936 was spontaneous and disconnects the radical activism in the first half of the 1930s from the revolt.¹²² Instead, unduly privileging its subject, it posits that the press was the only agency of

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 114, 125-26.

¹²² Mustafa Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper of Public Opinion, 1929-1939: Writing Up a Storm* (Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007; original published in Arabic in 2003), p. 235.

Palestinian society capable of inducing mass cross-class mobilization, and also argues (without proof) that members of the press came to play directive roles during the strike through acting on the national committees that superintended over it in their respective locales.¹²³ The exaggerated role accorded to the press terminated after 1936, when it came under new pressures from both the colonial state and the peasant rebels.

Weldon Matthews has argued in his study of the Istiqlal, the first political party based on ideology rather than family, that the popular politics and upsurge of the 1930s has much to do with its brand of strident nationalism and ardent opposition to British rule. The party was itself a small, vanguardist formation that skillfully used the press, dialogically engaged the public, and attentively cultivated the younger generation. The problem with this narrative, much as with Kabha's study, lies in the excessive weight and influence attributed to its subject, which was a tiny, closed and mostly elite, if very vocal and energetic, group. Developments in the 1930s were more myriad than Matthews's argument allows and the Istiqlal was not the only example, or the fountainhead, of militancy during the period, but one of several. The party's short institutional life (1932-33) and splintered activity after its demise also weighs against the notion that the revolt was Istiqlalist in provenance.

Finally, Haim Gerber's *Remembering and Imagining Palestine* is a unique study, thoroughly iconoclastic towards the *effendi* thesis to which it and other works by the same author have called attention. Gerber adopts Gelvin's argument (see below) that pursuant to world market integration, capitalist development, and administrative

¹²³ Ibid., respectively p. 235, 167. The first notion is in fact a contemporaneous British view with which Kabha agrees.

centralization during the late Ottoman era, Palestine gave rise to a populist mode of politics in the interwar period.¹²⁴ Strangely, however, the work does not pick up on Gelvin's stress on horizontal social mobilization. Thus while staunchly critical of elitist histories, *Remembering and Imagining Palestine* gives curiously short shrift to the development of the youth trend in the first half of the 1930s while at another moment attributing Akram Zu'aytir, an indefatigable youth partisan and Istiqlalist, with the lion's share of the credit for activism in the same period.¹²⁵ Even more askance from its theoretical leanings, Gerber depicts elite social influence as largely undisturbed, even as their leadership was challenged, and at other points inadvertently presents Palestinian society as stagnant, rather than dynamic, ignoring the effects of the restructuring it had undergone since the late Ottoman period.¹²⁶ The *coup de grace* of contradictions within the work is its evaluation that the factional schism of the Jerusalemite elites, manipulated by the British in the 1920s, became the resounding "tragedy" of the Palestinians before 1948 and "the major political issue of the... Mandate period."¹²⁷

Appreciative of the many works that have challenged the *effendi* thesis this dissertation takes a novel approach to the question of social and political leadership in Mandate Palestine. As a study intent on mapping the interactions between different

¹²⁴ *Remembering and Imagining Palestine*, p. 10, 119.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 122-23, 134. The point about Zu'aytir is, I believe, a prime example of the effect of the existing sources, as the youthful radical left behind nearly a 1000 pages of published diaries and a large edited documents collection, each of which are of great historical value.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 125. Regarding the overly conservative vision of Palestinian society, which is left implicit and appears to be unwitting, the Istiqlal, for instance, are said to have failed because they were too modern in their conception and *oeuvre*.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 107-08.

socio-political constituencies within Palestinian society, it strives to develop a rigorous understanding their interrelations with one another. I have taken inspiration in this endeavor from both the Subaltern Studies school of historiography (in its original Gramscian mode) and the relational paradigm in studies of the Mandate that has argued that the Palestinians and the *yishuv* were co-constituted political communities.¹²⁸ In this light the present inquiry argues for the need to rethink conventional notions of leadership within Palestinian society and its national movement. It proposes that leadership should be seen less as an attribute or possession of certain individuals or classes, and more as a shifting and dynamic process of complex social interaction based in contingent factors and changing circumstances. It holds, in other words, leadership to be relational, existing between different groups in a fluid state, ever capable of changing hands. Political leadership, for purposes of clarity, is further understood herein to pertain to the capacity to alter or maintain the strategic orientation, tactics, tempo, and resolve of the movement. The framework for the contestation of political leadership, as set out here, is mass politics, to which we now turn.

Mass politics as a category of analysis

As Manu Goswami compellingly argues in *Producing India*, studies of nationalism have long been beset by a significant array of methodological blinders.

¹²⁸ Key studies informing my thinking, the latter having established the paradigm it describes, are respectively: Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-2," *Subaltern Studies* v. 3 (Delhi: Oxford, 1984), p. 1-61, and Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*. A useful periodization of Subaltern Studies, distinguishing its first period from the postcolonial studies turn it later took, is provided in: Sumit Sarkar, "The Decline of the Subaltern in *Subaltern Studies*" in Vinayak Chaturvedi, ed., *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 300-323.

Although her concentration is on the presupposing of the nation-form, and particularly its key constituent elements, national space and national economy, her argument for a rigorous understanding of the sociohistorical production of such taken for granted and naturalized components of nationalist fields applies as well, I believe, to the development of national politics as a mass vocation and site of horizontal social mobilization.¹²⁹ Just as conceptions of national space and national economy attained the status of preconceived, self-evident categories for nationalist movements, and subsequently for scholars of nationalism, mass politics is usually treated as another piece of the nationalist template, undeserving of more careful scrutiny and largely invisible as a novel development within the production of nationalisms. Thus in the case of Palestinian Arabs, histories of the Mandate sometimes narrate a bulge of new actors (labor, women, youth) or old actors in new roles (peasants) in the 1930s, but their altered place and increased prominence within politics is not seen as worth much consideration, other than as measures of the deteriorating circumstances and rising desperation of the community. Moreover, their entry is certainly not seen as part of the birth of a new mode of politics. This is not solely or primarily an effect of the elitism discussed above, but also of a pronounced tendency to see nationalist politics as an inherently expansive, even inclusive field in which new actors or new social roles were steadily accreted and integrated in a semi-automatic fashion, without substantive changes, other than in scale, to the field itself. This tendency to presume and naturalize the expansion of the nationalist field mistakes an inherent *capacity* for its historical *actualization*. In doing

¹²⁹ Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 4.

so, it leaves the quality of that actualization – its effects on the wider political field – underspecified, and thus fails to register the magnitude of the transformations wrought by mass political participation.¹³⁰

Few works in the literature on the Arab Middle East during the late Ottoman era take mass politics as an analytic category, historically specific in its formation. Many see mass political participation as a transparent, preconstituted given of modern politics. The few studies that do engage it more directly as a category tend to equate it with new forms of social and political activism that rely on large or increasing numbers of persons and expand the political sphere beyond the realm of elites and notables. Rashid Khalidi, for instance, provides an example of this, writing that: “From 1908 until 1914, *bilad al-sham*, for the first time, was the scene of press freedom, hotly contested election campaigns, active political parties and secret societies, and public speaking before meetings, rallies, and private groups – in short, the beginning of the era of modern mass politics.” This new milieu created by the Young Turk revolution weakened the notables’ classic role in political mediation and opened space for new voices, Arabist in tenor, to challenge them.¹³¹ Joel Beinin has tied the phenomenon to a more expansive list of factors: new forms of labor organizing and activism (unions, syndicates, and strikes); the growth of street protests; the spread of new modernist discourses, norms, and social forms (among them nationalism, liberalism, women’s liberation, socialism, and

¹³⁰ The lack of specification, in turn, leaves prevailing elitist historical narratives and explanations safely unquestioned. Hence, for instance, Porath’s narrative, which offers more detail than many about the new nationalist forces from below, remains untroubled in its elite-centered focus.

¹³¹ Rashid Khalidi, “Ottomanism and Arabism in Syria Before 1914: a Reassessment” in R. Khalidi, L. Anderson, M. Muslih, R. Simon, eds., *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), p. 64. Khalidi maintains this view in *The Iron Cage*, p. 65.

secularism); novel understandings and ideological appropriations of the peasantry as a social force; and the reshaping of subjectivities to which these developments gave rise.¹³² More recently, and as noted above, Weldon Matthews has lent great weight to the public sphere and to the use of the print media by the Istiqlal Party to sway the Arab public against the British regime.¹³³

While each of these three descriptions clearly adduces elements of a new political framework, James Gelvin's work relating the emergence of mass politics to capitalist development has been the closest point of departure for the analysis pursued here. More explicitly than the preceding authors, Gelvin has argued that the social architecture for the mass political activity that characterized the post-Ottoman era in the region required the erosion of pre-existing vertical networks of social power and influence (the notable families) and their replacement by the growth of horizontal identities, affinities, and organization. This signal development – key to engendering new modes of politics and political sociability – was by no means absolute, and in fact in Syria, Palestine and elsewhere it was manifestly incomplete and partial, leaving older vehicles for the organization of political action competing with a new ethos, the basis of which accumulated more weight, density, and significance as the class transformation of society progressed. Gelvin further locates the move towards horizontal social organization within the modernization of state capacities during the Tanzimat period of the late Ottoman empire. The institutional developments undertaken over many decades

¹³² Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (UK: Cambridge UP: 2001), p. 71-98.

¹³³ Weldon Matthews in his very important and groundbreaking work on the period in question here: *Confronting an Empire, Constructing a Nation: Arab Nationalists and Popular Politics in Mandate Palestine* (I.B. Tauris, 2006), especially chapter 5.

to bolster the central state gave rise to “disciplinary and representational regimens” that were conducive to novel forms of ideological and discursive organicism. From this milieu a “culture of nationalism” took root that was distinct from and an essential precursor to the nationalisms that subsequently arose in the remainder of the empire. These sociological and ideational shifts laid the groundwork for the simultaneous emergence in the Syrian case of mass politics and territorial nationalism (*wataniyya*).¹³⁴

The popular resistance to the looming French invasion of Syria is of great interest for the study of later events in Palestine, and as Gelvin has argued, the two bear some significant likenesses. In the Syrian example, anti-colonialism did not take the form of the “reactive collective actions” (e.g. tax strikes, village abandonment, etc.) examined by Charles Tilly.¹³⁵ The assembly and proliferation of popular committees taking up the banner of “national defense” against imperialism relied on cross-class networks of those who were not the primary beneficiaries of capitalist development – middling merchants, *‘ulama*, artisans, workers, and others. The popular committees drew on pre-existing community networks and relationships within urban quarters and villages to produce “a formal structure that was congruent with daily practice.”¹³⁶ The discourse of the resistance was shot through with “traditionalizing” themes and symbols whose outward appearance belied their novel employment as components of a nationalist field that

¹³⁴ James Gelvin, “The Social Origins of Popular Nationalism: Evidence for a New Framework,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* v. 26, n. 4 (Nov 1994), p. 645-661; idem, “The Other Arab Nationalism,” p. 231-248; idem, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); idem, “‘Arab Nationalism’ Meets Social Theory,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* v. 41, n. 1 (Feb 2009), p. 10-12. Quotes from last, p. 11.

¹³⁵ Gelvin, “The Other Arab Nationalism,” p. 237-38, 241.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 239; Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, p. 113. Quote from *Divided Loyalties*.

melded older and newer idioms and discourses of identity and community to yield what Ted Swedenburg has described in the context of the Great Revolt in Palestine as a “fairly unified ideological discourse, such that each element fulfilled a role of condensation with respect to the others and each one operated as a symbol of all the others.”¹³⁷ The strong sociological and ideological bases of the resistance promoted widespread organization and mobilization and direct opposition to the quiescent agenda of the Faysali government.¹³⁸ In both this and the Palestinian case, as Gelvin underscores, the crises bearing down on the Syrian and Palestinian societies brought about the coalescence of popular movements, unmoored from elite control, that not only sought to defend their communities against colonial encroachment, but aimed to reshape them and revivify their bonds of mutuality and social solidarity.¹³⁹ They were, in other words, properly social as well as political movements.

In Palestine the coming of the Great Revolt has often been narrated in one of two fashions: either as a spontaneous explosion of popular discontent¹⁴⁰ or as the culmination of a series of “popular movements” since 1929 that believed in the cause of revolutionary violence and strove to raise an insurrection.¹⁴¹ The former erroneously

¹³⁷ Gelvin, “The Other Arab Nationalism,” p. 241-42; Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Fayetteville: U. of Arkansas Press, 1995), p. 79.

¹³⁸ Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*.

¹³⁹ Gelvin, “The Other Arab Nationalism,” p. 241; idem, “The Ironic Legacy of the King-Crane Commission,” in David W. Lesch, ed., *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), p. 23.

¹⁴⁰ This has been a very common trope in the literature, appearing in some form or other in numerous texts: Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 189; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-al-mu'assasat*, p. 331; Johnson, *Islam and the Politics of Meaning*, p. 47; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 71; Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 67; Black and Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars*, p. 5; Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 246; Basheer Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism, and the Palestine Question, 1908-1941: A Political History* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1998), p. 193; Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. xxii; Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 235.

¹⁴¹ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 246.

disconnects the revolt from the intense ferment of the years between 1929 and 1936 and ignores or misunderstands its bases in the growing mobilization of popular social forces. It also fails to adequately explain how a rebellion lasting roughly three years and passing through a complex series of phases could spring to life and be sustained for such a prolonged period, despite the tremendous human and economic costs entailed. The second narrative outwardly holds some greater degree of plausibility, stringing together various currents and moments to reveal the continuous pulse of a revolutionary core within the Palestinian community. It is rather reductive, however, collapsing the prior history of the popular currents that drove the revolt into a predilection for violence and armed struggle. This teleological reading elides the diversity of mobilization and activism that preceded the rebellion, which moved through several phases and trajectories and cannot easily be compressed into a unilinear narrative of marching toward revolutionary violence.

Informed by a host of historical and sociological work on the Middle East and elsewhere, as well as my own archival work, this dissertation argues against both of the above explanations for the Great Revolt. Inspired by innovative scholarship on the Mexican Revolution, I suggest that the uprising is less accurately apprehended when it is discussed and approached as merely an event or series of events in the conventional sense. Instead, this project contends that the revolt should be seen as the crystallization of a set of ongoing social processes.¹⁴² Beyond the contingent events that sparked the

¹⁴² Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent, Introduction in Joseph and Nugent, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 5.

first and second phases of the revolt, its origins lay in the broad interrelated developments that characterized the 1930s: class formation and reformation (the dispossession of the lower peasantry and the expansion of the peasantariat), the growth of the new horizontal associational culture, the discrediting of the diplomatic strategy of elites within the national movement and the consequent radicalization of the anti-colonial struggle, and an impulse towards the embodiment of popular sovereignty.¹⁴³ Much like the developments that undergirded the popular resistance to the French conquest in Syria, these processes forged the basis for protracted rebellion in Palestine, driven from below.

I argue in a further departure from the literature that the revolt was not a singularity. There are at least three senses in which this is so. For obvious reasons the Great Revolt has generally been portrayed primarily in its anti-colonial dimension, however this has been understood (i.e. as anti-Zionist, anti-British or both). This was indisputably the clearest and most agreed-upon cause of the uprising as its partisans saw it. Yet the turmoil it caused and the ardor it provoked provided openings for a second directionality within the rebellion, shaped by the social circumstances of the popular forces. This second axis within the rebellion spoke to the desires of the marginalized for social justice, for the amelioration of their oppressions, and for their social, cultural, and economic elevation. It was this impulse that lent the revolt its distinctive social coloring – essentially a peasant rebellion for much of its life – and animated simmering

¹⁴³ On the last see chapters 3 and 7-10. What can be said for the moment is that a shift took place from attempting to negotiate sovereignty to attempting to *take* sovereignty, or symbolic quotients of it, through novel forms of direct action.

insurrectionary tendencies against the class order of Arab society that manifested, late in the revolt, in a nascent social revolution.

The second sense has to do with the notion of the revolt as a cohesive phenomenon. Again, for reasons that are plain – the consistent upheaval and its dramatic scale and means – the different phases of the rebellion have been considered parts of a unity. While this certainly makes sense, it somewhat occludes the fact that the revolt didn't take a stable, consistent shape. It was, rather, manifold in its dimensions and its several phases weren't self-identical or uniform. The three most easily identifiable sub-periods within the revolt accord with the general strike in 1936, the interregnum during the Royal Commission's inquiry, and a renewed and expanded insurgency from 1937-39. Each of these sub-periods in turn is further divisible into more discrete moments. The insurgency phase (1937-39), for instance, consisted of an initial interval of rebel reorganization, followed by a period of rebel ascent when the uprising's partisans took over much of the country, and finally its conclusive moment during which the British regained the upper hand and beat back the revolt. The point in illustrating the fractal or discontinuous nature of the revolt is to suggest that attention to its internal diversity yields a richer, deeper view of the composite. Each of the phases and moments were based in different tactical repertoires and, to varying extents, consisted of different, interrelated cycles of contention and collective action. Each also mobilized or relied on the resources of different constituencies within the population in changing combinations. The approach taken here is to attempt to disaggregate the Great Revolt in order to both probe the contours of the phases and their sub-periods more

closely and to understand more fully how they interrelate with one another.¹⁴⁴

Finally, attention to the changing dynamics of the revolt's different phases and sub-components raises questions concerning its motive forces and the relations between the shifting constellation of actors shaping the rebellion and pushing it forward. The *effendi* thesis presents the revolt as something on the order of a well-ordered machine where the nationalist elites more or less controlled or directed the rest of society, with dissent only coming from the Opposition faction and perhaps from other elites or merchants outside the nationalists' circle. This dissertation presents an altogether different picture. In place of the (implicit and explicit) portraits of unity offered alternately by colonialist and nationalist histories, it excavates class, generational, and geographic tensions that cross-cut the uprising. My intention, lest there be any confusion, is not to reinforce older images of the revolt as a kind of bottomless pit of chaos and disorder, or of the Palestinians as hopelessly and fatefully divided among themselves. Rather, as set out above, it is to take up a mode of approach similar to the early Subaltern Studies school and to critically examine the internal sociology of the nationalist movement and the interactions between elites and non-elites within the nationalist field.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ My thinking in taking this tack has been influenced by some of the work done on social movements and social movement theory, and in particular: Doug McAdam and William H. Sewell, Jr., "It's About Time: Temporality in the Study of Social Movements and Revolutions" in Ronald R. Aminzade, ed., *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), p. 89-125.

¹⁴⁵ A brief word is in order on this schema. It should go without saying that summary categories like "elite" and "popular" elide all manner of salient internal distinctions, differences, and oppositions. Further, as Sarkar instructively notes, Guha didn't see elite and subaltern as separate domains, but rather as given to "interpenetration" and "mutual (though obviously unequal) conditioning" ("The Decline," p. 305). Nonetheless, in the Palestinian instance discussing elites *en masse* or *en bloc* makes a certain sense in light of their typically shared diminutive approach towards the majority of the populace, which they believed was incapable of or unfit for autonomy from their class and status superiors. This view was

In reexamining the 1930s era through the lens of mass politics this study aims to bring to light some of the hidden and occluded dimensions of the movement's history during the period. This work would not be possible without the prior contributions to the field of Palestinian social history that have ranged over peasants (Rosemary Sayigh; Ted Swedenburg; Munir Fakher Eldin), workers and labor (Rachelle Taquq; Zachary Lockman), the women's movement (Ellen Fleischmann), popular politics (Weldon Matthews; Rana Barakat), the press (Mustafa Kabha), and intellectual culture (Salim Tamari).¹⁴⁶ This rather partial and incomplete list underscores the flowering of an alternative perspective on Palestinian society that does not read its elite cast of politicians and their varied careers of interactions with the British as the sum of Palestinian history. By exploring the voices and experiences of non-elites these works broaden our sense of the diversity, complexity, and richness of Palestinian society and history. In advancing the optic of mass politics and by tracking the trajectories of youth, peasants, and the peasantry this dissertation aims to help push scholarly inquiry farther

clearly not without consequence, both for elites (who clung to their sense of entitlement to lead) and for the popular forces (which demonstrated a growing attraction to new forms of political sociability and organization).

¹⁴⁶ In the above order: Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Press, 1979); Ted Swedenburg, "The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry in the Great Revolt (1936-1939)" in *The Modern Middle East: a reader*, Albert Hourani, Philip S. Khoury, and Mary C. Wilson, eds., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993 [1988]), p. 467-502; idem, *Memories of Revolt*; Munir Fakher Eldin, "Communities of Owners: Land Law, Governance, and Politics in Palestine, 1858-1948," Ph.D. dissertation (New York University, 2008); Taquq, "Arab Labor" and idem, "Peasants into Workmen: Internal Labor Migration and the Arab Village Community under the Mandate," in Joel Migdal, ed., *Palestinian Society and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), p. 261-85; Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*; idem, "Arab Workers and Arab Nationalism in Palestine: A View from Below," in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, p. 249-72; Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its "New" Women*; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*; Rana Barakat, "Thawrat al-Buraq in British Mandate Palestine: Jerusalem, Mass Mobilization, and Colonial Politics, 1928-30," Ph.D. dissertation (U. Chicago, 2007); Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*; Salim Tamari, *al-Jabal didd al-bahr: dirasat fi ishkaliyat al-hadatha al-Filastiniyya* (Ramallah: Muwatin, al-Mu'assasa al-Filastiniyya li-Dirasat al-Dimuqratiyya, 2005).

down the road away from what Sherene Seikaly has referred to as the “flattened topography” of a society all too frequently imagined to be composed of only a self-obsessed wealthy upper stratum and groveling indigent masses.¹⁴⁷

Sources, methodology, and plan of the work

This dissertation is based primarily in archival research conducted in Israel and Britain, supplemented by published documents collections, memoirs, diaries, chronicles, and secondary sources. Palestinian Arab documents, usually captured by British or Israeli forces during the revolt and in the latter case during the 1948 war as well, appear in virtually all of the archives I utilized though very much as minor collections within their holdings. Even with published Arabic-language materials added to these the balance of the primary materials used here are British and Zionist, the dual colonial forces that thwarted the Palestinians’ drive to self-determination. This poses some obvious and much-commented upon problems for the researcher.

Each broad group of primary sources – Palestinian, Zionist, and British – raises issues that must be considered in thinking about historical investigation and writing, as has already been broadly noted above. My method here has drawn in the first place on the techniques of reading the colonial archive against the grain advocated by the first incarnation of Subaltern Studies scholarship.¹⁴⁸ The current study is, however, not a study of consciousness or forms of thought, but of political practice and of the social,

¹⁴⁷ Seikaly, “Meatless Days,” p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ For the former Ranajit Guha’s programmatic pieces, “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India” and “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency” have informed but not defined the investigation here: Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), p. 37-44 and p. 45-86.

political, and economic transformations shaping such. I have also drawn on Edward Said's model of "contrapuntal reading" across discrepant experiences, discourses and histories. The latter stresses two operations: first, the need to read contrasting and discordant accounts together and against each other, dialectically; and second reading for the excluded terms and contexts silently animating and shaping any text.¹⁴⁹

I have tried to muster these approaches to handle the various sources here both with care and as an ensemble, none of the components of which are individually unproblematic and each of which assists in opening up the others to reveal more about the contexts in which they were produced than they would alone. That being said, I have not wanted to write a history of the Palestinians without the Palestinians themselves and have, to the best of my ability, used Palestinian sources whenever they have been available from the archival work underlying this research. This has not in any way been a foolproof process and has inevitably led to some gaps that I hope to work to fill in the future.¹⁵⁰ I have tried to be as mindful as possible about this given the limitations of the research I have conducted.

The work is broken into three segments. In the first I trace the coalescence of what I call the youth trend, which became the most numerous and arguably most influential constituency within Palestinian society in the first half of the 1930s. Chapter 1 looks briefly at the pre-history of the youth trend and the Palestinian national movement before 1928, when the Young Men's Muslim Association was formed. It

¹⁴⁹ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. xxv-xxvi, 32, 52, 66-67.

¹⁵⁰ The most obvious here is the lack of use of the Arabic language press, a good deal of which is available on microfilm/fiche. The press has been used to marvelous effect in other studies, viz. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity* and Matthews, *Constructing a Nation*.

examines youth initiative before and after the explosive 1929 uprising and narrates the death of the elites' agenda of honorable cooperation with the government. Chapter 2 rotates around the Youth Congress and the Istiqlal Party, both of which were established in 1932 and both of which played integral roles in turning the national movement's attentions from Zionism to the British regime backing it. The chapter looks at the growing interest in the plight of the *fellahin* and at the first fruits of anti-British mobilization in 1933. In chapter 3 the narrative delves deeper into the changing sociology of the youth trend, surveying its diversity and exploring the effects of the proliferating new models of youth on subject formation and nationalist culture. It also traces a series of tactical experiments youth embarked on after the 1933 demonstrations, illustrating their increasing pull on the national field and their drift towards continued confrontation with British authority and colonial rule.

The second segment of the project looks at the plight of the countryside and the agrarian majority. Breaking from the chronology of the first segment, chapter 4 rewinds to establish the basic context from the late Ottoman era, excavating the deep and systemic changes within the political economy of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the attendant changes in social relations. It narrates the effects of world market integration, administrative centralization, and the origins of capitalism in Palestine, which gave rise to accelerating class differentiation and stratification, the reshaping of the elite (via the political and economic ascent of merchants), and the coarsening of bonds between segments of this new elite and the peasant producers. In chapter 5 the narrative turns to look at how the British advantaging of Zionism and

assumptions about the backwardness of Palestinian society and Ottoman-era social structures exacerbated the indebtedness of the peasantry and produced, contrary to all intents, a burgeoning, alienated landless class. In chapter 6 we turn to examine how peasants handled the dislocations and stresses of British rule, which led them to oppose the colonial order and the Jewish National Home policy and stimulated deep disaffection towards their erstwhile elite patrons, whose social standing slid as the conditions of the agriculturalists deteriorated. Complementing chapter 5's analysis of growing rural dispossession chapter 6 looks at the transformation of the peasantry through the lens of the peasantariat, following their struggles with the precarious conditions of life in urban slums and outlining the persistence of chronic un- and underemployment among Arabs. It ends with a look at the emergence of al-Qassam's revolutionary underground network as a product of this milieu.

The final segment of the dissertation examines the Great Revolt. Chapter 7 illustrates how the initiative of popular forces consistently outpaced and outmaneuvered the elites by 1936, bringing about the general strike and the formation of a new organizational infrastructure for the national struggle, the contours of which were shaped by popular militancy. Under the banner of the movement's desiderata popular forces progressively escalated the conflict with colonial rule. The colonial state's repression helped to engender urban and especially rural insurgency, but its augmentation and repurposing of preexisting practices of collective punishment – its principle counterinsurgency tools – failed to break the movement. Chapter 8 surveys the return of elites to influence during the Peel Commission inquiry, the intensification of the

factional schism brought about by the prospect of the country's partition (which the Opposition largely backed), and the continued anti-colonial mobilization of elements related to al-Qassam's network. The government's approval of the Royal Commission's recommendation for partition and the creation of a Jewish state in part of Palestine led to a renewal of the uprising under more difficult conditions than pertained in 1936 and with less initial support. Chapter 9 investigates how rebel institutions – comprising a nascent counter-state – were critical to the survival, spread, and intensification of the insurgent movement. It highlights the place of the rebel regime's intelligence, taxation, and judicial branches, probes the relationship between the rebel movement and its exilic backers (the CCJ and the mufti's network), and assesses the social revolutionary turn that accompanied the apex of rebel influence in late summer and early fall 1938. Chapter 10 provides an accounting of the movement's suppression and retreat beginning in late 1938. It tracks how a series of escalating pressures arrayed against the revolt, including the doubling of security forces and the development of a novel regime of rolling mass incarceration (tied to search operations in villages and urban centers), diminished the rebel movement's ability to take sanctuary from the colonial state's burgeoning offensive while increasing the costs to the population of the insurgency. External pressures amplified disorder and tensions within the rebel formations and led to the contraction of the counter-state and increasing chaos within society. In the midst of this decline, the British government's return to diplomacy (via the 1939 roundtable talks with Jews and Arabs) helped break popular resolve and pushed the beleaguered movement towards its final end.

Chapter 1:

The inception of youth activism and the twilight of elite hegemony, 1928-1931

In the fall of 1929 a political earthquake tore through Palestine. After escalating contention and competing claims over holy sites in Jerusalem¹ cascaded into demonstrations and inter-communal conflict, wide segments of the Arab public rose in rebellion. During the ensuing events mass violence, a good deal of which was committed by peasants, felled some 133 Jews and injured hundreds more.² More than half of the Zionist settlements in the country came under attack, ten were abandoned or temporarily evacuated, and four were effectively destroyed.³ The worst of the bloodshed took place in Jerusalem, which touched off the conflagration, and subsequently in Hebron and Safad, where indiscriminate slaughters of Jews took on the air of pogroms. Although the insurrection had the appearance of being, and to some extent actually was, religiously inspired, the deeper sources of discontent were bound up with the increasing political and economic marginalization felt by Palestinians.⁴

¹ At the center of the contention was the legal and moral ownership of the wall known to Judaism as *ha-kotel ha-ma'aravi* (the Western Wall), the remainder of the second Jewish temple. A portion of the wall is known as al-Buraq to Muslims, the location from which Muhammad ascended to heaven on his night journey (*isra*).

² On peasants' role in the 1929 rising, see Rana Barakat, "Thawrat al-Buraq," chapters 3 and 4. The figure is from: Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 144.

³ Avraham Sela, "The 'Wailing Wall' riots," p. 82; Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine*, p. 210. Heavily hit settlements in the Jerusalem region included Motza, Makor Hayyim, and Talpiyot (Barakat, "Thawrat al-Buraq," p. 197).

⁴ This was the conclusion of the Shaw Commission, sent to investigate the "disturbances": Shaw Commission report, p. 150-56. May Seikaly refers to religious sentiment as a "catalyst" tapping into the pervading malaise (*Haifa*, p. 208). The situation of the peasantry in the first decade of the Mandate is detailed in chapter five of the present dissertation.

The events of 1929 are typically seen as either a spontaneous outbreak or a nefarious plot hatched by the Grand Mufti, al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni.⁵ Yet among their most salient yet little commented upon features was the growing divide they signified between the Palestinian elites and the bulk of the Arab populace.⁶ The anti-Zionist revolt that swept through the country, known in English as “the Wailing Wall riots,” clearly spiraled out of the control of elite politicians. This loss of control, and the quickness with which Arab leaders decried the “disorder” in Jerusalem, Hebron, Safad, and elsewhere and moved to help quell the popular rising was in ways a sign of things to come.⁷ As the uprising showed, workers and peasants were more inclined to admit the possibility of using mass mobilization and collective violence to attain national goals and to fight to preserve their eroding position and shrinking hold on the country. While the elites continued to adhere to their diplomatic strategy of pursuing negotiations with the British, the ranks of dissent and unease grew in the years after the 1929 and subsequently had dramatic effects on the course of the national movement and the forms of struggle that it adopted.

By the late 1920s elite preeminence and leadership, and the ethos and style of notable politics, faced growing challenges from the intelligentsia and mounting pressures from below. Critically, the principle of elite intercession and mediation, and the

⁵ There is a substantial literature treating the climate leading up to the events, and the alleged role of the Supreme Muslim Council and its head, al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, in rousing the population to rebellion and violence. See: al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 218-233; Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, p. 33-49; Martin Kolinsky, “Premeditation in the Palestine disturbances of August 1929?” *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 26, n. 1 (Jan 1990), p. 18-34; Sela, “The ‘Wailing Wall’ Riots”; Ilan Pappé, “Hajj Amin and the Buraq Revolt,” *The Jerusalem Quarterly* v. 5, n. 1 (June 2003), p. 6-16.

⁶ This is freshly presented and explored in Rana Barakat’s “Thawrat al-Buraq.”

⁷ On the position of various elites towards the Wailing Wall/Buraq revolt, see Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 143, 145; Barakat, “Thawrat al-Buraq,” especially, p. 158-207. Also see below.

presumption of their stewardship of the population's interests and political representation, frayed increasingly in the late 1920s and into the 1930s. This owed to a number of causes, foremost among which were the erosion of the vertical social order upon which elite influence was historically based, popular perceptions that the upper classes were self-interested and duplicitous, and a growing sense of disquiet concerning the course of the national movement.⁸ The erosion of elite political authority helped spur new forms of increasingly restive and participatory political organization and activism among non-elites. While notable politics entered prolonged crisis, a new model of mass-based politics emerged, impelled by the growing sense of peril enveloping the Arab population and built on the growing impulse for popular organizing and the nascent view that mass mobilization, not elite negotiations, were what circumstances required.

The “new politics,” as it has been called, relied on popular organizing and activism, and was grounded in the new salience of horizontal categories and the identities that stemmed from them.⁹ Youth and youth associations of various types that began to spring up in the late 1920s were one of the foundational bases of the new, horizontally-organized politics. As explored below, youth was a nebulous and malleable category, and often included virtually anyone below the generation of the predominant elite leadership. Ilan Pappé has suggested in looking at the late Ottoman and early Mandate contexts that the dynamics of generational conflict were a central factor

⁸ The decay of the rural social order in the late Ottoman and British eras are treated in chapters 4-6.

⁹ The phrase is that of Weldon Matthews in his very important and groundbreaking work on the period in question here, *Confronting an Empire, Constructing a Nation*.

shaping change within local Arab politics.¹⁰ While Pappé focuses on the prominent and much-discussed al-Husayni family, his observations are also germane to the wider political field, where after a decade of British rule elites confronted swelling ranks of youthful activists who proved over time increasingly difficult to restrain or control.

This chapter narrates the beginnings of a wave of youth organizing that established a basis for continued activism and growing influence within the national movement. It situates this development first against the daily vicissitudes of the colonial situation and subsequently against the shock waves that ran through Palestinian society during and after the explosion and turmoil of the 1929 revolt and its repression. It examines how this pivotal moment in Palestinian history during the Mandate crippled the authority of the Arab Executive and the elites who backed it, in part by exploring the AE's own set of evolving responses to rising public disaffection from the British. Though they had cultivated a compliant set of Arab client politicians, after 1929 the British dealt their would-be friends in the AE several grievous blows, beginning with the indiscriminate suppression of Arab political violence, the execution of three men convicted of major "riot"-related crimes, and finally the fiasco of abrogating the Passfield White Paper in early 1931. These moves, and particularly the issue of the MacDonald letter (nullifying the White Paper), decimated the AE's case for pursuing a diplomatic path to fulfilling Palestinian national aspirations. The disillusionment and

¹⁰ Ilan Pappé, "From the 'Politics of Notables' to the 'Politics of Nationalism': The Husayni Family, 1840-1922" in Moshe Maoz and I. Pappé, eds., *Middle Eastern Politics and Ideas: A History from Within* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), p. 163-208. See also idem, *The Rise and Fall*.

bitterness the MacDonald letter caused helped set the stage for a renewed push for youth organization and initiative.

Analytically this chapter introduces the dialectical lens used throughout this dissertation to track and examine the changing interactions and relations between elite and non-elite political domains, organizations, and forces. It also introduces the concept of discipline, an optic derived from this narrative focus. By discipline I am not making reference to Foucauldian models of power, but rather something quite different and, as I see it, particularly pertinent to the constitution of anti-colonial social movements. As will be discussed below, youth who participated in the boycott of Jewish-made goods in 1929-30 played novel roles in the regulation of Arab society. The model of social regulation produced by the boycott saw serving the nation and the materialization of national goals become normative grounds for the deployment of sustained pressure and coercion by nationalist partisans on other elements of Palestinian society, particularly merchants. The “lesson” derived from this campaign – that for the sake of the nation forms of pressure could be, even needed to be, applied by nationalist activists on other Palestinians – subsequently shaped the internal organization and politics of the national movement.¹¹

¹¹ It has been argued by Hillel Cohen (*Army of Shadows*) that the growing internal use of coercion was intimately related to elite factionalism and especially the aspirations and ruthlessness of the al-Husayni family when it fell under the mufti’s influential sway. My argument about discipline bypasses the coercion and thuggery of ambitious elites, about which much has already been written, in order to understand and appreciate wider dynamics transpiring within the national movement. Shifting the focus of discussion away from the existing narrative of lethal internecine elite competition (of which Cohen offers an updated version) draws attention to aspects of the internal organization and sociology of the movement that have eluded scholarly attention, including the use by popular forces of a range of forms of overt and indirect pressure on elites and others. It also stresses the centrality of studying nationalist praxis and understanding it as a generative field capable of altering the balance of forces within the national movement and of rearticulating nationalist discourses and the web-work of relationships between the

Youth and others who came to surmise that notable politics and strategy had damaged the movement gradually saw that the national politicians were vulnerable to popular pressure. This was especially the case after the notables' strategy of diplomacy and negotiations fell into disrepute and became all but totally discredited among the Arab population. Youth and their backers therefore began to push their own conceptions of political struggle, including the necessity of mass-based organizing, onto the agenda of the leadership organs of the national movement. They also, in the period examined in this chapter, began to advocate for a critical turn against the British.

The Young Men's Muslim Association and the return of youth activism

Youth were a critical factor in the early nationalist stirrings and organizing within Arab Palestine.¹² Like the rest of the national movement, the youth field was affected by the years of general demobilization and drift that followed the ratification of the Mandate in 1922. This hiatus ended several years later at the end of the 1920s, when new forms of political and cultural organizing began to lay the groundwork for sustained youth activism. Before turning to look at this cycle of youth activism, the category youth itself is deserving of greater explication.

As noted above, youth was a plastic and expansive designation within Palestinian society. In terms of age, men as old as 40 or even older were sometimes associated with

movement (and sub-groupings within it), society, the state, and other contending forces (such as, in the present case, a rival nationalist movement).

¹² The first cycle of youth mobilization after the British conquest was broadly tied to the brief regime of Faysal Ibn Husayn in Syria and to two almost equally short-lived clubs, *al-Nadi al-'Arabi* (The Arab Club) and *al-Muntada al-Adabi* (The Literary Society), within Palestine. On the role of youth at this time see al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat* and Muslih, *The Origins*.

youth clubs and associations during the Mandate.¹³ Following other scholars of youth and youth movements, however, age alone appears to be an overly reductive and not particularly illuminating means of approaching the substance of the category. Of more significance were the shared experiences and what Mannheim calls the “social location” of the younger generation within the wider society. As Mannheim argues, commonality in social location configures the imaginable, conditioning a generation’s inclination towards “a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action” while ruling out others that do not correspond with its field of reference.¹⁴ Carried to a logical extreme this proposition too could be reductive, though seeing ranges of possibility rather than presupposing distinct modes of thought and action would alleviate a good bit of this conception’s more deterministic slant. More recently scholars have contended that youth must be seen as a social process constructed and shaped by social and institutional factors, much like class, race, and gender.¹⁵

The social location of youth, their opportunities and avenues for advancement and for the realization of their political aspirations, was greatly affected by the Mandate and its institutions. Perhaps more than anything else the imposition of the Mandate and the establishment of foreign rule defined the generational experience of youth. As

¹³ Arnon-Ohanah, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 181. Arnon-Ohana notes that older youth often became influential leaders within their circles (191). See chapter 3 below for more on the changing sociology of youth after the first cycle described here.

¹⁴ Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations” in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), p. 288-91; quote from 291.

¹⁵ Johanna Wyn, “Youth as a Social Category and as a Social Process” in Samir Khalaf and Roseanne Saad Khalaf, eds., *Arab Youth: Social Mobilization in Times of Risk* (London: Saqi Books, 2011), p. 35-46.

perceptively discussed by Weldon Matthews, the reemergence of the younger generations at an organizational level was brought about in part in response to the Anglophone and Christian culture promoted by the Mandatory state. For Arab Palestinians, the colonial power not only thwarted self-rule and sponsored the Jewish National Home, it also made its culture, language, and mores the norms of the state. “It was not only the law that was anglicized, but also the whole of the government and the locally recruited manpower that staffed much of it.” Notables accustomed to having positions within the state bureaucracy and the growing number of educated youth had to learn to conform with aspects of this culture, while being exposed to further manifestations of foreign cultural domination. This was most evident in the new language of the state and its law, English, but also extended to the importance imparted to such proselytizing institutions as the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). The British focus on “character-building” for young men through associations like the YMCA and the Baden-Powell-affiliated Boy Scouts served to bolster obedience to the colonial authority through the propagation of values and dispositions agreeable to serving the Mandate. These models were not lost on those seeking state employment and social advancement, many of whom felt compelled to join such associations. The convening of the world YMCA’s World Missionary Conference during Easter 1928 in Jerusalem proved to be too much to brook, however. Incensed by the effrontery and insult directed at Islamic sensibilities, local Arab youth called a Congress of Islamic

Clubs to meet in Jaffa in April, from which sprang the Young Men's Muslim Association (YMMA) of Palestine.¹⁶

The Young Men's Muslim Association was, as is suggested by its name, a counter-association to the YMCA. It was also inspired by the Egyptian organization of the same name, begun in 1926, and shared in its predecessor's Islamic modernist and *salafi* calling to protect the values and cultural ethos of Islam.¹⁷ Established as a registered association in Palestine, the YMMA had to accept the universal stricture against political activity imposed by the colonial state on approved local organizations. Though outwardly conforming to this guideline and disclaiming involvement in Arab political and factional disputes, it proved to be a magnet for political activists.¹⁸ Likewise its cultural and religious inclination quickly became joined to activities that had more overt political significance. The organization grew rapidly, with local chapters forming in at least eleven cities and towns by the time of the Congress of Islamic Clubs in November 1928.¹⁹

Concern for Islamic values and their protection involved engagement with the conditions of Muslims in Palestine. Among other issues, the situation of Palestine's Arab laborers rapidly gained the attention of the YMMA. The Seventh Palestinian Arab Congress had witnessed the defeat of a motion to organize Arab laborers (put forward by

¹⁶ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 46-47, 56. The call for the Islamic clubs' conference was issued by existing YMMA chapters, the Sports Club in Jaffa, the Arab Club (Nablus), and the Islamic Brotherhood Club in Gaza (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p.189).

¹⁷ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 56. On the Egyptian YMMA, see Aaron Jakes, "Extracurricular Nationalism: Youth Culture in the Age of Egypt's Parliamentary Monarchy," M.Phil. thesis (Oxford University, 2005), p. 79-82.

¹⁸ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 189; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 56.

¹⁹ Akram Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal: min mudhakkirat Akram Zu'aytir, 1909-1935* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-dirasat wa-l-nashr, 1994), p. 28. The first branches were in Jaffa, Nablus, Haifa, Gaza, Acre, Hebron, Lydda, Ramle, Safad, Jenin, and Silwan.

future member of the YMMA, Hani Abu Muslih).²⁰ The political class was content to fight against the preferences given to Jewish workers in the public sector and specifically in through the Public Works Department,²¹ but it was not keen on laborers' self-organization, which they feared might redound against their interests. Yet Arab workers faced concerted Zionist campaigns and pressure in the labor market.

Since the time of the second *'aliya* (1906-14), the Zionist movement on the ground in Palestine had been dominated by a coalition of factions and forces, including *Po'alei Tziyon* (Workers of Zion), *Ahdut Ha'avoda* (Unity of Labor), *Hashomer Hatza'ir* (the Young Guard), *Hapo'al Hatza'ir* (the Young Worker) and the smaller *Po'alei Tziyon Smol* (Workers of Zion – Left), which constituted the Labor trend. The Labor camp's dominance within the *yishuv* (the Jewish community in Palestine) was in part based in the institution of a split labor market as a means of providing opportunities for new Jewish immigrants. Instituting the split meant carving out a separate, protected and preferential domain within the labor market for Jews. It required there to be available opportunities for work combined with wages high enough to attract European immigrants. The campaign for 'Hebrew labor' (*'avoda ivrit*) demanded that Jewish employers hire only Jews, at rates guaranteed through collective bargaining, despite the larger payroll costs this entailed. For Arabs, where the campaign was successful, this meant their expulsion from Jewish-owned enterprises. As Gershon Shafir has persuasively argued, this component of the Zionist enterprise proved a major historical

²⁰ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 59.

²¹ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 276.

arena for the quickening of the conflict between Arab and Jewish nationalisms, and made the labor market a place of fierce competition.²²

Under the British, Hebrew labor was expanded to include efforts to instate favorable employment quotas and set-asides within the colonial bureaucracy, public works, and government-contracted labor. Hebrew labor was given a further boost in 1928 when the Mandate's Wages Commission agreed to formalize and approve discrimination in wage rates between Arabs and Jews, guaranteeing rates at least one-third higher for Jews on the pretext that they needed to maintain a generally higher standard of living.²³ Both the British Mandate's open discrimination against Arab laborers and the ongoing efforts to expel and ban Arab workers from Jewish-owned enterprises had obviously damaging impacts on the Palestinians.

Figures within the YMMA saw the weakness of the local Arab labor movement as injurious to the community as a whole. They also couldn't help but notice the efficacy of Zionist labor organization and the influence of the Labor trend within the Zionist movement and on the colonial administration, and some were clearly impressed by this. The Haifa branch, under the direction of Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, was the first YMMA to decide to involve itself in organizing Arab laborers. Its efforts reportedly produced rapid success, forming a kind of labor exchange, registering laborers to be picked by employers for projects and openings, including at the port. It claimed to have 2000 laborers on its rolls by October 1928. The call for labor organizing was taken up

²² Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989). On Labor Zionism and the Palestinians, see Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 21-110; 179-265.

²³ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 134. See also Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 76.

by the YMMA at the Congress of Islamic Clubs in November, in a resolution that called for branches to “organize unions of Muslim workers to help advance the Muslim worker to preserve his existence and rights and to advance his standard of living” and which further cited the unity of interests binding Christian and Muslim workers alike. In line with such goals the Gaza branch also offered evening literacy classes.²⁴

Although the resolutions passed at its early conventions did treat religious subjects, the *salafi* orientation that characterized the YMMA did not block the development of a more general Arab nationalist sensibility within the organization.²⁵ It was this broader sensibility that often prevailed within the YMMA, rather than a narrower religious basis.²⁶ This led to the anomalous situation of Christians joining a Muslim association, as was reported at the Nablus YMMA.²⁷ It also serves as an indication that among politicized youth, Palestinian or Arab nationalism typically trumped sectarian concerns. The focal point of the YMMA’s efforts was thus not an internally-directed campaign for Islamic morals and the preservation of traditions, but rather the attempt to build counter-models to the institutions of the Mandate and the *yishuv*. In doing so, the YMMAs sought to forge an institutional basis from which to resist the socialization apparatuses of the Mandate (i.e. colonial schools and curricula, the YMCA, Boy Scouts) and to repel threats to Arab interests and the Arab community

²⁴ Quoted in Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 59.

²⁵ On the *salafi* orientation of the YMMA, see Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 56-57, and in the sphere of education and among youth more generally, chapter 2 of his book, p. 44-74.

²⁶ Seikaly notes that the Haifa YMMA at points had a borderline anti-Christian tone (*Haifa*, p. 244). Y. Porath argues, without adequate elaboration, that the YMMA as a whole was anti-Christian in tenor (*The Emergence*, p. 300-01). This view seems to be a bit too much of a gloss and ignores its nationalist sensibility.

²⁷ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire* p. 60.

posed by the Zionist movement. Labor organizing was one aspect of this nascent project. Another aspect was the association's commitment, adopted at the November 1928 congress, to organize independent Arab scouting organizations.²⁸

The YMMA recognized that Hebrew scouting and touring groups, designed as they were to stake claims to the country while building a knowledge and familiarity with its environs and geography,²⁹ presented a distinct type of challenge. While the Zionist movement was not reluctant to politicize its youth and use them as a site to hone its ideology and practice, the Mandate-sponsored counterpart offered no parallel function, and in fact sought, as mentioned, to cultivate political acquiescence and a reverence for traits associated with British culture and administration. The official Boy Scouts, led in an honorary capacity by the High Commissioner himself, was an instrument for domesticating youth and for aiding in the production of a stratum of the Arab population capable of and agreeable to service in the colonial bureaucracy. The interest of Arab youth in creating their own scouting organs, like the impetus that led to the YMMA's foundation, arose in relation to both the official instruments of molding 'character' and to the claim-making inherent in Zionist scouting. Independent Arab scouting was a defensive measure aimed at recouping attachments to place and community, as well as building ties of social solidarity, independent of what the British would permit in the official organization.

²⁸ Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 29.

²⁹ Shimri Salomon, "Hahrato ve-te'udo shel ha-shetah ha-'aravi be-aretz 'al yadai ha-Haganah lifnai proyekti tikai ha-cfarim," *Daf me-ha-slik* 12, (April 2005).

Independent scouting and sports clubs took part, like the YMMA, in spreading a nationalist and indigenist sensibility. Scouting groups and other forms of youth association represented an organic reaction to the multi-faceted predicaments of an indigenous community beset both by powerful, yet alien enculturating state and parastatal colonial institutions and by a determined settler movement whose political claims rested in part on renarrating local history, denuding it of its Arab geography, heritage, and population. As a manifestation of an incipient national culture, the advent and spread of independent scouting is indicative of the fact that nationalism was as much vested in a complex field of social mobilization as it was the sphere of a political organ, the AE, which represented the population to the colonial state. It was also an implicit admission that the existing Arab national and social institutions were not adequate to the manifold challenges facing the national movement.

While the advent of the YMMA and Arab youth-affiliated scouting associations and the like indicated a growing distance between the Anglophone Christian culture of the Mandate and the majority Arab population, the affirmation of Arab identity and rootedness and the rejection of Zionism and its manifestations which these organizations spoke to did not guarantee a harmony of interests or outlook among youth. The latent fissure between those who desired to pursue remunerative careers within the colonial bureaucracy and those inclined to more fervent political activism and opposition to the Mandate was visible in August 1929 at a congress of Arab students in Jaffa. The congress took place on 12 August amidst the rising tension surrounding the issue of access to and possession of the Wailing Wall/al-Buraq in Jerusalem. Its proceedings

featured rousing poetry and denunciations and criticism of the state's policies in support of Zionism, which triggered a counter-motion to have the congress declare itself as politically neutral. The resolution passed with the proviso attached that the gathering was apolitical, except with respect to affairs affecting students, in which it reserved a right to intervene. This, however, did not stop the congress from returning to its oppositional anti-colonial tone or from giving its full-throated support for total independence, which was demanded in a unanimously passed resolution. The organizational components of the resolutions passed continued to bespeak the pulse towards cultural autonomism, and included a call to establish independent Arab scout troops, and another to organize and insure observances of local, and not imperial, holidays. Correspondingly, missionary schools were also censured and a resolution for their boycott was passed.³⁰

Although the more activist oriented students carried the day at the conference, the split among the younger generation of elites and middle classes over politicization and how to approach the colonial state continued long afterwards and grew more pronounced and polarizing with time. As well, an important facet of youth politics and mobilization was displayed in the maneuverings of the more politically inclined youth. As Matthews notes, after passage of the resolution branding the conference non-political, the majority of attendees continued on in a remarkably political manner.³¹ Its resolutions passed in an atmosphere that might be compared instructively with that of the recent Seventh Palestine Arab Congress, convened in June 1928, which failed to call for independence and reversed the political class's previous opposition to the establishment

³⁰ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 62-64.

³¹ Ibid., p. 63.

of a legislative council, or pseudo-parliament, with no power of review over the Jewish National Home policy and no Arab majority in its membership.³² Thus it is certainly paradoxical that the “apolitical” conference of students struck a far more militant posture than the preeminent political body of the Palestinians at the time. “Political” in the sense used by the student conference might be understood as relating foremost to internal questions, principally the factional rivalries of the dominant Jerusalemite families. This understanding of “politics” in turn allowed youth formations to present themselves to the colonial state as non-political, as indeed an amazing variety of highly politically active groups subsequently did, and as was required to assure approval as a registered society. In this manner, groups whose inclinations did not shy away from engaging many of the foremost political questions of the time negotiated a space for themselves within the confines of the colonial state and its restrictive associational laws.³³

1929 and the crisis of Arab leadership

The events of August 1929 mark a point of rupture in Palestinian politics, drawing a clear line between an increasingly restive Arab public and its elite leaders. The notables, caught off guard by the popular violence and its ferocity, quickly

³² Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 99-100, and on the history of legislative council proposals, 179-92. Summing up the disdain it evoked in some circles of the younger generation, ‘Izzat Darwaza, then a dissident member of the AE, referred to the Seventh Congress as a nest of “hypocrites” (*munafiq*), spies, and land-dealers (quoted in Johnson, *Islam and the Politics*, p. 36).

³³ While not all groups that claimed to be apolitical were involved in political matters, the existence and usage of this type of definition of the sphere of “politics” proved quite useful for advancing youth organization. The fact that many such groups went on to political endeavors is born out by the wider direction of youth activism. Regarding this paradox, Bayan al-Hut has argued that the declarations against political activities made by the YMMA and other groups (including the MCAs, for instance) were simply acts of necessary “deception” (*al-Shaykh al-mujahid ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam fī tarikh Filastin* (Beirut: Dar al-istiqlal li-l-dirasat wa-l-nashr, 1987), p. 42).

disavowed the carnage unleashed against the *yishuv*. Some, including the Grand Mufti, al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, tried to contain the storm of passions which had been stirred up in the controversy surrounding the Wailing Wall/al-Buraq.³⁴ But the growing senses of economic dislocation and political desperation among the *fellahin* could not be dispelled by honeyed words or calls for order. The British responded fiercely, deploying extra military forces to Palestine and using air and ground attacks to repress Palestinians *en masse*. The villages of Lifta, Dayr Yassin and Qalunya (all located west of Jerusalem), in particular, came in for brutal treatment.³⁵ More generally, lax open-fire regulations issued to suppression forces led to many civilian non-combatant deaths. The campaign of repression that followed the Arab uprisings, combined with Jewish reprisal attacks, killed 116 Arabs and wounded another 232.³⁶

The electrified mood precipitated by the events greatly impacted youth, whose position in Arab society gained new attention as a consequence of their budding prominence and visibility. Members of the Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Hebron YMMA chapters were involved in planning demonstrations after the Zionist demonstration of August 15 which helped ignite the conflagration.³⁷ The Hebron YMMA had already made statements decrying Jewish encroachments on the Wall, and two of its shaykhs headed a deputation of over one hundred people to government offices in their city to

³⁴ See: Barakat, "Thawrat al-Buraq," chapter 3 (p. 158-207), which makes repeated references to the efforts of Muslim elites to tamp things down. The Shaw Commission concluded against premeditation, whether by the AE or the SMC (p. 70-82; 156), though it held that members in unnamed "Moslem associations" – presumably the YMMAs – "prosecute[d] among the more ignorant Arab people a campaign of propaganda calculated to excite them" (p. 156).

³⁵ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 145.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 144.

³⁷ Barakat, "Thawrat al-Buraq," p. 183-84.

make representations on the issue.³⁸ As senior police officer for the Jaffa subdistrict, Eugene Quigley, testified during the Shaw Commission hearings, younger elements were well out of control of those counseling moderation during the events and could not be quieted peaceably.³⁹ In Nablus, for instance, upon hearing on 16 August of the clashes in Jerusalem the previous day, youth and others assaulted the police station and became embroiled in a firefight with the police.⁴⁰ Police surveillance is also indicative of the widening role and expected rebellion of young Palestinians, and turned during the events to focus on student clubs as well as known “agitators.”⁴¹

As Abdul-Wahhab Kayyali points out, the British suppression campaign turned the all-Arab towns of Nablus, Tulkarm, Acre, Jenin, and Gaza into sites of protest against the British.⁴² This presented an opening for the more radical youth, who began to press for direct opposition to British rule, and a conundrum for the elite leadership, which rejected such a course. After the clashes in Jerusalem on 23 August Musa Kazim al-Husayni, the head of the AE, signed onto a public call to the Arabs for the restoration of order and an end to the rising. The call, issued on 24 August, was cross-factional and was also signed by al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni (president of the Supreme Muslim Council and Grand Mufti of Palestine), and Raghib al-Nashashibi (the mayor of Jerusalem and head of the Opposition faction).⁴³ However divided the notables were internally, they were in consensus on the necessity of achieving national goals – including the curbing of

³⁸ Ibid., p. 183.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 247-48.

⁴⁰ Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 40.

⁴¹ Barakat, “Thawrat al-Buraq,” p. 252.

⁴² Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 145.

⁴³ ISA (65) 985-22pe.

immigration, the establishment of a representative government, and eventual independence – through negotiations with the British.

While the notables uniformly distanced themselves from the violence, public opinion diverged from the staid position of the AE and the elite leadership. Political meetings conducted by youth produced two options in response to British repression and Zionist reprisals. The more radical wing of the emerging youth movement, represented by the Haifa YMMA and figures such as Hamdi al-Husayni, an organizer in the Gaza and Jaffa YMMAs, pressed for mobilization against the British.⁴⁴ The larger tendency, influenced by Muslim notables, favored continuing assaults on Jews and the Zionist project.⁴⁵ From the outset of the upsurge Palestinian elites struggled to forestall this outcome, and in the following months the AE exerted considerable energy towards channeling the public's anger away from anti-British activism. Their task was not made any easier by the administration's pronouncements assailing the Arabs or its mobilization of the judiciary branch to continue the restoration of order and the suppression of the revolt by legal means.

Upon his return to Palestine at the end of August, the High Commissioner for Palestine, John Chancellor, issued a scathing statement that squarely put responsibility for all of the bloodshed at the feet of the Arabs and excoriated them for their "barbaric behavior".⁴⁶ This roused the AE to respond in kind, pointing out that the Jewish National Home policy lay at the root of the seething unrest throughout Arab Palestine.

⁴⁴ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 145.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Shaw Commission report, p. 68.

The Arab lawyers' organization offered an eloquent rebuttal statement. It charged that the Mandate's fealty to serving the Jewish National Home presented the Arabs with an existential quandary by threatening them with dispossession, and supported the charge with evidence adducing the direction of policy and the consequent marginalization of the majority Arab population.⁴⁷ Such rejoinders and explanations fell on deaf ears amongst the British, however, who continued to treat the violence of 1929 as a question of security, not general policy.⁴⁸

The High Commissioner was unwavering in his certitude that the Arabs needed to be made to pay a price for the bloody rampages that occurred in Hebron and Safad. This was carried out first through military and police operations and then through the administration of justice. To try the Arabs charged for offenses relating to the 'disturbances,' the mandatory authorities promulgated a number of changes to the courts system, including the exclusion of Arabs (and Jews) from any role in the adjudication of justice, and a relaxation of the evidentiary standards required for conviction.⁴⁹ A wave of arrests and indictments led to the prosecution of some 891 Arabs for various offenses, 124 of whom were charged with murder. Of those charged with murder, 55 were found guilty and 27 condemned to death.⁵⁰ The Collective Punishments Ordinance of 1926

⁴⁷ Both the AE and lawyers' statements are reproduced in: *Watha'iq al-muqawama al-Filastiniyya didd al-ihtilal al-Baritani wa-l-Sahyuniyya 1918-1939*, compiled by 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Kayyali (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 1988), p. 142-43 and p. 144-47, respectively.

⁴⁸ Privately, Arab arguments may have made an impression on the High Commissioner, who months later in January of 1930, authored a secret paper in which he widely criticized the fundamentals of British policy in Palestine and argued for limits on land transfers to Jews and a cessation of the immigration of Jewish agriculturalists, for fear of creating a class of landless Arabs. See PRO - CO 733/182/9 and see below.

⁴⁹ On the administration of justice in the aftermath of the events, see Barakat, "Thawrat al-Buraq," chapter 5: p. 257-307.

⁵⁰ Arrest figures come from: *Report by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Palestine and*

was also amended and made retroactive to include the period of the events.⁵¹ Onerous collective fines amounting to £P 33,340 were levied against at least 22 villages and urban areas by the close of 1930.⁵² In the case of the attack on Be'er Tuvia in the Gaza subdistrict, 11 nearby Arab villages were assessed with collective fines ranging individually from £P 400-3000, whose total sum dwarfed the monetary damages sustained by the colony.⁵³

The administration's iron fist policy towards the Palestinians elicited a strong popular response of indignation and resentment at the Mandate and sympathy for the condemned, which surged for months after the events. The tenor of public political discussion was such that even figures in the more conciliatory, pro-British wing of the national movement, the Opposition, such as 'Isa al-'Isa, editor of the largest Arabic daily newspaper, *Filastin*, denounced the British and decried their blatant anti-Arab posture.⁵⁴ In towns and villages alike there was a strong undercurrent of disaffection among all classes of society, including peasants, as the High Commissioner informed London in October.⁵⁵ When the High Commissioner ascribed the anti-British atmosphere to the

Trans-Jordan for the year 1929 (hereafter annual reports are cited as: *Report to the League of Nations, year*), p. 7; *Report to the League of Nations, 1930*, p. 8. Murder case numbers are those of the first Palestine Attorney General, Norman Bentwich, cited in Barakat, "Thawrat al-Buraq," p. 293. Bentwich gives an undercount of capital sentences (25), in contrast to the *Report to the League of Nations, 1930* which cites 27 as the cumulative total (p. 8).

⁵¹ Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 58.

⁵² Peel Commission report, p. 194. The annual reports for 1929 and 1930, which give lower figures (£P 17,840 in 1929 and £P 1500 in 1930), are presumably incomplete (*Report to the League of Nations, 1929*, p. 8; *Report to the League of Nations, 1930*, p. 8). The outsize quality of these imposts is evident in that by 1935, only £P 8520 was collected (Peel Commission, op. cit.). According to the Attorney General's wife, Helen Bentwich, the sum collected was distributed to Jews to defray damages (Bentwich and Bentwich, *Mandate Memories*, p. 135).

⁵³ Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 71.

⁵⁴ Barakat, "Thawrat al-Buraq," p. 273-75.

⁵⁵ HC to Colonial Secretary, 12.10.29 (#245), 19.10.29 (#264), CP 343 (29), PRO – CAB 24/207.

handiwork of practiced agitators, he gave voice to the common colonial trope of the ignorant and downtrodden *fellah* as malleable clay in the hands of his social betters.⁵⁶ But non-elites hardly required social superiors to interpret what the “restoration of order” looked like for the Arabs. On the contrary, it was popular antipathy and rage towards the British that drove the AE to adopt a more adversarial political posture, if only in fits and starts from which it soon retreated.

The uprising clearly spoke to the anguish and rage felt throughout the public at the Jewish National Home policy, but the British response to the “disturbances” led to a new and spreading perception that it was the British who enabled and protected the Zionist project foremost.⁵⁷ This idea greatly threatened the position of the elites, who sought by early October to walk a tightrope between roiling public sentiment and their own unshaken belief in the necessity of a national strategy based firmly in diplomacy. AE members and other leaders like al-Hajj Amin knew at some level that their position in favor of pacific struggle and negotiation was in jeopardy, and that their credibility rested in part on getting out in front of popular sentiment. Their leadership had been wildly flouted by the population during the events, and would require extensive recuperation.

The notables’ image was also damaged in the eyes of the British, who acted quickly to cease discussions on the formation of a legislative council, which the AE had been pursuing in 1929.⁵⁸ In a meeting with the High Commissioner in mid-October,

⁵⁶ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 148.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 145-46.

⁵⁸ See below.

‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi, one of the AE’s secretaries, admitted the elites’ predicament quite plainly when he informed Chancellor that “the Executive Committee in their actions are not always their own masters, but have to yield to the pressure of their followers.” Their position necessitated that they “follow[] a policy to do all they could to win over public opinion and to avoid estrangement.”⁵⁹ ‘Abd al-Hadi sought to make the most of the growing gap between the elite leadership and the population, presenting the AE as the most rational and moderate Arab interlocutor for the British, whose own interest lay in exerting its influence to quiet the situation and return to the negotiating table.

Yet as the AE and the elites assured the colonial state of their abiding commitment to amicable relations, they recognized that they had to make concessions to the public. To this end they agreed that the AE must take a more active part in the popular organizing which it typically shunned. At the same time, and in sharp contrast to the lingering mood of bitterness felt by large parts of the Arab public, it redoubled its diplomatic bid, officially relaunched with the decision in January 1930 to dispatch a new delegation to London for talks, but quietly begun months earlier.⁶⁰ In this light, the advance of popular forces in the wake of the rising came, from one direction, in response to the leadership’s tepid measures, and from another, as a result of the AE’s increased attempts to insinuate itself into activist currents and gain a wider purchase on the public.

Youth, the boycott campaign, and the boundaries of the nation

⁵⁹ Quoted in Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 148.

⁶⁰ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 23-24.

In late September the AE called a national strike in response to the government's judicial onslaught, the bias of police against Arabs, and especially the continuation of Norman Bentwich, a well-known Zionist much hated by the Arab population, as the Attorney General.⁶¹ It also protested restrictions on the press, as three Arabic papers had been suspended two days previously, and the entire Arabic press had been squelched for a period of two weeks after the commencement of the attacks in August.⁶² However, after a meeting with the High Commissioner, the AE reversed itself and called off the strike.⁶³ This produced a rebuke from the YMMA, which then on 11 October took its own initiative to call such a strike.⁶⁴ Faced with the prospect of being shown up, the AE convened a full meeting the following day at which a procedural motion was passed that reinstated the strike call and set the date for that assigned by the YMMA, 16 October.⁶⁵ It used recently announced (10 October) "temporary" regulations concerning Jewish access to the Wailing Wall as an additional pretext for its about-face while also protesting the collective fines being levied on many towns and urban quarters.⁶⁶

While 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi was explaining to the High Commissioner that the AE was struggling to retain its stature, youth forces were coalescing around a new means of campaigning among the public. At the same meeting at which the YMMA resolved to call the 16 October strike, it also voted to implement a boycott of Jewish and foreign

⁶¹ AE meeting minutes, 29.9.29, ISA (65) 984 – 4p.

⁶² Ibid; Official communiqué #27/1929, 27.9.29, ISA (2) 566 – 1m; Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 44.

⁶³ Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 52.

⁶⁴ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 65.

⁶⁵ Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 52-53.

⁶⁶ Official communiqué #31/1929, 10.10.29, ISA (2) 566 – 1m; Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 52-53; AE meeting minutes, 12-13.10.29, ISA (65) 984 – 4p.

goods and to encourage Arab industry and products as alternatives.⁶⁷ After the massacres and attacks of August, a sporadic Jewish boycott had been briefly visited upon Arab goods.⁶⁸ It appears that this unofficial Jewish boycott sparked an Arab counter-boycott.⁶⁹ By the time the Arab boycott of Jewish goods was officially resolved on by the YMMA the effort was well underway and highly organized. This owed in no small measure to the facilities of the AE, which was already in the thick of organizing the campaign by early October.⁷⁰

The boycott enjoyed stalwart support from youth and, it seems, a good portion of the Arab public.⁷¹ Akram Zu‘aytir, a 24-year old YMMA activist in the Nablus and Acre chapters and skilled publicist, set himself to advocating for the boycott in articles he wrote for the press. In highly emotive tones Zu‘aytir urged on the cause, holding forth to his audience that “the nation which usurps [*taghtasib*] your rights in life, and works towards a most evil exile for you, the nation which is striving to bury you alive [*li-wa’dika*]... you must resist it until the end... and the least of what you must do concerning your enemy is to boycott them.”⁷² Similarly, other newspapers, including *al-Karmil* and *al-Sirat al-Mustaqim*, urged going beyond the usual compass of political activity and endorsed the formation of popular organs capable of embodying and serving public interests and aspirations, rather than those of elites.⁷³

⁶⁷ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 65.

⁶⁸ *Report to the League of Nations, 1929*, p. 8.

⁶⁹ HC Chancellor reported to London on the boycott as early as 5 October (Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 146-47).

⁷⁰ Multiple conversations between the AE and various parties, recorded via phone-tap, show the AE’s early involvement. See CZA S/25 – 22329.

⁷¹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1929*, p. 8.

⁷² Zu ‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 52.

⁷³ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 45.

At its outset the Arab boycott of Jewish goods was well-supported by much of the Arab public – so much so that it concerned the High Commissioner and the Palestine administration considerably. On 5 October, before any official Palestinian endorsement of the boycott, the High Commissioner warned the AE that the boycott risked triggering a renewal of serious violence and bid it to restrain the Arab public. A week later he noted that: “Boycott is being enforced and instigators are working clandestinely and avoiding detection.”⁷⁴ Indeed, the boycott network was so effective and the atmosphere so conducive to such an action-oriented campaign that the authorities initially had trouble tracking, apprehending, and prosecuting boycott agents.⁷⁵

The boycott continued for several months at varying levels of strength. Its enforcers, referred to by Arabs as the “boycott boys,”⁷⁶ acted to dissuade Arabs from patronizing Jewish stores and to keep Arab merchants from trading with their Jewish counterparts. When tactics rooted in persuasion and dissuasion fell short, boycott activists sometimes used or threatened violence. They also vandalized stores and merchandise and harassed and even extorted money from Jewish merchants.⁷⁷ One of the primary daily tactics used to advance the boycott agenda was the picketing of Jewish stores and stores retailing Jewish goods. Strong pickets created great commotion, even “deafening” sound, outside venues patronized by Arabs.⁷⁸ When Arab consumers purchased goods from Jewish stores they ran the risk of boycotters damaging their

⁷⁴ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 146-48.

⁷⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1929*, p. 8.

⁷⁶ Various references are made in tapped AE office phone conversations at CZA S/25 – 22329.

⁷⁷ Report of political work among the Arabs, 6-12 December 1929, CZA J/1 – 310. This report recounts that a boycott leader, named as Sharif Ibn Haraj Yusuf Wafa, broke into Jewish stores in the Old City of Jerusalem and subsequently demanded £P 500 from their owners.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

merchandise.⁷⁹ Taunts were also used, such as when Arab women entering Jewish stores were reported to have been jeered at by women working for the boycott with repeated shouts of “Jew.”⁸⁰

Boycott activists also doubled at times as advertisers of cheap Arab goods. They called out prices of commodities offered at affordable rates to the Arab public by Arab vendors, warning Arab consumers against buying from Jews.⁸¹ The concentration on cheap goods suggests that they may have presumed that the majority of transactions between Arab patrons and Jewish vendors were devoted to purchases of low-priced goods, or that less well-off Arabs were more likely to simply buy whatever was cheapest. The addition of economic inducements to conform with the boycott may have been sound strategy to widen its effectiveness. It further illustrates, however, that the need for the boycott was not universally self-evident or immanently practical and that multiple messaging techniques were deployed to strengthen popular adherence to the campaign.

In urban areas simple but effective measures were taken to help boycott activists avoid detection and detention. In the Old City in Jerusalem, stores were designated as safe spaces, where picketers and activists could change clothes upon the arrival of police. This, along with the general social sanction that accompanied the campaign for some time, seems to have proven an effective means of evasion. Lawyers were also

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ A.H. Cohen to Y. Ben Tzvi, 22.1.30, CZA J/1 – 310. Cohen refers to the women acting for the boycott as “whores,” though there is nothing further on this accusation. Little is evident in general about women active with the boycott, and most mention of the actual boycott squads omits any note of women present on them.

⁸¹ Report of political work among the Arabs, 6-12 December 1929, CZA J/1 – 310.

made available in the instance of arrests, and the Old City reportedly had three or four on call in January 1930.⁸²

Almost from the outset, the Arab Executive was heavily involved with the boycott.⁸³ It acted as a coordinating body, collecting intelligence, issuing instructions – including concerning the use of force or violence – and provided legal support for the proponents on the ground. It is unclear how this role came about, but the AE’s resources, connections, and countrywide network facilitated its logistical and coordinating functions.

The AE became a clearinghouse for boycott enforcement. For instance, in one report from Ramle, a local contact passed off information that two men from Majdal, a Muslim and a Christian, were buying goods for resale from Jews at Jerusalem. A witness to the act was attested to by name, and the AE subsequently “agreed to take action in the matter,” the exact nature of which remains unclear.⁸⁴ That the AE engaged in violence to support the boycott is suggested by instructions which it sent to Jaffa concerning boycott enforcement. In a dispatch sent to a shaykh Mustafa in mid-October 1929, the AE directed that “the sternest measures” were to be deployed against anyone breaking the boycott.⁸⁵ The fact that such measures would go unspecified leads one to suspect both that the organization was seeking to keep its hands clean and that there was no need for further detail. Petty assault became a regular occurrence during the boycott. In one representative instance, for example, an Arab merchant from Jaffa purchased

⁸² A.H. Cohen to Y. Ben-Tzvi, 30.1.30, CZA J/1 – 310.

⁸³ Phone tap records, AE office, various dates, CZA S/25 – 22329; Intelligence report, 25.10.29, CZA J/1 – 310.

⁸⁴ Intelligence report, 25.10.29, CZA J/1 – 310. Similar reports can also be found in CZA S/25 – 22329.

⁸⁵ Intelligence reports, 15-20.29, entry for 17.10.29, CZA J/1 – 310.

“fancy goods” from a Jewish retailer and was struck “fiercely” on the face by local boycott activists after refusing their instructions to return the merchandise.⁸⁶ The AE also reportedly had a number of individuals at its service who were available for unsavory purposes, even allegedly murder.⁸⁷ One of these men, Tawfiq al-Husayni, a nephew of the Grand Mufti, was later reported by an Arab source to be a member of the boycott committee within the AE.⁸⁸

The question of the boycott’s leadership remains murky. There appear to have been several different tiers of leadership, including a boycott committee inside the AE and local “captains” on the ground, though the nature of the relationship between these groups is not apparent. Nor is it clear that there was a single unified command or that all of the boycott efforts in the country came to be directed under the auspices of the AE. In October 1929, the arrest of Sa’d al-Din al-‘Alami, a boycott committee member, was said by opposition intelligence sources to be causing great consternation and fears within the AE for the success of the boycott.⁸⁹ Mughanam Mughanam, an AE lawyer, was deputed to his case.⁹⁰ In January 1930 a letter was sent to the police from a member of the Faraj family, informing that the boycott committee operated as a “special Department” of the AE.⁹¹ Its members, named as Thabet Darwish, Ishaq Darwish, Mustafa al-Husayni, and Tawfiq al-Husayni, were close confidantes or relatives of Hajj

⁸⁶ Incidents in connection with the boycott movement (Musa Hassin [Hasan] Kurdi), n.d. (subsequent to 31.10.29), CZA J/1 – 310.

⁸⁷ Intelligence reports, info from Arab Agent X and another source, 13.10.29 entry, CZA J/1 – 310. Four men are listed in this report.

⁸⁸ Abdul Rahman [‘Abd al-Rahman] Faraj to District Commandant of Police, Jerusalem, 20.1.30, CZA J/1 – 310.

⁸⁹ Intelligence report, 25.10.29, CZA J/1 – 310.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Abdul Rahman Faraj to District Commandant of Police, Jerusalem, 20.1.30, CZA J/1 – 310.

Amin al-Husayni, and would seem to indicate that he had a role in the campaign, if through allies and proxies. A British report from November 1929 cited the formation of a boycott committee with AE and SMC approval whose purposes included “terrorism.”⁹² However, it was subsequently revealed that the committee, a body of 24 members, featured 11 communists, which led authorities to doubt the links between this committee and the AE, and which further illustrates that there appear to have been multiple boycott centers.⁹³

In Jerusalem, where the Joint Bureau, an intelligence service of the Jewish Agency and the Jewish National Council (*ha-Va'ad ha-le'umi*),⁹⁴ followed the boycott closely, two men were reported in January 1930 to be the managers on the ground: Ahmad Shu'ayb al-Nashashibi and shaykh Nasir Abu al-Sa'ud.⁹⁵ The first ran crews within the Old City, while the latter ran operations outside it. A mere day after detailing the two captains' names, Aharon Haim Cohen, the Joint Bureau's local operative, sent a further report that Nasir Abu al-Sa'ud was ready to work with Zionists and wanted the boycott to end.⁹⁶ He sought an audience with Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi, head of the Joint Bureau and National Council member, and was ready to offer his assistance free of remuneration or reward. Cohen told his boss that shaykh Nasir had become fearful for

⁹² Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 150-151.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 151.

⁹⁴ See Elyakim Rubinstein, “ha-Tipul ba-shela ha-‘Aravit be-Eretz Yisrael ba-tkufa ha-miyadit sh-le-aher ‘meore‘ot tarpat’ ve-hikmat ha-lishka ha-meuhedet shel ha-mosadot ha-yishuviim – heybatim madiniim” in Ilan Pappé, ed., *‘Arvim ve-Yehudim ba-tekufat ha-mandat: mabat hadash ‘al ha-mehkar ha-histori* (Giv’at Havivah: ha-Mahon le-Heker ha-Shalom, 1995), p. 65-102.

⁹⁵ Report on events in the Old City, 2.1.30, CZA J/1 – 310.

⁹⁶ Report on events in the Old City, 3.1.30, CZA J/1 – 310.

his life, having learned that his name was circulated in the Jewish press as a boycott leader, and that this appeared to have spurred his change of heart.⁹⁷

Zionist forces responded to the campaign with a counter-campaign that focused on several elements, including counter-picketing to defend Jewish stores and a propaganda campaign in Arabic newspapers.⁹⁸ At the center of Zionist concern were Jewish merchants. Jewish businesses and retailers were hurt by the Arab boycott, and some pleaded desperately with the Zionist authorities for help.⁹⁹ Others, such as in the Old City in Jerusalem, were angry with the Zionist leadership, pointedly complaining that they had been abandoned and contending that an organized reverse boycott, by Jews of Arab goods, would kill the Arab campaign post haste.¹⁰⁰ The merchants noted that the boycott effort ebbed and flowed from day to day and week to week, and argued that Zionist leaders often presumed that the campaign was dwindling if it appeared smaller or less present for a few days, when in fact it continued.¹⁰¹ Jewish leaders debated the reverse boycott proposal at length, but ultimately concluded that it was likely to enflame the situation and push “moderate” Arabs into the hands of the nationalist activists.¹⁰² Instead young Zionist activists were used to shield Arab businessmen who continued to trade with their Jewish counterparts.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Ibid. Later in the month Abu al-Sa‘ud stated that he was a believer in Arab-Jewish unity and again affirmed his desire to see the boycott ended (A.H. Cohen to Y. Ben-Tzvi, 30.1.30, CZA J/1 – 310).

⁹⁸ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 219.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁰⁰ Report on events in the Old City, 2.1.30, CZA J/1 – 310; Report of political work among the Arabs, 6-12.12.29, CZA J/1 – 310.

¹⁰¹ Report on events in the Old City, 2.1.30, CZA J/1 – 310.

¹⁰² Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 218-19.

¹⁰³ A.H. Cohen to Y. Ben-Tzvi, 30.1.30, CZA J/1 – 310.

The Zionist effort against the boycott included attacks on the campaign in the Arabic press and counterintelligence operations designed to exploit inter-Arab divisions and foment disunity in the Arab camp. One of the vessels for the Zionist press offensive was a publicist named Muhammad Tawil, who published a booklet called *al-Haqa'iq al-Majhula* (Unknown Truths) in 1930.¹⁰⁴ Articles such as those by Tawil aimed to stir disaffection by charging that the boycott was being led to serve the self-interest of merchants connected to the national movement, who were profiting at public expense.¹⁰⁵ Indeed there were profiteers among the Arab merchants and this damaged the boycott and undoubtedly contributed to its demise.¹⁰⁶ The Joint Bureau also made use of simmering urban-rural tensions and encouraged the view that the boycott was a vehicle for the promotion of urban hegemony over the countryside.¹⁰⁷ At a meeting of Nablus area notables and merchants in January 1930, dissenters contended that the boycott was a device for encouraging rural businessmen to take on high-interest loans from their urban brethren.¹⁰⁸

In addition to impugning the motives for the boycott, Zionist authorities advised Jewish merchants to trim prices through special offerings and discounts to undercut their Arab competition and deflate public enthusiasm for Arab autarky.¹⁰⁹ Combined with actual price hikes instituted by some Arab merchants, the attempt to create an economic

¹⁰⁴ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 40, 274.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁰⁶ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 219.

¹⁰⁷ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 219.

wedge against the boycott may have eaten away at the campaign, perhaps most of all in some rural areas.

Yehoshua Porath credits Zionist counter-measures for the downfall of the boycott.¹¹⁰ Important as these measures were, British efforts were at least equally responsible for sealing its fate. State officials saw that the events of 1929 produced a “revival of Arab nationalist and anti-Jewish feeling” which then continued to be manifested through the boycott.¹¹¹ To stamp out these odious currents and to prevent the boycott from igniting further bouts of bloodshed, the colonial state suppressed the campaign. As previously mentioned, legal suppression of boycott activists was initially greatly hampered by the venture’s popularity and by intimidation supplied by the boycott’s backers when that enthusiasm was lacking. After some time, and with the aid of Zionist intelligence, the police had an easier time ferreting out street-level boycott agents and elements of the campaign’s leadership, and crucially, in obtaining evidence that would secure convictions.

Youth had already become a target of colonial repression. In the most infamous episode, Jerome Farrell, Assistant Director of Education, outraged the Arab public when he ordered youth in Nablus whipped in public on their buttocks, as part of the state’s efforts to break the 16 October strike and punish its local organizers.¹¹² An estimated 100 students, including those under age 16, were dragnetted, with around 80 lashed and others given fines.¹¹³ A similar occurrence was visited upon Safad.¹¹⁴ Students

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1929*, p. 8.

¹¹² Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 65.

¹¹³ Ibid.

responded to this treatment by organizing their own protest strike which spread to a number of the most prominent cities and towns.¹¹⁵

The government took legal action against the boycott through a set of new and revamped regulations, such as a wide-ranging Sedition Law that went into effect in late October.¹¹⁶ It also made use of the Prevention of Crime Ordinance, which allowed for internally exiling offenders in cities or regions remote from their residences, and the newly promulgated Magistrates Courts Jurisdiction (Amendment) Ordinance, which expedited prosecutions by allowing magistrates to pronounce summary verdicts.¹¹⁷ In Jaffa, police determined that Hamdi al-Husayni, YMMA-Jaffa head ‘Ali al-Dabbagh, and others, such as shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Muzaffar, a prominent figure in the MCA and sometimes dissident politician, were among the boycott’s leaders and directed a highly coercive campaign.¹¹⁸ Arrestees in a sweep, such as Midhat al-Habab, convicted of incitement to boycott, fomenting rebellion and leadership of an armed band, and Hamdi al-Husayni were sentenced to one year of banishment.¹¹⁹ As the boycott came under pressure, the first AE sought dismissal of the legal proceedings, but received a scolding from HC Chancellor, who inveighed that “it was vain to try methods of conciliation with jackals & that they could tell their young friends that the same action would be taken against any one of them who were caught in seditious acts.”¹²⁰ By early

¹¹⁴ Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 54.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 60. The law’s formal title was Criminal Law (Seditions Offenses) Ordinance.

¹¹⁷ Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots in Mandatory Palestine, 1928-35* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), p. 110.

¹¹⁸ Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 71; Martin Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 110.

¹¹⁹ Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 99; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 66.

¹²⁰ Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 65.

1930 the AE was in full retreat, importuning various arrestees to accept the government's conditions for release on bail.¹²¹

The YMMA was also targeted in the aftermath of the “disturbances.” A number of key activists from the Jaffa branch were arrested and the branch itself was closed in December 1929. This was soon followed by pressure on the Gaza and Jerusalem chapters, which were also compelled to dissolve.¹²² The wave of branch suppressions triggered a crisis for the organization. The divide that had appeared earlier between more professionally oriented youth who coveted their jobs in the state bureaucracy and those who were more inclined towards nationalist political activism resurfaced with added gravity. As was observed in the press, the state distinguished between branches whose leadership was controlled by civil servants and those where more activist orientations held sway, shuttering the latter. The YMMA was replete with civil servants, who comprised some three-quarters of its membership, and branches divided between the activists and the civil servants, such as at Nablus, were paralyzed.¹²³

The third annual YMMA convention, held on 25 April 1930, was its most political to date.¹²⁴ It called for the release of Hamdi al-Husayni from internal exile, the reopening of the Jaffa branch, the reestablishment of the Jerusalem branch, and for the

¹²¹ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 56. The AE's president, Musa Kazim al-Husayni, actually went to the length of visiting the men's families and enjoining them to put up the bond money themselves.

¹²² Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 67; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 190. The AE motioned at two sessions in early 1930 to protest the branch closing and insist on its reopening, but to no avail (AE minutes, 28.1.30, 11.2.30, ISA (65) 984 – 5p).

¹²³ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 67-68.

¹²⁴ For comparison with the first and second annual congresses, see: al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 190.

cancellation of death sentences relating to convictions from the 1929 events.¹²⁵ But more broadly indicative of the climate prevailing in the association was the defeat, at the hands of anxious civil servants, of a motion to change the organization's constitution and formally permit involvement in political affairs.¹²⁶ Two months later in June the government banned civil servants from membership in the YMMA.¹²⁷ As Matthews puts it, the YMMA was "on its knees by July 1930, having stumbled on the issue of whether such an association, in an atmosphere of colonial control and ongoing colonization, could be purely cultural and religious."¹²⁸

Although the "remarkable unanimity among Arabs in avoiding economic transactions with Jews" dwindled in early 1930, the boycott had a number of significant short- and long-term effects.¹²⁹ As well as Jewish businesses hurt by the campaign, some Arab enterprises also sustained damages or were forced to close. The government estimated that many Arab business bankruptcies in 1930 derived from forward purchasing contracts related to the boycott that became unsustainable with the campaign's collapse.¹³⁰ Ironically, the state's coffers also benefited from the boycott, as the turn away from products of Jewish industries and firms stimulated imports (for lack of local Arab-made alternatives), which boosted the customs revenues that were the government's greatest source of funds.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Resolutions of third annual YMMA conference, 25.4.30, ISA (25) 871-61-141m.

¹²⁶ Political report, Tulkarm area district officer, 28.4.30, ISA (112) 5170 – 4m.

¹²⁷ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 68.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1929*, p. 8.

¹³⁰ *Report to the League of Nations, 1930*, p. 7.

¹³¹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1929*, p. 8, 11.

Perhaps the most visible and lasting effect was the increased spatial division and separation between Arab and Jewish urban communities. Many Jewish merchants and businesses left the Old City in Jerusalem and likewise those in Jaffa moved to neighboring Tel Aviv.¹³² New markets were emphasized that were removed from the Arab population.¹³³ The same happened in Haifa.¹³⁴ The government papered over these changes in its 1930 annual report, which noted that the “revival of economic intercourse served to promote the establishment of personal relations and toleration, if not friendship” between Arabs and Jews after the boycott’s “gradual disappearance.”¹³⁵ The resumption of economic interchange between Arabs and Jews represented a move back towards the status quo ante, but relations between the two communities became more strained than ever, as the spatial distancing of Jews from Arabs evidences.

The development of a self-reliant, homogeneously Jewish community had long been part of the guiding vision of Zionist settlement. Concentrating population centers and commercial zones away from the Arabs fit this vision and verified its underlying premise of self-reliance as a defensive as well as developmental goal. For the Arabs their condition as the indigenous majority beset with a smaller but growing settler population posed quite different questions and possibilities. Jewish settlers brought capital along with their drive to remake the land in their image. While the colonial ethos of Zionism and its claims on Palestine were greatly resented by the Palestinians from early on, the capital influx brought by the foreigners helped shape relations between the

¹³² Ibid., p. 8.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 219.

¹³⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1930*, p. 7.

communities. It fostered more resentments, such as at the capture of major concessions like the Rutenberg electrification scheme, but it also built links between the two populations, as Arab laborers were hired by Jewish businesses or plantations, as goods produced by Jews found consumer markets, and as merchants traded and consorted with one another. While the national claims and aspirations described by Zionism in any of its Labor or Revisionist variants were repellent to Arabs and were consistently rejected by the Palestinian national movement as a negation of the rights of the indigenous majority, the economic interpenetration of the two communities was not easily undone.

The question of economic linkages between Jews and Arabs had been raised previously by Palestinians, but never with as much force as in 1929. Palestinian elites were certainly aware of the danger of being economically overtaken by the settlers and considered that the limited bases of the local Arab economy required further development. They also recognized the threat posed to their own economic interests and to the solvency of Arab economic renovation posed by the circulation of “Jewish-made” goods. Consequently the Palestinian Arab Congresses (from which the AE was derived) had resolved on boycotting Jewish products and seeking to foster an Arab economic revival as early as 1922 and 1923 but little effort was materialized to advance the boycott call.¹³⁶

The resuscitation of the boycott idea in 1929 rested on many of the same premises as its predecessors, but unlike them, was accompanied by a catalyzing moment

¹³⁶ On the subject of early designs for national economic development and economic boycott of Jewish enterprises see Khairia Kasimieh, “Economic Aspects of the Arab-Zionist Confrontation in Mandatory Palestine” in Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 448-49.

that suffused it with an immediacy and urgency that led to its implementation. The campaign brought into relief the mutually opposing dynamics of economic interpenetration and the expansion of the Palestinian national field. The boycott was seen by its backers as an instrument to promote Arab economic self-sufficiency and a means to break ties of external economic dependency and cease relations with Jewish enterprises. The boycott's promotion of Arab goods implied a vision of a self-contained Arab economy that would strengthen the national movement's economic base while supporting the demand for independence by demonstrating freestanding Arab economic capacity. This abstract vision of a national, wholly Arab economy, predicated on increased Arab productive capacity, was assumed to be in the long-term interest of the Palestinians as a whole.

Yet in practice the economic premises of the autarkic model were not self-evident to all. They also clashed with the immediate interests of those whose livelihoods had become overtly enmeshed with the expanding Jewish economic presence. This was part of the reality that settler colonialism had wrought upon Palestinian society: the implantation of a significant number of foreigners changed the economic landscape of Palestine and frustrated the construction of a separate national economic sphere. The boycott represented Palestinian activists' efforts to redress this situation and forcibly disarticulate the Arab population from Jewish settlement and its economic corpus. In doing so, the boycott and its youthful practitioners contributed to defining the boundaries of the nation, prescribing the economic interrelations that were thought beneficial to it, and proscribing such contact with those outside the limits of the nation. The profiteering

that some Arab merchants and businesses partook in during the boycott was also at variance with the idealized conception of national economy underlining the campaign. But those who maintained relations or ties with Jews, whose increasing numbers and influence symbolized a threat to indigenous patrimony and security more than ever, really became the central focus for the campaign's enforcement. The resort to coercion against these elements, especially against merchants, in turn had its own effects.

The push for militancy and action which propelled the events of 1929 was afterwards transmuted in part into the boycott. There is some indication that segments of the population were ready to continue direct assaults against Jewish communities and colonies. One intelligence report from November highlighted that Arab youth were "impatient" and hungry for action, advocating for renewed communal clashes on at least one occasion at a private meeting in a notable household.¹³⁷ Further, the boycott was seen, at least by some, as the elders' alternative to a course of open violence.¹³⁸ In this light, the Arab Executive's rapid adoption of the boycott was a salve for its sagging credibility and something of a containment exercise, seeking to avert further confrontations that could deter or diminish its diplomatic strategy, which had already been bruised and tarnished by state repression and popular alienation from the British. The result was paradoxical. Enacting the boycott required a supplement to the voluntary support it garnered. The use of force it entailed represented the first organized use of coercion by the Palestinian national movement against fellow Arabs. In supporting the campaign, the elite leadership succeeded in redirecting popular rage and zeal away from

¹³⁷ Intelligence report: information from Agent J, n.d., 17.11.29 entry, CZA J/1 – 310.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

further bloodshed and averted altercations with the British, while at the same time helping to create the conditions under which force and duress could eventually be turned upon it from more radical elements.

For the youth forces acting as the muscle backing up the endeavor, it was an instructive lesson. Boycott enforcement involved a double act: to cut off and restrict economic relations outside of the nation, and to police the conduct of those within it, demanding their adherence to nationalist dictates and necessities. The nation would not always comply with the exigencies of the national movement and its “advances.” When the population did not back nationalist efforts of its own accord, the use of pressure sometimes brought about more amenable results. The risks of hardening an opposition from such bare-knuckle treatment seem to have been lost on those doling out the punishment and those ordering or sanctioning the use of coercion. The introduction of violence in the name of the nation into intra-Palestinian relations escalated over the course of the 1930s, with widely varying results.¹³⁹ The same antagonistic relation between nationalist youth and a subset of merchants pursuing their own personal gain or interests, heedless of the national agenda, was to reappear again during the general strike in 1936, for instance.

The watchword for youth involved in the boycott was not, however, violence, but discipline. The achievement of national objectives required not only sacrifice – as was endlessly repeated in oratory, the press, AE statements, and nationalist discourse in general – but discipline. This meant that even the population itself, or groups within it,

¹³⁹ This subject is treated most extensively in Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, and will be returned to successive chapters herein at length.

sometimes needed to be shunted into conformity with the ‘needs’ of the nation. It wasn’t long before this principle of enforcing discipline, implicit in the actions of boycott enforcement, was turned inward yet again, towards the national leadership, whose flagging energies came to be seen as incapable of delivering on national demands, yet who remained convinced of their entitlement to the reins of the movement. The challenge that youth forces would pose to the established leaders was not so much frontal as incremental, demanding employment of means sufficient for attaining the agreed upon national aims. While it is certain that the youth forces which would mobilize over the next several years grew far broader and more numerous than those that participated in the boycott campaign, the direction of their activism seems to have been informed by a conception of discipline along the lines of that described here. In particular, youth went on to play a role in tactical escalation, pushing for means deemed adequate to the tasks at hand, and urging conformity in their employment. The boycott was thus not only generative of a model of discipline, which was witnessed by the population as a whole, but a site for youth’s reemergence into the forefront of struggle.

The AE after 1929: between a delegation and public relations

In the heat of the storm in late 1929 elites quietly and discreetly continued to signal their belief in the possibility of a negotiated settlement to the question of Palestine. This was as true for Hajj Amin al-Husayni and his companions in the SMC, who had helped ignite the fury of 1929, as it was for the AE. In October 1929 St. John Philby, a former senior political officer in Transjordan, confidentially solicited the

position of SMC members on key political issues in an effort to find an agreeable solution between Arab parties and the Mandate.¹⁴⁰ Philby's intercession was private and not backed by the government in London or HC Chancellor, but it nonetheless demonstrated the great lengths to which Palestinian leaders in the SMC were willing to go in order to reach an accommodation. In two meetings, the second of which included the mufti, Philby gleaned that the key concern for Arab leaders was that of convening a democratically elected government, embodied in a representative assembly whose membership would be proportionally configured. Remarking on the second session, Philby found those he met "fully disposed to meet the British government half way by whittling down their extreme public demands." A draft settlement was proposed in which the High Commissioner retained responsibility for public security and veto power over the proposed legislative council, the Jewish Agency remained in place, and immigration would proceed according to the country's "economic absorptive capacity."¹⁴¹ The mufti and the other leaders informed Philby of their confidence in being able to bring the draft settlement before the Palestinian Arab Congress and secure its approval, but the motion went nowhere, as Zionists rejected it and HC Chancellor considered it without significance.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ On Philby's career, see Mary C. Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) and Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia*.

¹⁴¹ As Barbara Smith observes, "the concept of economic absorptive capacity was essentially a political tool, a useful slogan purporting to show HMG's concern for the protection of Arab interests." See *The Roots of Separatism in Palestine: British Economic Policy, 1920-1929* (Syracuse UP, 1993), p. 68, and more generally on early immigration policy, p. 63-85.

¹⁴² Quoted in Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 20-21. The mufti's reported ascent to the legislative council is also important in that some accounts have represented him as opposed to the body's formation, since it would presumably depreciate his influence as the head of the SMC (e.g. Sela, "The 'Wailing Wall' Riots," p. 67). This in fact was the view of M. A. Young, Officer Administering the Government in 1931 during the protests in Nablus related to Jewish armories, discussed below. Whether

The Arab concentration on achieving some kind of representative legislative body that was visible in the Philby talks built on the AE's position arising out of the Seventh Palestinian Arab Congress and followed the renewal of discussions with government on the issue.¹⁴³ Twice in 1929, in January and in June, AE representatives had met with the High Commissioner and pressed for the formation of a legislative council. In January they had been chastised by HC Chancellor, who told them that local representation was being advanced through the growth of elected municipal councils, and who recalled that the AE had emphatically rejected a similar proposal made by the government in 1923 for the establishment of legislative council. In June the High Commissioner told the AE that he would raise the issue in his upcoming talks in London. After the uprising in August the legislative council was taken off the administration's agenda, as a rebuke to the Arab elites' failed leadership.¹⁴⁴

The Philby talks were not the only sign of the elite's resolve to pursue negotiations. In October, amidst the strike and the boycott, Jamal al-Husayni, a trusted ally of the mufti who served as secretary of the SMC and on the secretariat of the AE, was dispatched to London by al-Hajj Amin on a mission to lobby the Colonial Secretary, Lord Passfield. In an interview with the Colonial Secretary, Jamal Effendi reiterated terms similar to those agreed on with Philby. No firm commitment was taken by Passfield, but some members of the AE saw the creation of a more vigorous Palestinian

there is any basis for this view in 1931 is opaque, as Young does not adduce anything substantive, but the mufti's acceptance of the motion in principle early after the 1929 events, when his standing soared, suggests that this line of argument has been exaggerated.

¹⁴³ The rejuvenated pursuit of representative government by the AE in 1929 also followed years of lower level talks on the subject in which Arab elites often indicated their willingness to compromise on the public positions of the Palestine Arab Congresses and the AE. See the introduction.

¹⁴⁴ *Report to the League of Nations, 1929*, p. 9-10.

presence in London at the time as a potential asset that could help tip the scales in their favor. After haggling for some months, the AE decided in January 1930 to depute a delegation to London to continue lobbying the Arab case.¹⁴⁵

The dispatch of the delegation precipitated further intra-elite clashes. Disagreement first erupted over the composition of the delegation, with al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni first selected as its head, but later resigning under pressure and according the seat to Musa Kazim al-Husayni, longtime president of the AE.¹⁴⁶ More importantly, the political line the delegation would take with the British became the subject of fierce conflict. Both Musa Kazim Pasha and Raghib al-Nashashibi were willing to accept a legislative council controlled by government-appointed nominees (as had been proposed in 1922).¹⁴⁷ This fact, and the general readiness of Opposition-affiliated members of the delegation to compromise, aroused hostility from more stalwart members of the AE, who eventually succeeded in stipulating that the official negotiating position was to demand independence and nothing less.¹⁴⁸ As testament to the great distrust surrounding Musa Kazim, he was compelled personally to take an oath that he would not break from the “national will” (i.e. in favor of independence) and that no deals would be struck without prior consultation with the full AE.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 23-24. See also ISA (65) 984 – 5p.

¹⁴⁶ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 24. The rivalry that developed between uncle and nephew has been treated at some length in the literature. See: Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 24,32; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 231; Sela, “The ‘Wailing Wall’ Riots,” p. 71-72; Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 59; Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 54.

¹⁴⁷ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 24. Before leaving Palestine Musa Kazim Pasha communicated to Haim Kalvarisky, head of the Joint Bureau, that he, along with Raghib Bey and ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi were the “moderate” wing of the deputation.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

The Shaw Commission report, delivered in March 1930, strengthened the delegation's case. It cited the lack of "constitutional development" and a means of advancing local self-government as part of the climate fostering the conditions that led to the outbreak of violence.¹⁵⁰ The delegation pressed this issue in negotiations with the Prime Minister and the Colonial Secretary, and argued for a legislative council and the composition of a national government outfitted with British advisors, as in Iraq.¹⁵¹ Al-Hajj Amin told Colonial Secretary Passfield that Palestine must have something surpassing dominion status, to which the Secretary brusquely responded by informing him that Palestine, far from a dominion, was in fact less than a colony.¹⁵² When the talks broke off in June the government in London issued a statement explaining that the demands of the Palestinian delegation for "sweeping constitutional changes" were "wholly unacceptable since they would have rendered it impossible for His Majesty's Government to carry out their obligations under the Mandate."¹⁵³ It further went on to attempt to dispel the view that British authorities were jeopardizing the continued existence of the Arabs in Palestine, whom it referred to in the diminutive, euphemistic parlance of the Mandate as "non-Jewish" communities, and threatened anyone propagating such a conception with serious punishment.¹⁵⁴ The delegates themselves

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 25; Shaw Commission report, p. 162.

¹⁵¹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 25; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 236.

¹⁵² Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 159. Kolinsky notes that the mufti's comments likely followed India's recent rejection of dominion status.

¹⁵³ Quoted in *Report to the League of Nations, 1930*, p. 10.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

were loath to disclose that they had departed from full-throated advocacy of independence, and their true stance only became known some years later.¹⁵⁵

In the lead-up to the departure of the delegation in March (after the Shaw Commission report was issued), the AE moved to reconsolidate its position within the national movement. To do so it launched a public relations offensive at home. Just prior to dispatch of the delegation the AE attempted to arrogate to itself new centralized powers of communication and oversight. It wrote to national associations, such as the MCAs, and informed them that it wished to project a unified political line. Consequently it requested that local associations and bodies not issue their own statements on developments or express their own positions on relevant issues, but rather direct their wishes to the AE, so that it could act as a coordinating body and mouthpiece for the movement as a whole.¹⁵⁶

To promote its leadership, it also augmented its communications with the Arab public. In January 1930 it decided to continue producing and distributing a weekly bulletin, which featured items on its activities, including protests to the government, tours among the population and donations received for the 1929 prisoners.¹⁵⁷ As it had previously done, the AE also issued communiqués (*bayanat*) formally articulating the

¹⁵⁵ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 25-26. Most of its demands were concerned with technical propositions related to land transfers, immigration, and the national government (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 236).

¹⁵⁶ AE minutes, 9.3.30, ISA (65) 984 – 5p. The AE already served as the head of the movement, but from its beginning the MCA network had been decentralized and allowed local associations and members, or assertive politicians, the space to take initiative. Nevertheless nationalist associations often did seek to coordinate their activities with the AE, and requested its support on numerous and various issues.

¹⁵⁷ AE minutes, 6.1.30, ISA (65) 984 – 5p. Samples available at: ISA (65) 985 – 18p; ISA (65) 986 – 36p.

body's perspective on political developments which, at times, also enjoined the public to action.¹⁵⁸ More significantly, it endeavored to bring the press under its wing.

The events of 1929 had a transformative effect on the Arabic press, amplifying its capacities and influence over Arab society and enabling the consolidation of daily newspapers as a regular feature of print culture.¹⁵⁹ With circulation blossoming, the print media represented a key resource for addressing the population and for image management. Much to the AE's dismay, by early 1930 it faced strong criticism regarding the decision to send a costly delegation to Britain. Calls were issued in some newspapers for a fundamental transformation of the national movement and its activities.¹⁶⁰ In its 11 January 1930 edition the Haifa-based *al-Karmil* reviewed with biting succinctness what it saw as the fruits of the MCAs, the AE, and the SMC, concluding that it was time for change and that the era of protest petitions and pleasantries with government officials had passed.¹⁶¹ After the mufti resigned as first head of the delegation, *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*, a *majlisi* organ, joined the fray, publishing a fiery statement in mid-February by Hamdi al-Husayni and two of his colleagues, Shukri Qutaina, and Rafi' al-Fahum, which declared:

¹⁵⁸ Some of these manifestos appeared intended for multiple audiences, both British and Arab. A statement issued in December 1929 on the twelfth anniversary of the conquest of Jerusalem provides a good example. It begins by bemoaning the prevailing policy of oppression which it contends brought about the disturbances and subjected the nation (*umma*) to demise (*fina'*) and decline (*idmihlal*). It then puts forth the classic argument that Britain's best bet in securing its interests was with the Arabs, who composed the majority throughout the region. Finally it refers to the Jaffa arrestees case as baseless, and ends, turning rhetorically back to addressing the Arab public, with salutations to the "martyrs" and prisoners, and a call for an independent Arab Palestine. The statement appears in: ISA (65) 987-22p.

¹⁵⁹ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 23, 27. Until 1936, when a radio station was opened, the print media was the sole source of regular, current news.

¹⁶⁰ Some of the first calls for what Mustafa Kabha terms "a new political order" were made by youth societies, which he unfortunately does not name (*The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 61).

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61-62.

The colonialists desire to limit the national issue to the cancellation of the Balfour Declaration, without a word on the Mandate, construing [this] silence as evidence of satisfaction with it. Thus they made use of a class from among the nation that was appointed at their wish to convene a conference to resolve on this position [*mabda*']. This class rose after the Seventh Congress convened... formed an Executive Committee... and originated the idea of sending a delegation to negotiate. Whereas the principle of total independence for Palestine lies with Arab unity based on [regional] alliance, and as this principle will not be realized through negotiations between two parties unequal in power, and as the delegation claims to represent the nation in full despite being elected by the Arab Executive which represents a class of civil servants [*hukumiyyin*] given to personal interests and the principle of canceling the Balfour Declaration only, we [therefore] oppose the departure of this delegation in the name of the nation and we insist on the publication of... the principle upon which it will negotiate...¹⁶²

The AE took this charge seriously enough to comply with the demand to publish its writ for negotiations (*nuss al-tafwid*), which appeared three days later in its weekly bulletin on February 20.¹⁶³

But even before its castigation at the hands of a famous national stalwart, apprehension about the power of the press to mobilize political opposition to the AE's tenuous authority had alarmed the organization. In an effort to avert such attacks and to coax the support of the press for its diplomacy, the AE convened a meeting with editors and representatives of 12 newspapers, along with several well-known journalists and publicists, on 14 February 1930. At the meeting, which featured staff from *Filastin*, *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*, *al-Sirat al-Mustaqim*, *Mir'at al-Sharq*, *al-Karmil* and other papers, freedom of the press was a mainstay of conversation. 'Umar Salih al-Barghuthi, vice president of the AE, cloaked the organization's desire to muzzle the press by simultaneously affirming its freedom and arguing for its temperance given the necessity

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 54; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 235. Quote from the latter.

¹⁶³ ISA (65) 986 – 36p.

of not undermining the national interest, which the AE alone shouldered. Opinion amongst the journalists was divided. Some sought to steer a middle course between signing onto the AE's agenda and refusing it altogether while others were adamant in maintaining their independence and chastised the AE for its overbearing attitude.¹⁶⁴

Just days after the meeting, Shaykh 'Abdullah al-Qalqili, editor of *al-Sirat al-Mustaqim*, scourged the AE in his paper in a sarcastic piece called "We are traitors." In it he attacked the incompetence and ineffectiveness of notable privilege as embodied in the AE and the lack of a popular basis for the delegation:

And when one of us said that the delegation traveling to London is no more than a delegation of beggars, we were accused of treachery... We are traitors because we said that if it is imperative to send a delegation, the delegation must be chosen by a general assembly including all parts of the nation.... If the delegation had been elected according to the delegates' skills and not according to the known criterion of affiliation with notable families, it would have encroached on the sons of the two families that comprise the homeland. And then anyone who had chosen the delegates on [the basis] of their skills would have been branded a traitor.¹⁶⁵

When the delegation left for London, elements of the press continued their offensive.

Al-Sirat al-Mustaqim charged in mid-April that: "The Palestinian leadership is not worthy of its position. This leadership does not act in support of the national interest and does not let others act... Our simpler folk naively think that the nation can realize its aspirations through this leadership. But they do not know that our situation is gradually declining precisely due to this leadership." It went on to compare the AE to an ignorant doctor capable only of malpractice.¹⁶⁶ Akram Zu'aytir, who took over editorship of the

¹⁶⁴ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 50-51. See ISA (65) 986 – 3p for further detail.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 55

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 48.

Opposition paper *Mir'at al-Sharq* in early 1930, also inveighed against the AE in April. In a debate with the editor of *al-Karmil*, Najib Nassar, Zu'aytir echoed the charge of Hamdi al-Husayni and his comrades that it was aligned with the government and deprecated its members' self-interested behavior.¹⁶⁷

By their actions it is evident that many editors and journalists did not consider the AE to be the sole arbiter of the national cause. Many felt that its position since the Seventh Congress had been obsequious and that its policy had not born any fruit. They knew that with the growth of the influence of the press, they might be able to push the AE into a firmer stance, not by offering it free allegiance, but through open debate and pointed criticism of its weaknesses. And indeed press campaigns often did succeed in this very manner, with the AE responding by taking a step away from timorousness and conciliation and towards popular initiatives. Softer lines from newsmen, on the other hand, allowed the AE to maintain a more passive posture. Hence, although the AE wished to insulate itself from media flak, its poor handling of the press only encouraged the latter's independence. Tussles between the two became commonplace, further tarnishing the AE's standing.¹⁶⁸

The distrust displayed by some elements of the press towards the AE was more broadly reflected in society. This was evident in the character of the rumors which sometimes circulated about the organization and its members. In March 1930, for instance, a rumor floated that Musa Kazim Pasha and 'Umar al-Bitar, former mayor of Jaffa and the founding head of the MCA, had purchased land at Miske, in the Tulkarm

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 57-58.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 50, 52, 58.

subdistrict, that was being sold to Jews.¹⁶⁹ In April another held that the AE had refused some form of self-government offered by the authorities in London and that instead it was planning to clandestinely meet with a Zionist delegation.¹⁷⁰ While rumors by their nature are given to exaggeration and conjecture, their power was taken with dire seriousness by the colonial state. As Zu'aytir observed, cognizant of the role rumor played in stoking the violence in 1929, the state quickly enacted a law afterwards that carried stiff penalties for circulating information that the state deemed fallacious.¹⁷¹ More so than presenting a potential threat to state security, rumors were also one of the only relatively direct means by which popular sentiment and opinion enter colonial reports, and those around the time of the delegation were indicative of the rapidly sinking credibility of the notable leaders.

The final front through which the AE attempted to manage the tide of public sentiment concerned the prisoners and the fallen from 1929, their families, and those affected by the government's suppression campaign. These issues lay at the heart of public concern and were key to the turn against the British in public opinion. Rhetorically, the AE made the prisoners issue a touchstone, invoking and sacralizing their plight as symbolic of the sacrifice that the nation must bear in its struggle. As events unfolded in August 1929, it moved quickly to offer legal aid and to seek administrative remedies from the suppression campaign. It also provided services to pursue damages claims regarding Zionist retaliation and acts committed by the British

¹⁶⁹ Political report, Tulkarm area district officer, 16.3.30, ISA (112) 5170 – 4p.

¹⁷⁰ Political report, Tulkarm area district officer, 13.4.30, ISA (112) 5170 – 4p.

¹⁷¹ Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 53.

while restoring order, though it advertised direct assistance only to the Jerusalem district, and Hebron, Bethlehem, and Ramallah, thereby notably excepting Safad.¹⁷² On 2 October 1929, the AE issued a statement calling on members of the public to aid the pursuit of claims against the authorities by recording in detail data related to violent acts and offenses committed by the police and British forces.¹⁷³ It regularly dispatched lawyers to aid in the defense of youths detained by the police and to fight against collective punishment charges.¹⁷⁴

Despite popular fury and the exchange of barbs in September, the AE and other elites never ceased reaching out to the administration, with which they met repeatedly. The High Commissioner made it known that his greatest priority was the return to “order” and securing the country from the threat of more violence. Gauging the public mood, Musa Kazim Pasha told HC Chancellor in November that a failure on the part of the Shaw Commission to make recommendations in line with Arab demands could result in a renewed uprising.¹⁷⁵ Chancellor did not take such a prospect lightly. Nevertheless, in the months after the events, he showed no willingness to offer reprieves to Arabs

¹⁷² Communiqué, 15.9.29, ISA (65) 987 – 22pe. In the same announcement the AE stated that it would handle damages claims prior to issues arising from the imposition of collective punishments. This choice probably stemmed from an effort to stake an Arab claim to relief monies offered by the Palestine government, which created a £P 100,000 compensation fund for damages sustained during the events, almost 90% of which was ultimately assessed to Jewish claimants (*Report to the League of Nations, 1930*, p. 9).

¹⁷³ Communiqué, 2.10.29, ISA (65) 987 – 22pe.

¹⁷⁴ ISA (65) 984 – 5p. – dates, sessions??

¹⁷⁵ Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 59.

charged with crimes, including capital offenses.¹⁷⁶ Nor was he willing to alter the state's ongoing efforts to quash popular protests and campaigning by Arabs.¹⁷⁷

Whether gambling on the delegation as its best bet, or worn down by the administration's steely policy towards the Palestinians, the AE soon signaled a change of course on the prisoners issue. In a communiqué issued on 17 January 1930 it noted the administration's intransigence in heeding Arab protests and decried the use of the Prevention of Crimes Ordinance against youth and other activists, contrasting this stance with what it saw as inaction towards Jewish incitement. While roundly condemning government policy, it urged associations and individuals to desist from seeking official "review" of "acts of suppression." Instead, displaying its most common post-1929 public motif, it requested "the people to bear with patience and endure this severity [military, police and legal suppression] with its faithful national resolve, with which it has [already] demonstrated that it understands that there will be sacrifice for the sake of the nation," adding to stress the point that "the great national demand for which it [the nation] strives will not be realized without patience and sacrifice."¹⁷⁸

The themes of patience and sacrifice suffused the communiqués of the AE after the 1929 events. In late February 1930 it called for the annual 'id (holiday) celebrations of Ramadan to be cancelled, declaring that holidays without independence gave rise to "false appearances" and "deceitful displays." The situation of prisoners became a metaphor for the nation as a whole as holiday decorum was deemed inappropriate so

¹⁷⁶ The Privy Council in London (which had the power to review cases of the Palestine Supreme Court) also declined to hear appeals of the capital cases (*Report to the League of Nations, 1930*, p. 8). The High Commissioner subsequently changed his mind later in the year. See below.

¹⁷⁷ *Report to the League of Nations, 1930*, p. 8.

¹⁷⁸ Communiqué, 17.1.30, ISA (65) 987 – 22p.

long as the nation was a “subjugated prisoner” (*ummatna ’asirat al-isti’bad*) and “tens of our sons are condemned to death... tens of our youth are sentenced to hard labor, and hundreds of our heroes remain hostages in prison.”¹⁷⁹ The community’s casualties were invoked in redolent nationalist tenor through the language of sacrifices for the honor of the nation. Those who fell or were injured conducted themselves with presence and peace of mind (*bi-tayyib khatir* and *radi nafs*) in rising in defense of the nation.¹⁸⁰ With such descriptions the violence of the state and Zionist retaliation transmuted the fallen into ideal national subjects: clear-eyed, selfless partisans whose hearts were bound to the national honor and its defense.

Statements such as the call to mute Ramadan celebrations staked out a rhetorical high-ground for the Arab Executive and were clearly calibrated to hit notes that would resonate with the public. Extolling ‘sacrifice’ and calling for steadfastness indicated the AE’s attempts to come to grips with the public mood after 1929 and to actively manage its representation of the Arab community in the new climate. Yet while such discourse demonstrated an ability to speak to the immediate and visceral issues affecting the community, the themes themselves were polysemic, and could evidence resolve or alternatively be seen to connote passivity or even impotence. Further, though the messaging of its communiqués was intent on reestablishing its place as the authentic arbiter of Arab interests in Palestine, the operative or instructive elements transmitted in such statements signaled a retreat from the field of popular action and a return to a more quietist posture.

¹⁷⁹ Communiqué, 22.2.30, ISA (65) 987 – 22p.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

The AE's priorities were on display after the delegation left for London. On 10 April, it issued a statement during the annual Nabi Musa festival, which had become a flashpoint for agitation and unrest since the beginning of the Mandate. The statement confirmed the delegation's unsparing efforts to secure independence and underlined that every effort was being made to save the lives of those convicted of capital offenses. The real purpose of the communiqué appears in its closing section, however, where patience is invoked to buttress a plea for keeping public order: "in order to complete these efforts [the aforementioned] in a climate of quiet calm, the AE sees it fit to call on the nation to perpetuate tranquility, to seek the aid of patience, not cause disorder, and to respect peace, which is our hoped for aim."¹⁸¹ With messages such as this, the AE confirmed suspicions that the events of 1929 had not altered its strategic vision or tactical ensemble. Diplomacy, not popular mobilization, was its central objective.

Martyrs against Zionism

In May, after rejecting earlier pleas from the Arab public and the AE, the High Commissioner decided to commute the sentences of all but three of the Arabs slated for execution.¹⁸² In its final appeal to spare their lives, the AE representatives privately disclosed that though they were obliged to convey protests from numerous cities and towns, they were in fact grateful to the administration for the reprieves given in the other capital cases.¹⁸³ Quietly accepting the finality of the executions and the state's display

¹⁸¹ Communiqué, 10.4.30, ISA (65) 987 – 22pe.

¹⁸² Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 89.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 67-68.

of its brand of justice, the AE did not reveal its posture to the public. It called a national strike on 15 June before the execution date, and strikes marking the event were observed over a period of days in different locales.¹⁸⁴ The administration took the precaution of closing Arabic newspapers for two weeks from 7-23 June.¹⁸⁵ As an additional safeguard, the administration imposed a curfew for the entirety of the appointed day, forcing shops and schools to close.¹⁸⁶ On 17 June, in the state prison at Acre on the coast, Muhammad Jamjum and ‘Ata al-Zir of Hebron and Fuad Hijazi of Safad were executed.

In making examples of these men the state not only desired to close the book on the bloody events of 1929 and erase the memory of its own loss of control, but, as Rana Barakat observes, it acted on “the false hope that killing them would effectively silence the growing protest movement.”¹⁸⁷ Far from stamping out the anti-British mood that gathered force from late 1929, the executions bolstered it. When the press was permitted to resume work, its pages were quickly awash with anger. A letter allegedly written by Fuad Hijazi shortly before his execution was circulated and reprinted. In it he addressed the Arab public with patriotic ardor: “I am not just your brother or son, I am the brother and son of our *umma* [nation]. Do not cry or wail after me... you must sing and be happy... my death should be celebrated... [because the] *umma* that stands in the face of this misery and fights it, is an *umma* that will forever survive.”¹⁸⁸ Since the only Jew

¹⁸⁴ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 5; Political reports, Tulkarm area district officer, 16.6.30, 23.6.30, ISA (112) 5170 – 4m.

¹⁸⁵ Barakat, “Thawrat al-Buraq,” p. 300.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 300-01.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 300.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 303. Second bracket in the original.

convicted of a capital offense was reprieved, the execution of Jamjum, al-Zir, and Hijazi further cemented the impression that the administration of justice was aligned against the Arabs. The extent of the disquiet was again reflected by ‘Isa al-‘Isa in *Filastin*, who wrote that the government had elected to become “a foreign power [that rules] through prisons and bloodshed.” The state had crossed a red line, as, he declared, “the blood of our martyrs is the tie of the unity of our nation.”¹⁸⁹

The executions also inadvertently dealt a crippling, and by some accounts fatal, blow to the Palestine administration’s friends in the AE.¹⁹⁰ The violence of colonial justice undermined the policy of cooperation with the government and left the idea of a negotiated settlement in shambles. Former reliable and influential pro-British voices, such as ‘Isa al-‘Isa, openly spurned the path of negotiations and named the British as the Palestinians’ enemy.¹⁹¹ As the gulf between the colonial administration and the Arab populace grew, the stubborn position of the elites became all the more striking. While the leadership of the AE clung to its view of the necessity of cooperation it grew more distant from the public it sought to represent. The consequences of this growing internal fissure were not yet evident, but soon portended the rise of a new, more militant leadership.

The executions gave Palestine its first recognized martyrs.¹⁹² This was evident in their memorialization in poetry, song, and public gatherings. The noted Palestinian poet Ibrahim Tuqan penned a verse entitled “al-Thulatha al-hamra” (Red Tuesday) inscribing

¹⁸⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 304.

¹⁹⁰ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 231; Barakat, “Thawrat al-Buraq,” p. 302.

¹⁹¹ Barakat, “Thawrat al-Buraq,” p. 304.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

the three men's lives in a tapestry of national sacrifice.¹⁹³ Demonstrating the popular currency of such depictions, portions of Tuqan's poem found their way into a song, "Min sijn 'Akka" (From Acre prison), which became a nationalist standard.¹⁹⁴ The discursive 'construction of national martyrs,' to use Barakat's phrase, formed part of a larger corpus of practices of commemoration that developed under the Mandate.¹⁹⁵ Such forms of remembrance were fundamentally political and commemorative practices subsequently became focal points for political organizing.

For precisely such reasons, the Palestine government suppressed the AE's plans for a public *arba'in* (a memorial marking the 40th day after a death) for the three men.¹⁹⁶ Much to the chagrin of scouts, certain MCA chapters and some in the press, the AE did not resist, contenting itself with issuing another communiqué.¹⁹⁷ The newspaper *al-Karmil* responded by assailing the AE's submissive posture, sarcastically insinuating that the colonial state did Arab government officers a favor by keeping them from having to mix their dueling roles as government employees and nationalist spokesmen.¹⁹⁸ The day of the men's execution was subsequently declared a national holiday and time of remembrance.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 305.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. As Barakat notes, this song has been recorded by numerous artists over the years. Its lyrics depart from Tuqan's poem, but are clearly inspired by it and by its three stanza form (one for each of the executed men).

¹⁹⁵ Barakat, "Thawrat al-Buraq," p. 300-305. Strikes and other events were organized annually on key anniversaries, such as Balfour day and the British occupation of Jerusalem.

¹⁹⁶ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.; Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 59.

¹⁹⁸ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 59. Najib Nassar, the editor, further chided and taunted the AE by asking whether the decision to accept the public event's cancellation was representative of the independence that the delegation had sought in London.

¹⁹⁹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 5.

In marking the government's executions of the three men and commemorating the events of 1929, the AE announced its intention to remain at the forefront of national representation. Though it sought to portray itself as a beacon reflecting the will of the nation and giving voice to its torments, the AE's own primary agenda lay at cross-purposes to the militant evocations of disaffection it sometimes vocalized. It sought not to stir up resistance to the British, but to soothe the lingering sense of oppression and affront. The commemoration of the trauma offered a means by which to carry out its rhetorical strategy of at once recognizing and modulating the pitch of the public mood. It afforded some potential to rekindle the AE's connection to the population and to reposition itself as the articulate and mindful public keeper of tradition, national sentiment, and public dignity. As with other post-1929 initiatives discussed herein, however, whatever promise it held was not actualized, nor capable of overcoming the pall cast by British rule over the prospects for Arab Palestine.

Youth identity and politics in the shadow of 1929

For those who saw great potential in the activism of youth to help assert a new political course for the Palestinians, their interest continued during the boycott campaign and the delegation, but struggled to take tangible shape. When Akram Zu'aytir became editor of the Opposition-aligned daily *Mir'at al-Sharq* in early 1930 some initial steps towards creating a new youth formation or front, and with it a new role and status in the movement, were tentatively taken.

The need to "organize ranks" (*tanzim al-sufuf*) became the rallying cry of those

seeking greater organizational coherence and influence for youth. The necessity of organization, and its value for the movement, were something Zu‘aytir remarked on in his diaries after the events. In classic nationalist parlance, Zu‘aytir saw 1929 as a moment of “national awakening” in which the national spirit (*ruh al-umma*) was shaken violently to life. While he viewed the unfolding of the events as a revelation that the colonial state only listened to the language of violence – thereby inverting a common imperial conceit concerning the role of violence in regulating the colonized – he also intoned that the moment brought home the importance of political organization. The key question seemed to be one of forging more integrative political associations that could draw together the energies and “spirit” of the public. Thus for youth advocates the way forward seemed to necessitate convening a conference of youth.²⁰⁰

Although Zu‘aytir was unaffiliated factionally, or perhaps because of this fact, his rising nationalist credentials and use of an Opposition-backed paper to broadcast and circulate his views and those of his allies helped make the emergence of youth as a political category and nascent force something with which both elite factions had to contend. Under Zu‘aytir’s editorship *Mir’at al-Sharq* quickly became a forum for voices supporting youth activism. Only days after beginning his work at the paper in early January 1930 Zu‘aytir wrote of the need to form new youth-based associations, asking rhetorically: “Is it right that youth leave the field to people made for things other than jihad?” His call met with a host of favorable responses over the next few weeks, as various figures wrote in to the paper, echoing the need for youth to ‘close ranks’ and

²⁰⁰ Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 51.

convene a conference. Ahmad al-Khalidi, head of the well-known Khalid Ibn al-Walid scout troop, was the first which Zu‘aytir recounted in his diaries, followed by Shukri Qutayna (noted above as a confrere of Hamdi al-Husayni), and Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani (affiliated to the *mu‘arada* camp). In early February Muhammad ‘Ali al-Salih, of the Haifa YMMA, suggested drafting a pan-Arab constitution (*mithaq*) to serve as a guidepost for youth throughout the region.²⁰¹

In February and March Zu‘aytir moved to advance the project of convening a youth congress, holding meetings in Haifa, Acre, and Jaffa.²⁰² In March renown Indian nationalist M.K. Gandhi initiated a march across India that swelled to encompass thousands and precipitated hundreds of resignations by village leaders from government posts. Zu‘aytir took inspiration from Gandhi’s venture and, after consultations with colleagues and friends, began to plan something similar for Palestine. His march, in a prelude to activities that would soon capture the attentions of youth, was to highlight the dangers of land sales to Zionists and to promote national (Palestinian Arab) industries and products.²⁰³

Using an emotive appeal borrowing symbolic force from the institutions of the independent state Palestinians sought, the marchers were to compose what Zu‘aytir referred to as an “army of defense” for the nation. The implication was that this ‘army,’ moreover, was not one that would be authorized by the British Mandate, but rather one that had to issue from the will of the colonized themselves, and that its purpose was

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 109; 114-116. Quote from 109.

²⁰² Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 117, 129.

²⁰³ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 69-70.

defensive, aimed against both the erosion of the Arab land base and the colonial overlords who had so recently unleashed great violence indiscriminately upon the Palestinians. In the event, the march and the army – as protean an idea and effort as they had been – were nipped in the bud by authorities who arrested Zu‘aytir on incitement charges after a speech he gave at the annual Nabi Musa festival.²⁰⁴

The state’s targeting of Zu‘aytir, who was not yet 21 years of age, provoked a string of responses. His arrest was much-discussed at Nabi Musa and stirred consternation among other youth.²⁰⁵ His comrades in the YMMA packed the court for his sentencing, and at their third annual meeting on 25 April 1930, called for his release.²⁰⁶ Defiant youth petitioners wrote or telegraphed protests to the state. Some, such as Hashim al-Sabi‘, YMMA enthusiast and future Istiqlal member, along with other friends from Qalqilya, thanked it for offering youth a lesson in sacrifice.²⁰⁷ Others protested the use of the Prevention of Crimes Ordinance, variously decrying its deployment against Arabs as discriminatory and charging that the regulation was

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 70-71. Matthews informs that the army of defense had some 20 or more volunteers by early April, and hence had not built any mass base or sizable following before Zu‘aytir’s arrest.

The state had been displeased when Zu‘aytir applied for official recognition as editor of *Mir‘at al-Sharq* but had not immediately devised a means of shutting him out of the position (Dep. District Commissioner, Jerusalem, to Acting Chief Secretary, 24.3.30, ISA (2) 293 – 6m). The occasion of his speech afforded the administration with such an opportunity, despite the fact that in his oration he bluntly noted that no “disturbance” was in the offing, so long as the delegation was in London and the national movement still saw that it should pursue implementation of the recommendations of the Shaw Commission (Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 146). Mention of the tactical possibility of using violence, however, was enough to qualify as seditious behavior, and Zu‘aytir was sentenced by Edward Keith-Roach, DC-Jerusalem, to a short prison term followed by internal exile in Nablus for one year (ibid., p. 148-49). The sentence of internal exile then completed the state’s legal circle, providing a *bona fide* reason to remove Zu‘aytir from his editorship on grounds that he was not a resident of Jerusalem, where *Mir‘at al-Sharq* was based (Acting Chief Secretary to Dep. District Commissioner, Jerusalem, 22.5.30, ISA (2) 293 – 6m).

²⁰⁵ Alef reports on Nabi Musa, 11.4.30, CZA J/1 – 310.

²⁰⁶ Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 148, 150.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 155.

designed to attack and target youth expressly.²⁰⁸ In a foreboding sign of things to come, ‘Atif Nurallah, a scout leader from Balad al-Shaykh near Haifa, wrote to Zu‘aytir that his incarceration was a “badge of glory” (*wisam fakhr*) for which youth should congratulate him.²⁰⁹ The conversion of state sanction into nationalist honor evident in the sentiments of young organizers like al-Sabi‘ and Nurallah was indicative of the growth of a militant opposition to British rule percolating in youth circles.

Zu‘aytir’s exile posed a problem for the AE and attracted it further ire, when it was perceived as not adequately coming to his aid. Nablus youth protested the organization’s lackluster response to the situation, and Zu‘aytir’s former newspaper, *Mir’at al-Sharq*, also upbraided it.²¹⁰ Zu‘aytir himself also took the gloves off after his arrest and his continued polemics, despite his exile, helped widen the circle of opposition to the agenda of the AE and its posture towards the British. Najib Nasar, the editor of *al-Karmil*, was clearly affected by Zu‘aytir and the emerging role of youth as nationalist spearhead. Reacting to the force of Zu‘aytir’s critique of the AE and its priorities, Nasar urged youth not to wait forever, writing that for youth to defend the AE and show it “patience” after its critical failings was an even greater mistake than those made by the AE itself.²¹¹ The AE, he continued, was liable to leave youth at a point of paralysis in future confrontations with the state’s “brute forces” (*quwat ghashima*), hence it would be better if “sincere youth” charted their own course, guiding the misguided through the

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 149, 155.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 155.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 150.

²¹¹ Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 153.

example of right action.²¹² The seeds for an independent youth force within the national movement were thus the subject of a growing public conversation, even before the boycott campaign had finally been extinguished.

The youth phenomenon in early 1930, however, was far from singular in its opinions or views. Not all young nationalists shared Akram Zu‘aytir’s dim view of the Arab Executive. Many youths at Nabi Musa, for example, shouted slogans and chants in favor of this or that national politician. Musa Kazim Pasha was regaled by youth from Nablus, who used the evocative sobriquet “mountains of fire” for their hometown to signal their zeal. Other figures also had followings at the processions, most notably al-Hajj Amin, whom one chant extolled as the central symbol of the independence movement while being, in the image of a true inspirational leader, above the fray: “Hajj Amin, rest... the sword will cancel the Mandate.” Hamdi al-Husayni, in what must have been a departure from the typical standards of adulating elders, was also represented by a significant cadre.²¹³

In the jostling of slogans and contingents it is certainly possible to see the factionalism of the Jerusalemite politicians that has been a staple topic of the literature on Palestinian politics under the Mandate. Yet at the same time the perceived audience for factional jockeying had widened to include youth. Youth were doubtless an integral part of each faction’s constituency long before 1929, and it is inconceivable that younger members of households or other followers of charismatic elites or local patrons were not

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Report on events at Nabi Musa, 11.4.30, CZA J/1 – 310. Raghib al-Nashashibi’s young followers tried to get him included in the list of ‘long live’ cheers, but were unsuccessful.

represented in the orchestration of *hamula*-based political organization. But while young men may have been adjuncts of any given household, I am arguing here that part of what distinguishes youth in the 1930s was their emergence as a larger political constituency in and of itself. Their constitution as an increasingly organized and active group quickly made them an arena for competition by elites and various forces aiming to harness and direct their considerable energies. In the rivalry of sloganeering and in the call and response environment that transpired during Nabi Musa in 1930 it is perhaps possible to see the beginnings of this status and its attendant competitive dynamic.²¹⁴ While their future role could hardly have been divined at the time, it is likely that elite forces felt some urgency to secure a foothold among youth. This is evident, moreover, in the practice which accelerated in the early 1930s of elites representing their own influence through the mobilization of young supporters, particularly in public displays at national and other occasions like Nabi Musa.

The vitality of youth at the 1930 Nabi Musa, and the occasional militancy of their chants, was fairly well noted in reports to the Joint Bureau, which was no doubt concerned to gauge the mood of the Arab public after the carnage of 1929. Chants were a polyphonic barometer of national sentiments. Invocations of Palestine were enshrouded in a discourse calling for independence, as in cries of “long live free and independent Palestine.”²¹⁵ At the same time, slogans supporting the delegation, and thus the AE, could similarly be heard, indicating that the AE’s willingness to accept a

²¹⁴ On the call and response quality of the processions, see various reports in CZA J/1 – 310.

²¹⁵ The procession of Nabi Musa, 16.4.30, CZA J/1 – 310.

legislative council and postpone independence was either not universally known or not seen as contrary to calls for independence.²¹⁶

Songs also displayed the national sentiments of youth and others in the procession. In a report from 13 April songs about the Arab prisoners condemned for capital offenses are noted.²¹⁷ In other songs, such as that sung by youth from Ramle, Muslim-Christian national unity limned a brewing militancy:

The Buraq is ours and the *Haram* [*al-Sharif*] is ours
We have protection and we have the flag
Christians and Muslims, rose and joined one another
Palestine, don't you see
Within you there are men of war
Palestine, don't you see
Until we cancel the Mandate
And again we say: until the Mandate is cancelled...²¹⁸

In another song from Lifta, the Royal Air Force and Zionism are both posed as hollow powers incapable of stopping the historical role of the Arabs in Palestine:

The airplane isn't stronger than stubbornness
The Zionists are fleeing and the Arabs rule
You won't see from the airplane
The Arabs, they are the victors
Zionism is broken, and the Arabs are the rulers²¹⁹

Such songs by youth paraded a nationalist ardor and described a disposition at odds with the tone and tenor of the AE's alternately stoic and melancholic discourse. In general

²¹⁶ Ibid. It may have also been that convocation of a legislative council could be considered by some as an acceptable step in the right direction. There is no way of knowing from the Zionist intelligence reports whether the same youths shouted the same slogans or which they mixed (they are reported in a series in one report, despite their different foci). It seems, however, that in the amplified environment following 1929, the potential to mix what could be seen as conflicting messages and demands was a reality and owed in part to the sense of urgency and the broadening of political participation. Such admixture may indicate competing loyalties or a willingness to countenance different outcomes, and should not be discounted as simple confusion.

²¹⁷ Information on the events of Nabi Musa, 13.4.30, CZA J/1 – 310.

²¹⁸ The procession of Nabi Musa, 16.4.30, CZA J/1 – 310. Translation from Hebrew.

²¹⁹ Ibid. Translation from Hebrew.

terms, song and poetry were a means for the regeneration of morale for popular forces, and according to the perception of the Zionist intelligence agent who filed the report, impassioned songs were acutely felt and embraced by the crowd.²²⁰

Young Palestinians were not of one mind about politics, but their deepening involvement in national affairs was evidenced in part by their rising importance in national assemblies and the stalwart sentiments with which they were often identified. Their gathering cohesion as a category progressed in part through these public roles. For elites, the nascent emergence of youth as a political factor was understood as a field for prospective social intervention or even a political opportunity. The difficulties presented to this envisioned social ordering by growing youth self-direction were however, soon more apparent.

The White Paper, the 'black letter,' and the death of cooperation

While efforts in early 1930 to convene a forum for youth to collectively organize didn't get far, this changed following further setbacks to the national cause occurring later in the year and in early 1931. The political terrain which the national movement negotiated after 1929 underwent a topsy-turvy series of conflicting pivots as British officials wrestled with competing notions of how to rectify and clarify their own investment and position in Palestine. This brief but fierce contest was conducted through a near steady stream of commissions, committees, special reports, and policy

²²⁰ Report on the events of the Musa celebration, 13.4.30, CZA J/1 – 310. The agent filing the report, noted only as “alef,” may have been Aharon Haim Cohen, who often worked in Jerusalem and its environs.

statements, beginning with HC Chancellor's special dispatch of January 1930 and ending with the MacDonald letter in February 1931.²²¹ In the span of these activities certain limitations on the Jewish National Home were variously considered, debated, recommended, and finally announced, only to be revoked post haste. In the process, Britain again confirmed the Arabs' worst fears, fully reversing itself under Zionist pressure and skillful lobbying. Subsequently the imperial power was increasingly seen in nationalist Arab discourse as identified, if not synonymous, with Zionism, and the AE's tattered credibility with the Palestinian public was badly sullied yet again for having put any stock in it. The MacDonald letter, moreover, finished what the 1929 rebellion could not, mortally wounding the policy of cooperation and convincing the majority of the AE of the fundamental weakness of their posture since 1928.²²²

Contrary to the High Commissioner's hopes and those of the British government, the MacDonald letter set the stage for rising militancy and future violent confrontation.²²³ Afterwards it did not take long for suggestions of pursuing armed struggle to be voiced openly, thereby widening the potential for radical political activity

²²¹ Accounts across a spectrum of opinion generally concur that this interlude presented a real possibility of establishing a new policy, less amenable to Zionist interests. Zionist accounts, such as those of Porath (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 22-23, 28-30) and Stein (*The Land Question*, p. 80-114, especially p. 84), portray HC Chancellor as favorably disposed to the Arabs and interested in terminating the Jewish National Home policy. A finer reading of Chancellor's memorandum reveals that this isn't entirely the case. He still viewed the Arabs as susceptible to religious fanaticism and mob-like behavior, and nowhere in the memo did he show himself inclined to their self-determination (HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.1.30, p. 45, PRO – CO 733/182/9). He did object, in part on security grounds, to what he considered the privileged position of Jews and the Jewish National Home policy under the Mandate, and recommended equalizing the positions of the two communities resident in Palestine (see p. 26-27, 32, 71-72). Walid Khalidi, in contrast with the tone of Porath and Stein, notes more circumspectly that "Britain hesitated somewhat in implementing the Jewish National Home policy," and this equivocation was embodied in the 1930 White Paper (Introduction to Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, *al-Difa' 'an Haifa*, p. xliv). Chancellor's views are revisited in chapter 5.

²²² Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 242; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 35.

²²³ After 1929 an armed Arab band took up activities in the north, but it was rapidly suppressed and disbanded. Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 155-56.

and stoking a more confrontational nationalist ethos and sensibility. The impulse to imperial recalibration surely derived from concerns originating in the colonial state's weaknesses and failures in 1929 and the increasing tensions between Arab and Jewish communities in Palestine, yet the resultant policy ironically stimulated an acceleration of those very tensions and an escalation of Palestinian nationalist activity.

As has been explored above, the AE's orientation towards high politics and its dogged hope for a diplomatic coup of some sort was generally unpopular with Palestinians after 1929. Despite this, the review and elucidation of imperial policy that followed appeared to offer the AE reason to continue its course of engagement with the colonial authorities. The Shaw Commission's recommendations began by emphasizing the need for a new statement of policy, particularly in order to clarify its position towards the Arabs. In this regard the Commission urged that the "value would be greatly enhanced" of such a statement "(i) if it contained a definition in clear and positive terms of the meaning which His Majesty's Government attach to the passages in the Mandate providing for the safeguarding of the rights of the non-Jewish communities in that country and (ii) if it laid down, for the guidance of the Government of Palestine, directions more explicit than any that have yet been given as to the conduct of policy on such vital issues as land and immigration."²²⁴ These same issues had been raised at

²²⁴ Shaw Commission report, p. 165. It may be noted that the impetus of the 1930 White Paper bore striking similarities to its 1922 predecessor under Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill, the stated purpose of which was to clarify Britain's posture and responsibility towards the Arabs. In 1922 the intent had been to mollify Arab opposition to the Balfour declaration and the mandate, and the White Paper produced the doctrine of 'dual obligation,' which held that Britain had responsibilities to both the Arabs and the Jews (or the Jewish and 'non-Jewish' communities, according to the official parlance), neither of which could be sidelined by the other. The Palestinian leadership and public were hardly placated by such redefinitions, which they saw largely as a re-packaging of the odious Jewish National Home policy, but

length during the delegation's stay in London, and remained at the center of the tug-of-war over policy until its finale in early 1931.

At the time, the issues pertaining to immigration and land sales highlighted in the Shaw Commission were the subject of an official inquiry by Sir John Hope Simpson, a former Indian civil servant and an official involved in the Refugee Settlement Commission in Athens, who was commissioned in early April by the Colonial Office to write a report on which future policy would be based. In the interim, before Hope Simpson's report was completed and a new policy enunciated, Jewish immigration was briefly suspended.²²⁵ Further boosting the delegation's hopes they were told by the Colonial Secretary that "It is clear today that it is necessary to make some arrangements in connection with immigration and land problems in a way favorable to you," though these matters were only to be treated after completion of Hope Simpson's report.²²⁶ Hence although the delegation had not been able to secure the formation of a "national government" (in the form of a legislative council), much less independence, the AE retained some hope that concessions on the key issues of immigration and land transfers might be forthcoming.

Arguably, HC Chancellor and his turn against an unlimited vision of Zionist settlement exerted a great influence on these questions.²²⁷ Hope Simpson was instructed to formulate his report in consultation with the High Commissioner and indeed the results of his work corroborated many points previously made by Chancellor in his

the 1922 White Paper and its formulations were quickly overshadowed by the subsequent ratification of the mandate the same year.

²²⁵ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 26.

²²⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*

²²⁷ See ft. #230 above.

secret memo. As a study principally trained on the economic feasibility of continued immigration and the question of Arab landlessness, the Hope Simpson report concluded that there were no more available arable lands for Jewish agricultural settlement (save for certain unutilized lands already held by the Zionist movement) and that Arab unemployment should be factored into the immigration quotas issued under the labor schedules. It also strongly criticized the land-purchasing methods and Hebrew labor policy of the Zionist movement. Hope Simpson contended that the construction of a sizable development scheme (requiring an equally sizable capital investment) and a policy aimed towards the modernization of agricultural techniques were necessary for both Arab and Jewish communities, and that these measures would afford an increase of at least 20,000 families. While not barring immigration *in toto*, the parameters the report proposed for its regulation, and in particular the suggestion that Arab livelihoods needed to be accounted for materially in the relevant policies and quotas, were anathema to Zionists and thus were staunchly opposed after being made public in October with the White Paper.²²⁸

The White Paper authored by members of the Cabinet and issued under Lord Passfield and the Colonial Office drew heavily on the High Commissioner's special dispatch, the Shaw Commission, and the Hope Simpson report.²²⁹ Hope Simpson's recommendations were adopted almost wholesale, save for the development scheme, which was sent to a technical committee for a detailed assessment and to be whittled

²²⁸ Report by Sir John Hope Simpson, 1930, London: HMSO, p. 100-01, 103, 108, (Hereafter: Hope Simpson report); Hope Simpson to Colonial Secretary, 18.8.30, p. 4, CAB 24/215.

²²⁹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 30; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 82-83.

down financially.²³⁰ Though it offered some innovations in configuring the specific dimensions of policy, and importantly stipulated new limitations for the implementation of the Jewish National Home, the Passfield White Paper retained the over-arching framework laid down in the preceding 1922 White Paper which held that British policy must meet a ‘dual obligation’ to the Jewish and ‘non-Jewish’ communities in Palestine.²³¹ In keeping with the criteria established in the 1922 White Paper, immigration would still be permitted and regulated according to the “economic absorptive capacity” of the country, but following Hope Simpson, this was to be evaluated in light of Arab unemployment and the computation of absorptive capacity was limited to the exploitation of lands already in Zionist organizations’ possession.²³² Further Jewish land purchases were to be made contingent upon the availability of lands for *fellahin*.²³³ Arab tenants, on the other hand, were to receive statutory rights of occupation, including on lands sold to Jews, and state lands were to be opened for Arabs whose landholdings were deemed below self-sufficiency.²³⁴ A limited resettlement project would be launched for those Arabs judged to have lost their own lands owing to the implementation of the Jewish National Home.²³⁵ Finally, the Passfield White Paper reiterated the 1922 White Paper’s provision to establish a legislative council along the

²³⁰ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 29-30.

²³¹ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 160.

²³² Ibid; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 83; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 30.

²³³ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 83.

²³⁴ Ibid; Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 137; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 30.

²³⁵ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 30. This was to be designated by strict attribution and display of requisite proofs, not through a general claim of communal dispossession. A loss of land under the circumstances engendered under the Mandate was not, in other words, sufficient. Landlessness had to be directly attributable to fulfillment of the Balfour declaration to qualify for resettlement and reclamation project.

lines laid out in 1923, and included a contingency plan to secure the council's constitution in the event of an election boycott by any party.²³⁶

At the first Arab Executive meeting after the White Paper's issue, on 24 October, it was decided to study the statement of policy closely, but by the subsequent session on the 28th, the members of the office had reached an optimistic appraisal, concluding that if the White Paper were implemented, "Zionist policy would have failed."²³⁷

Consequently, for the first time since the British conquest of Palestine, the AE declined to call a strike on Balfour day (November 2nd).²³⁸ Instead a public statement was issued which explained only that the White Paper was under study.²³⁹ The failure to announce the annual strike produced a rebuke from an organization called the Students' Higher Committee, which took it upon itself to issue its own strike call, wrapped in militant rhetoric, in *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*, the daily closest to Hajj Amin.²⁴⁰ Likely more important to the AE at the time than such signs of student and youth unrest was the tack taken by *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*, which went on the offensive against the White Paper even before the AE cancelled the annual strike. The paper charged that the prospect of a legislative body had caused the AE to retreat from the national demands embodied in the Palestinian Arab Congress resolutions and to risk further national dishonor.²⁴¹ The Executive's position was undermined further by the government's issue of a new batch

²³⁶ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 160; Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 139.

²³⁷ AE minutes, 24.10.30 and 28.10.30, ISA (65) 984 – 5p.

²³⁸ AE minutes, 28.10.30, ISA (65) 984 – 5p; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 160.

²³⁹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 31.

²⁴⁰ Call of students announcing strike on anniversary of the Balfour declaration [*wa'd*], 1.11.30, in: *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 189-90.

²⁴¹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 31.

of immigration certificates and its invitation in mid-November to Zionist leaders for consultations on the White Paper.²⁴²

The AE did not immediately produce an official response to the Passfield White Paper. In a meeting on 15 November called by HC Chancellor after news of the negotiations with Zionist officials had circulated, Musa Kazim Pasha downplayed concerns over the potential for renewed disturbances. He explained that the AE saw reason for hope in the White Paper, but feared that it would be squelched.²⁴³ Arab debate continued inside and outside the AE until its formal statement was finally delivered in late December.²⁴⁴

The statement, a lengthy memorandum, makes a range of arguments on all of the principal issues occupying the national movement. The sum of its argument was that in principle, the 1930 White Paper was not dissimilar from its 1922 predecessor, which failed to alleviate Arab concerns. It referred to the British occupation as the first in the country's history and charged its rulers with bringing unparalleled instability, economic blight and dislocation, and the ever-present potential for "riots or disturbances." Moreover it argued that the British Mandate conferred an obligation to assist native government, as per article 22 of the League of Nations charter, the British had simply substituted themselves for local government. Despite the statement's forthright contestation of the White Paper, its closing remarks signaled an openness to the proposed policies, stressing that their implementation would be essential to ascertaining

²⁴² Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 161; Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 141-42.

²⁴³ Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 144.

²⁴⁴ Porath provides some detail on this: *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 31-32.

the seriousness of the government. The AE's wrangling over its position on the White Paper and its final adoption of a statement that was at once suitably critical and ambiguous was quickly made moot by the issue of the MacDonald letter on 13 February 1931.²⁴⁵

The deposit of a letter from the British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, to Chaim Weizmann, head of the Zionist Organization and master diplomat of the movement, ended the brief period of reevaluating imperial policy and dealt a crushing blow to the Arabs and the AE.²⁴⁶ The letter, which purported to provide a definitive interpretation of the policy of HMG, in fact abrogated the new components of policy in the White Paper and disavowed Hope Simpson's findings. The Shaw Commission's recommendation of a positive delimitation of policy towards the Palestinians, which had provided a basis for the partial opening to the Arabs represented in the White Paper, was effectively eviscerated. The reversal of policy was so complete and the sidelining of the Arabs so total within the terms of the new statement that they dubbed the Prime Minister's deposit the "black letter." In addition to retracting the White Paper's limitations on dimensions of the Jewish National Home policy and concessions made to Arab concerns, the letter added several new plums for the Zionists, including an official endorsement of the principle of Hebrew labor (meaning in this case the use of Jewish capital to hire only Jews).²⁴⁷ Weizmann later wrote of MacDonald's letter as a

²⁴⁵ An English version of the statement appears in PRO – FO 371/15326.

²⁴⁶ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 35; Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine*, p. 104; Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 166-67; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 84. The original may be found at: PRO – FO 371/15325.

²⁴⁷ PM Ramsay MacDonald to Chaim Weizmann, PRO – FO 371/15325. See also the discussion in Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 141-58.

cornerstone “which enabled us to make the magnificent gains of the ensuing years.”²⁴⁸

In the short-term, the capitulation to Zionism discredited the AE’s pursuit of a policy of cooperation and helped create the impetus for a push by popular forces for renewed mobilization and for the British to be considered as an enemy.

HC Chancellor, who had been greatly concerned with avoiding a recurrence of Arab rebellion, opposed the principal lines laid down in the MacDonald letter and feared that the quashing of the White Paper would rekindle the flames he was so fervently trying to douse. When representatives of the AE met with Chancellor on 16 February they contended that HMG had destroyed all hope of creating any kind of cooperation between Arabs and Jews and described their own internal position as “precarious and anxious” in view of an outraged public.²⁴⁹ They turned over a memo to the High Commissioner which further declared that the AE had lost confidence in HMG and threatened a renewed boycott of Jews and Jewish goods in response to the government’s acceptance of what it called the boycott of Arab labor.²⁵⁰ Days later the AE issued a statement in which it excoriated the British and asserted that “Mr. MacDonald’s new document has destroyed the last vestige of respect every Arab had cherished towards the British government.”²⁵¹ It matched this dejection by proclaiming a new direction for the national movement, enjoining it to look beyond the British and instead seek succor and solidarity from the Arab and Islamic worlds.²⁵² Significantly, however, the AE’s statement treated Jews, not Zionism or the British, as its primary animus. Its articulation

²⁴⁸ Quoted in Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 162.

²⁴⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ Quoted in Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 34.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

of a transnational approach for the movement sought to exact a price from its perceived enemy by calling on Arabs to treat Jews throughout the region “as the Jews treat the Arabs of Palestine by boycott and oppression.”²⁵³ Its fiery invective and venomous nativism, however, remained coupled to its older concern for keeping order, and it urged Arab activists to heed the law in their struggle.²⁵⁴

Although the AE’s statement illustrated its shock and outrage at the magnitude of the government’s *volte-face*, it hesitated in articulating a direction for the movement within Palestine. Its invocation of a pan-Arab, pan-Islamic orientation, while intended to threaten Britain’s wider imperial interests with interlinked, translocal eruptions of dissent and rebellion, in fact revealed its weakness at home and its distance from the Arab public. Its groping at a new vision for an internationalized independence struggle demonstrated the notables’ continued penchant for discounting the local Arab population and the AE’s incapacity of conceiving of forging a popular, mass-based movement. This stance quickly elicited popular reaction. Telegrams were received by the AE from a number of groups and organizations that called for convening a national conference to deal with the MacDonald letter and in particular to discuss the idea of non-cooperation with the state.²⁵⁵ In Nablus and Haifa sizable public meetings were conducted at which the MacDonald letter was condemned and in the former a demonstration permit was applied for but rejected by the Palestine administration.²⁵⁶ Colonel Fredrick Kisch, the

²⁵³ Quoted in *ibid.*

²⁵⁴ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 162.

²⁵⁵ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 34 and ft. 93. These included a committee in Nablus that featured Akram Zu‘aytir and ‘Izzat Darwaza, the Islamic Society in Haifa, and individuals from Tulkarm.

²⁵⁶ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 85-86.

head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, reported in late February to Zionist authorities in London that proposals for non-cooperation, including resignations from government boards and committees and the non-payment of taxes, were being discussed.²⁵⁷ These matters were finally taken up by the AE in early March.

At the AE's meeting on 2 March 1931 proposals for adopting a posture of non-cooperation with the state crystallized a division within the organization which presaged the formation of the Istiqlal party. Notably, despite the climate and the agenda, influential figures such as Musa Kazim al-Husayni and Jamal al-Husayni did not attend. Nonetheless a ranging debate was held over the course of two days. Advocating for a program of non-cooperation and civil disobedience were known dissidents such as Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Muzaffar and Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim. On the first day, the counter-proposal to this plan, mooted by members of the *mu'arada* faction including 'Isa al-'Isa and 'Umar al-Baytar, was to relaunch the anti-Jewish boycott. On the second day, Hajj Amin and Raghib al-Nashashibi attended. At the second day's session some Opposition figures switched tack from their previous approach, supporting non-cooperation in a bid to get Hajj Amin to resign the SMC presidency. Raghib al-Nashashibi, then mayor of Jerusalem and head of the Opposition, however, put forward a different proposal to boost local Arab production and consumption by a policy of what he and several colleagues referred to as 'positive boycott.' Arguing against a reprise of the anti-Jewish boycott, Raghib Bey and others contended that the 1929-30 campaign

²⁵⁷ Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 150. On the matter of a new anti-Jewish boycott, Kisch opined that its chances may be slim as "the Arab landlords, with the recollection of the sequel to the boycott which followed the 1929 riots, may be expected to throw their weight against a repetition of so suicidal a measure" (quoted in *ibid.*).

had been a failure. Nevertheless, at the close of the second day's session non-cooperation had been defeated and the resolution which stood favored both a new anti-Jewish boycott and the promotion of local Arab goods and industries.²⁵⁸

Unlike the atmosphere of 1929, the boycott did not gain much momentum. The AE appealed to the public to “sell to the Jews everything except land and not to buy from them anything but land” and continued over time to enjoin support for Arab industries and products and the boycott of Jewish firms and goods. Its slogan marks transitions underway since the prior boycott venture by awkwardly acknowledging economic roles for Jews, even during an anti-Jewish boycott: first as consumers of Arab-made goods and builders of Arab market share, and, more telling of the times, as owners of former Arab lands. These calls, for whatever reason, met a spotty reception at best. This may owe to a lack of resources and investment, as there is virtually no indication of any kind of popular organizing, leadership, or support on the scale that occurred in 1929-30. Boycott efforts continued throughout the rest of the year and into 1932, becoming a rhetorical staple but one that lacked real traction.²⁵⁹

While the boycott in early 1931 paled in comparison to its predecessor, there is some evidence that local, youth-backed initiatives taken to hit at government revenues and to spur and support Arab industries experienced some limited success. In the Tulkarm region in early March a campaign was reported to stop smoking, in order to reduce tax revenues levied on cigarettes and tobacco. The “movement”, as it was referred to by the district officer, first caught on in Qalqilya, where most smokers were

²⁵⁸ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 34-35.

²⁵⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 35; 219.

suddenly reported to have quit, and then spread to Tulkarm where some 200 were estimated to have followed. The initiative spread to other villages in the subdistrict as well. Consumption of local goods, including clothing manufactured in Majdal, was simultaneously noted to have taken off in both Qalqilya and Tulkarm. Without more detailed reports for other regions, it is difficult to know how widespread these phenomena were, or over what duration they persisted, yet they do demonstrate the potential effectiveness of having youth support for a campaign. They also showcase the growth of the economic arena and consumption as areas of struggle against the government.²⁶⁰

Zionist armories and the activist challenge

It was not daily acts of consumption, however, which provided the circumstances from which the next round of youth organization would emerge. In June *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya* published reports that the government had begun training Jewish colonists near Tulkarm in marksmanship.²⁶¹ The administration tried to calm Arab nerves by explaining that the arms in question were short range only (shotguns known as Greener guns) and that they were stowed in sealed armories near Jewish colonies for emergency use only, as part of the security reforms instituted after 1929.²⁶² There were 74 armories in all²⁶³ and once word appeared in the Arab press, activists recognized their next

²⁶⁰ Political reports, Tulkarm area district officer, 16.3.31, 23.3.31, ISA (112) 5170 – 4p.

²⁶¹ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 91.

²⁶² *Report to the League of Nations, 1931*, p. 2. As the official communiqué issued by the government stated, the armories had existed for almost a decade (ibid.), though many had been withdrawn between 1925 and 1929 (Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 28-29).

²⁶³ *Report to the League of Nations, 1931*, p. 2.

opportunity to rekindle a spirit of mobilization. By confirming the existence of the armories, the administration's effort at clarification only amplified the activists' need to galvanize a response.

'Izzat Darwaza used the Nablus Muslim Christian Association, which had been renamed the Patriotic Arab Society, to issue an invitation to a public meeting on the subject of the armories on 16 July.²⁶⁴ At the meeting a committee of youth was elected to initiate a congress that would address the movement's response to government policy.²⁶⁵ On 31 July the congress convened at the Patriotic Arab Society's clubhouse in Nablus, garnering an attendance estimated by authorities and participants at 300, with delegations from all areas of Palestine.²⁶⁶ Its location was intended to remove it from the quarreling among Jerusalemite factions, yet catch the attention of the national elites.²⁶⁷ The police presence was palpable in the city.²⁶⁸ At the congress the idea of non-cooperation was raised by Darwaza and others and debated.²⁶⁹ Shaykh al-Muzaffar again proposed a strategy of resistance to taxation, invoking the fallen from 1929 and inveighing against the use of tax monies to pay police and "spies" used as agents of repression against the Arab community.²⁷⁰ Fadil Tahir, an activist from Jenin, argued for the creation of a youth party.²⁷¹ Several proposals were made for arming segments of the Arab population. 'Adil Samara, an AE member from the Tulkarm region,

²⁶⁴ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 91; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 120.

²⁶⁵ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 91.

²⁶⁶ Ibid; HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.8.31, PRO – CO 733/209/6a.

²⁶⁷ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 120.

²⁶⁸ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 91.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Events and resolutions of the Nablus conference on arming, 1.8.31, in Bayan al-Hut, ed., *Watha'iq al-haraka al-wataniyya al-Filastiniyya, 1918-1939: min awraq Akram Zu'aytir* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 1984), p. 359.

²⁷¹ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 92.

suggested that the Arabs on the disputed lands of Wadi al-Hawarith, which had been sold by an absentee landlord to the Jewish National Fund, be given weapons to resist their eviction.²⁷² Dr. Sidqi Milhis propounded that proficiency with arms was an attribute of manliness, and recommended that regular weapons training be conducted under the cover of sporting associations.²⁷³ Such clubs, he contended, could be established by the YMMAs and as attachments to nationalist-oriented schools.²⁷⁴ Though the discussion was enflamed, the congress's final resolutions were more staid, being limited essentially to calling for national demonstrations on 15 August and the issue of several written protests to the government and the League of Nations.²⁷⁵

The reaction of the Arab press to the Nablus conference was mixed, with some critiquing it for not bringing any new development to the national movement (*al-Hayat*), some accepting its proceedings (*al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*), and others charging it with undermining the AE and alleging it was without authority (*Sawt al-sha'b*).²⁷⁶ The Jewish Agency, on the other hand, was concerned about the agitation surrounding the sealed armories before the congress was underway.²⁷⁷ After the congress Colonel Kisch claimed that the growing furor directed by activists and the press was liable to create a climate such as that preceding the 1929 events.²⁷⁸ The colonial state concurred to the extent that it found some Arab newspapers were bordering on incitement. Five

²⁷² Events and resolutions of the Nablus conference, in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 359.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 92.

²⁷⁵ Events and resolutions of the Nablus conference, in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 359-60. Al-Hut expresses surprise that despite rejecting "traditional" politics, the Nablus organizers did not deviate from standard political tactics (*al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 242).

²⁷⁶ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 92.

²⁷⁷ Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 114.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 114-15.

newspapers' editors were called in by the Chief Secretary, including those above plus *Filastin* and *Mir'at al-Sharq*, and issued a stern warning.²⁷⁹ In response, they went on strike for a week, from August 10-17.²⁸⁰

The national day of protest on 15 August was observed most strongly at its point of origin, in Nablus itself, where protesters gathered in defiance of the administration's refusal to grant a permit.²⁸¹ Other areas in the country also struck or protested, though with faint results.²⁸² The Nablus committee met again and decided to call another day of action on 23 August, the second anniversary of the 1929 uprising.²⁸³ The AE, feeling the heat for losing the initiative, invited Muhammad 'Ali Darwaza (brother of 'Izzat) and Akram Zu'aytir to meetings it convened in Jerusalem on 16 and 17 August.²⁸⁴ The High Commissioner reported to the Colonial Secretary that: "The discussions were excited and heated and the extremist opinion prevailed. The speakers' general tenor was distrust of H. M. Government's policy and a demand for a vigorous measure of opposition to this policy even to extent of civil disobedience."²⁸⁵ Resolutions passed affirmed the day of protest on the 23rd and condemnation of the sealed armories, as well as voting down participation in the Hope Simpson-inspired development scheme and rebuking the government for its plan to normalize the status of thousands of Jewish immigrants who

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 115.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 93; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 120.

²⁸² Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 93.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ HC to Colonial Secretary, 19.8.31, PRO – CO 733/209/6a.

had entered the territory surreptitiously.²⁸⁶ The AE also decided to take its fight for preeminence to the door of its internal challengers, announcing a special session to be convened in Nablus on September 20.²⁸⁷

The protests on 23 August in Jerusalem, as *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya* reported, provided AE members with the opportunity for verbal confrontations with the authorities. Strong words were spoken between Jamal al-Husayni and Major Wainright, including the latter's denunciation of the politicians' activity as "adolescent" in character and Jamal Effendi's declaration that "you can kill us and drive us to the darkneses of prisons, but we will not retreat." Despite the display of political theater, the Arab politicians took the path of least resistance and proceeded, as dictated by Wainright, along the sidewalks. Protesters were eventually made to select ten individuals to deliver the petition to the High Commissioner's office, and afterwards the gathering disbursed.²⁸⁸

In Nablus the demonstrations turned violent, reportedly after the detention of Dr. Milhis, with protestors pelting police with rocks and police responding with baton charges and then opening fire. Fourteen protesters were injured, three of whom were shot. Youth were in force at the demonstrations, as *al-Hayat* emphasized, and became a target of the suppression activities. Thirty demonstrators as young as 13 were given three-month prison terms. Two others, Muhammad 'Ali Darwaza and 'Adil Kan'an, were given one year sentences. The offices of the Patriotic Arab Society were raided

²⁸⁶ Ibid; A report on the decision to strike ran in *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya* and is reproduced in: *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 237-38.

²⁸⁷ Decision of the Arab Executive to announce a general strike in protest against the arming of Jewish colonies, 17.8.31, in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 238. Note AZ's read on meeting...

²⁸⁸ Reprinted in: *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 240; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 93-94.

and some of its papers taken by police. Recriminations also followed the events in Nablus, as Zu'aytir blasted the AE for failing to muster support for the Nabulsi activists.²⁸⁹

It is clear that the rising agitation of northern activists provided the canvas for the AE session convened in Nablus on 20 September. As it would continue to be confronted with in the following years, the AE faced a rising challenge from those who perceived it as incapable of mounting serious resistance to British policy, including the budding youth wing of the movement and some of its own politicians. Its attempt to stem popular disaffection with its leadership brought it to adopt sharper rhetorical lines on national issues, though these were positions taken with some ambivalence which it would subsequently offer to compromise, particularly as concerned the legislative council issue. Importantly, the AE also ventured to formally sponsor the organization of youth in a new associational network that was hoped would deliver this emerging political constituency from the hands of the radicals back to the AE's fold. None of the AE's maneuvering, however, properly recuperated its standing, and instead, its overtures to the activist wing of the movement ended up lending further credibility to their positions.

The meeting was attended by roughly 250 people, slightly over half of the invited attendees, who featured many notables.²⁹⁰ The Opposition boycotted it entirely, leaving the floor to the *majlisi* faction and the activist trend.²⁹¹ The agenda, set out in advance by the AE, centered on the need to address the government's contravention of its own

²⁸⁹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1931*, p. 1-2; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 94; 'Izzat Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka al-haditha: tarikh wa-mudhakkirat wa-ta'liqat* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Asiriyya, 1950), v. 3, p. 76.

²⁹⁰ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 96.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

laws and the abrogation of the findings of its own reports and committees of investigation.²⁹² Jamal al-Husayni took a lead role in the proceedings and, after a disquisition on the impoverishment of the peasantry, summarized the choices facing the movement by way of analogy to both Egypt and India.²⁹³ The national struggle in Egypt, he held, had entered a phase of cooperation with the government, while in India the strategy of civil disobedience was being applied. Detailing the Indian case, al-Husayni contended that there were two manners of civil disobedience, one which remained within the bounds of the law and one which transgressed it. He argued that the Indian national struggle offered the most promise as a model for Palestinians, but urged that such a campaign in Palestine abide by the law.²⁹⁴ As Matthews comments: “The significance of al-Husayni’s position was that, although he employed the symbolism of the Indian civil disobedience movement, he responded to the militants in Nablus with what was essentially a plea to obey the law.”²⁹⁵ Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim also invoked Gandhi, and both he and ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Muzaffar sounded out more militant lines, the former pointedly criticizing the national movement’s reliance on protest petitions as grossly inadequate to the tasks at hand.²⁹⁶

The overarching political line endorsed by the meeting repeated the demand for independence within Arab unity (i.e. within a framework larger than Palestine) taken by the 1930 delegation. Its resolutions reiterated the standing calls to support local Arab

²⁹² Decision of the AE... in protest against the arming of Jewish colonies, in *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p. 238.

²⁹³ Police daily intelligence summary #221, 21.9.31, PRO – FO 371/15333; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 96.

²⁹⁴ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 96.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Police daily intelligence summary #221, 21.9.31, PRO – FO 371/15333.

industries and products and to boycott Jewish goods, expanding the boycott to include all foreign-made items. Customs receipts, which were a major fount of government revenue, were singled out along with other sources, and a committee was to be established to help oversee the effort to decrease government income drawn from Arabs. Support for the National Fund was also enjoined. Breaking with the AE's typical delegation of matters to its own subcommittees, the decisions taken at the session were to be managed and executed by a congress of Arab youth that would convene under its imprimatur.²⁹⁷

M. A. Young, the Officer Administering the Government, wrote in his cover dispatch to the police report on the session that it was the work of the mufti, who aimed to torpedo any further movement on the legislative council issue for fear of sapping his own influence.²⁹⁸ Matthews also portrays the Nablus meeting as a *majlisi* affair, noting that Zu'aytir was unimpressed, and didn't believe that the AE would either shepherd the movement to independence or even stand by the demand as its own.²⁹⁹ The meeting, Matthews writes, initiated a dynamic whereby "the youth could insist that the leadership make gestures of resistance towards the British and expect a response, if only symbolic."³⁰⁰ But while he is certainly correct that many elites hardly intended on following their more stalwart colleagues into militant resistance and were content to offer ringing but toothless condemnations of the government, the effect of the

²⁹⁷ Ibid; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 96-97.

²⁹⁸ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 26.9.31, PRO – FO 371/15333.

²⁹⁹ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 96-97.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 97.

leadership's "gestures" was actually of greater significance than this description suggests.

As Jamal Effendi's argument on strategy disclosed, there was no present path to cooperation with British authorities. One could suggest that Jamal's motion was simply a temporary sop brought on by recognition of the catastrophic damage done by the MacDonald letter to diplomacy. Certainly Jamal Effendi was not averse to bargaining down the movement's goals, as he had shown in London³⁰¹ and as he would again demonstrate. And he was far from alone among elites in this regard. But the public retreat by the *majlisiyin* from a strategy of cooperation in turn helped shift the movement's discourse towards the terrain of the activists. The endorsement of an Indian-style campaign of civil disobedience, however constrained, marked a discursive departure towards a strategy predicated on public mobilization and forms of resistance to the state and the empire.³⁰²

The principle of cooperation, generally agreed on by elites across the political spectrum since 1928, had by the second half of 1931 been publicly exhausted and unwittingly but effectively repudiated by the colonial state. Youth activists and their allies among political elites, such as Darwaza, were among the first to read the writing on the wall and act. But as Jamal al-Husayni's exhortation at Nablus demonstrated, partisans of the *majlisi* faction thought that they could advance their place within the

³⁰¹ Jamal Effendi came under fire from young Palestinians studying in London at the time for his refusal to reject the mandate outright when fielding questions during a session of parliament (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 235).

³⁰² Matthews acknowledges that the *majlisi* faction shifted its position as a result of the ferment in Nablus (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 100) but does not note the advantage this conferred on the activists and their discourse.

movement by taking a page from the activists' playbook. Yet, as with their concessions to popular discourse and images of civil rebellion, the elites who first sought to contain and subordinate the growing thirst of youth and others for more active contention miscalculated. While the forum that would become the Youth Congress was intended to capture youth as a "swing force",³⁰³ and thereby help the *majlisiyin* out-flank their political competitors, both more conservative and more radical, the creation of a major new youth organ only expanded the bases for autonomous action by youths and their capacity to exert their own influence over the movement, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The agitation in Nablus, beginning in July and lasting a period of months, described a new cycle for protest³⁰⁴ and offered fresh evidence of the growing inability of national elites to withstand popular pressure. The actions of the Nablus committee affirmed a repertoire that would be repeated in the coming years: taking initiative independent of the national leadership, forming a new association, conducting public meetings, proceeding to call demonstrations after generating a base of public support and concern, and mobilizing opinion to force the national leadership's intervention. The AE's response (as divided as it was) to the armories controversy and the Nablus activists' initiative in turn represented another instance of the national elite being disciplined by more ardent junior parties.³⁰⁵ As elite political weakness remained, the

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 97-98. The term is Matthews's.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁰⁵ 'Izzat Darwaza was certainly an insider among the political elite, yet he was effectively a defector in this instance, which in the event presaged his involvement with other dissident elements of the AE in the Istiqlal party the following year.

opportunities grew for activist challengers to impress tactics and strategy upon the notables, and this is precisely what they did.

Conclusion: the problem of notable politics

The breach that emerged between Palestinian elites and large segments of the population continued to grow in the aftermath of 1929. Much of the Arab public felt anguish and bitterness over the British suppression of the risings, and increasingly feared that the Mandate would cause the displacement, if not dispossession, of the Arab population by a new Jewish majority, hostile to the rights and interests of the Arabs. Despite the widespread apprehensions concerning Zionism, the Mandate and the plight of the Arabs, as symbolized by the declining fortunes of the *fellahin*, and despite the storm of violence with which these sentiments had just exploded into public life, most of the elite politicians remained unshaken in their faith that there was no other course for the Palestinians to obtain their national demands, but through the offices of the British. Though elites were chary of the gap between themselves and blocks of the population and took various measures to show their unity with popular sentiment, including involvement in the boycott campaign and legal and other solidarity work, they overestimated their ability to massage and alter the increasingly negative estimations of the public, not only concerning the Mandate, but with regard to their own stewardship of national interests.

At stake in the changing climate after 1929 was nothing less than control of the national movement and its trajectory. The AE recognized that the events of August had

weakened its influence and had displayed the possibility for a radically different path of pursuing independence and an end to the Zionist project. The uprising and attacks had illustrated the power of mass mobilization and forced the AE to take part, most prominently through the boycott campaign. Discursively the events had created a renewed emphasis on themes of struggle and the realities of present hardships in a variety of forms, political, economic, and otherwise. The AE's paradoxical attempt to benefit from the nationalist upsurge was to send a delegation to London. This however, had the effect of transitioning its internal approach from one of public solidarity and participation in popular campaigning and legal advocacy to one premised in public relations support for its diplomacy. The Arab Executive's attempts to manage the public through stagecraft and liaising with journalists, as well as to circumvent internal dissent by trying to absorb and redirect more militant currents, ultimately failed and gave way to new national forces with a different vision for conducting the independence struggle.

Probably most troubling to elites, however, were the constant setbacks delivered to their diplomatic agenda since its highpoint in the summer of 1929, when the legislative council had the backing of HC Chancellor. Indeed, reading the scholarly literature on this period one is struck by the litany of post-mortems delivered for the AE at various points. Whether highlighting the hangings of the 1929 convicts,³⁰⁶ the MacDonald letter,³⁰⁷ or the AE's imbroglios with the press,³⁰⁸ such analyses all underscore the diminishment of the AE as an institution and as a political center or

³⁰⁶ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 231.

³⁰⁷ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 35.

³⁰⁸ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 58.

fulcrum for the Palestinians. The British, in spite of their great desire to foster cooperation with notable leaders, were greatly responsible for this decline. And as the AE went from defeat to defeat, so too did notable politics and the principle of elite intercession and representation which it embodied.

The notables, of course, did not willingly accede to their loss of influence. But beyond obvious instances of defeat, many couldn't necessarily see, much less accept, that their political ethos was crumbling. As has been shown here, they retained an older sensibility of presumed command over the public that was predicated on the dismissal of its capacities and agency. Elite pretensions, however, came into conflict with the reality of new forms of social mobilization that characterized the period beginning with the formation of the YMMA. As the public moved farther away from the elite's quiescent posture towards the British, and as youth found more political footing and sought to respond to the quotidian challenges presented by the dual colonial regime, new forms of autonomy from elite political primacy were tentatively established. Local action and local initiative became the seeds of a new idiom of Arab politics.

Youth gained significant coherence as a political grouping in the period proximate to the 1929 events. Beginning with the development of an impulse to cultural autonomism and resistance to the socializing forces of political domestication under the Mandate, and growing to address political and economic challenges at the level of daily life, the YMMA provided a new model for political engagement that quickly grew among the middle and upper classes and the educated. The YMMA broadened the scope of Palestinian politics not only by presenting a framework for youth activism, but also in

its resolve to approach issues other than the over-arching macro-political questions of elite politics. This dual expansion of the political field continued in the ensuing years, and created avenues for the subsequent development of the new politics and the growth of popular forces' political profile and influence.

The anti-Jewish boycott campaign in 1929-30 offered another model to youth. While a line can hardly be drawn directly from the boycott to subsequent youth ascendancy, the campaign could scarcely have escaped the attentions of many. For those who participated, or witnessed its mechanics, the attempt to rearticulate local patterns of consumption and economic circulation and to (economically) define the boundaries of the nation offered evidence of the difficulties ahead. Nationalist aims and dogmas were not ready-made, self-fulfilling propositions. They ran across class and familial interests in complicated fashions that vexed the movement throughout the Mandate era. The degree of popular investment in the campaign, for its initial months, suggested however, that mass nationalist mobilization, particularly when well-coordinated, could achieve startling uniformity and effectiveness. Building "national" industries, saving "national" lands, and achieving independence – all required great exertion of political will and, importantly, necessitated the disciplining of recalcitrant elements. The example of the 1929-30 campaign may not have been foremost in the minds of those who took up this task in the years that followed, yet the dynamic of internal contention over adherence to nationalist objectives which was first visible during the boycott periodically reappeared with great intensity, and important results, in the period preceding the revolt.

By the time of the armories controversy and the Nablus protests, youth had

become a noticeable, if emergent, political constituency. The formation in early 1932 of the Congress of Arab Youth, arising out of the Nablus AE session in 1931, indicated that elites were increasingly anxious to capture and constrain the development of youth activism. It is to this contest and the general broadening and rise of youth forces after 1931 that we now turn.

Chapter 2:

The Youth Congress, the Istiqlal Party and the anti-British turn, 1932-33

In the fall and early winter of 1931, Jamal al-Husayni began to grow nervous. Since the events of 1929, the mufti had become the foremost Palestinian leader and the Husayni faction was dominant over its rival, the *mu'arada*.¹ Al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni was diligently working towards advancing his international stature in the Arab and Muslim worlds by hosting a pan-Islamic conference in Jerusalem in December, with the stated purpose of addressing the threats posed to the holy places in Palestine.² Unlike his perturbation in late 1931, Jamal Effendi was often a politician who projected confidence, sometimes with an excess of optimism about the Palestinian national movement's future and its accomplishments. In the lead up to the Islamic Conference in Jerusalem, getting a handle on the effusions of youth activists occupied his attentions.³ Although the Islamic Conference was the centerpiece of a new internationalist orientation which the mufti sought to cultivate, the Youth Congress scheduled to follow it was a less easy object to finesse, and proved a vexing subject for his trusted deputy.

In late October, about a month after the AE's Nablus session on September 20, Hamdi al-Husayni was appointed editor of *al-Sirat al-Mustaqim*.⁴ The first piece he wrote for the paper was a vituperative attack on Jamal al-Husayni's plans for the upcoming Youth Congress and on the *majlisi* faction's bid for power over youth more generally. In unsparing prose, Hamdi Effendi labeled the congress organizers

¹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 49; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 231; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 63.

² See discussions in: Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 50-64; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 102-34.

³ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 112. Matthews speaks generally about the interests of the *majlisiyyin*, rather than Jamal Effendi specifically.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110-11.

“intermediaries of imperialism” and named their objective as stamping out the drive to national independence of youth.⁵ If hyperbolic, these charges still carried some resonance. Jamal al-Husayni was indeed trying to steer the course of the Youth Congress and stage-manage its agenda and disposition. He was even reputed by a Zionist informant in late December to be well-positioned to become its president.⁶

A week before Hamdi al-Husayni’s attack in *Sirat al-Mustaqim*, Jamal Effendi wrote an article in *al-Jami’a al-‘Arabiyya* in which he set forth his view of the Youth Congress:

What do we mean by a Youth Congress? Should we plan a new programme intended exclusively for young people? If so, the land will become enmeshed in insoluble political and ideological chaos. Do we want the young people to organize their ranks to do what we would do, and must we let them stand at the front? If so, we are replacing one power with another. We want a convention that will reach clear decisions and a clear system that will define what the young of the nation should do, on condition that it will not involve political and sectarian disputes, so that everyone will act for the homeland, in particular with regard to the National Fund.⁷

Underneath its espoused pragmatism and affected tone of guidance from a seasoned elder it’s not difficult to detect common themes of elite anxiety and presumption. To have an independent youth force with its own agenda emerge from the congress would spell “chaos.” Youth need not think that they should play a guiding role in the movement – that place was already taken by the movement’s older ranks. They should not become embroiled in the question of factional contestation, and hence could have nothing to say on the matter and have no place in seeking its potential resolution.⁸ But

⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶ Ovadia’s information, 25.12.31, CZA J1 – 205/1.

⁷ Quoted in Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 82-83

⁸ Given the *majlisi* angling prior to the congress, this piece seems particularly if predictably disingenuous.

the final and overall thrust was key: youth required definition as a political quantity, and their purview should be limited. The definition of youth would assure their rightful and dutiful activation, as well as guarantee their retention as subordinates within the established socio-political hierarchy of political representation. In outlining what he saw as the coming congress's place within the movement, Jamal Effendi sounded out lineaments of an older ideal of elite regulation of the crowd or the masses, and a preoccupation with the question of "order."

In spite of the resounding defeat of their diplomatic initiatives, elites continued to presumptuously see leadership as their inherited or inherent prerogative and to discount the potential of other social groups to act autonomously. Yet in the aftermath of the 1929 events and the displays of popular power they manifested, elite Palestinian politicians found themselves confronting the question of how to deal with the growing political participation of the population. The advance of new horizontal sensibilities was represented foremost in the formation of a welter of new associations – youth groups, labor unions, women's committees, village associations – and their rising popularity. Still, older vertical affiliations and networks retained great influence and often cross-cut the new horizontal formations. The uneasy commingling of horizontal and vertical bonds and affiliations led to competing systems of loyalty and identification.

As elites wrestled with the new multitudinous dimensions of the national movement, popular forces searched for the means by which to represent and advance their political engagements and concerns, and the sense of urgency which underlined them. As noted in chapter one, mass politics had a foundation in the affairs and issues of

the everyday, such as the labor market and the problem of land sales. The involvement of popular groups in the struggles of everyday life afforded opportunities for direct, unmediated forms of political activity. The autonomy which many new associations acquired from elite influences acted as an incubator for the escalation of the national struggle and the revision of its barren diplomatic strategy. The break with the gentlemanly strategy of elites was also fed by the changing fortunes of Zionism in the early 1930s and Britain's return to steadfast support of the Jewish National Home policy (after various post-1929 recommendations for its limitation).⁹

As Jewish colonization ramped up following the emergence of the *yishuv* from the economic doldrums of the mid-late 1920s and as immigration soared after Hitler's rise to the chancellorship in Germany in early 1933, Palestinian society struggled with the sense that its national community was not simply embattled but greatly endangered. The national discourse of the time was saturated with the fear of Palestine's conversion into a Jewish-majority state and references to the eventual expulsion and/or destruction of the Arabs of Palestine as an entity. While such anxieties had long characterized Palestinian perceptions of Zionist ambitions, they attained a new, virtually ubiquitous status and circulation in the early 1930s. The fear of national catastrophe owed to a plethora of factors beyond immigration: the growth of landlessness and the extended crisis of the countryside; the scuppering of the 1930 White Paper and the effectiveness of Zionist lobbying; the advancement of the Zionist economy; the expansionist fantasies of Zionist Revisionism; and Labor Zionism's agenda of colonization and exclusivist

⁹ See chapter 1.

labor organization. Standing behind Zionism's successes after 1929 was the British Mandate.

Historically, the Palestinian national movement's turn against the British has typically been attributed to one of two primary sources, the Grand Mufti or the Istiqlal party. The present account argues that both explanations are deficient. The charge that the mufti was responsible for the shift rests on little more than *post hoc* assertions of conspiracy, void of hard evidence, that systematically ignore his great ties of financial and political dependence on the British.¹⁰ The alternative, somewhat revisionist explanation which holds the Istiqlal to be the ideological sign-bearers of the era overstates the party's influence and occludes other factors, most proximately the Youth Congress, and more broadly the profusion of horizontal associations and their openness to conceiving of new strategies and tactics for the movement.¹¹

This chapter offers a different portrait of the sharpening of Palestinian anti-colonialism in the early 1930s. It examines early efforts by the youth wing of the national movement, and by the Istiqlal party, dominated by dissident elites, to respond to the crises buffeting Arab society by refashioning the movement and its course. It begins with the formation of the Youth Congress in early 1932 and looks at the contest over

¹⁰ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 118. Al-Hut is perhaps less direct, but makes a string of insinuations suggesting the centrality of the mufti (*al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 231; 287; 326). A variation on this argument, based on the views of HC Wauchope, holds that the mufti acted as a fulcrum whose tipping towards conflict with the British would produce rebellion. See: Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 168.

¹¹ Matthews's work (*Confronting an Empire*) is most representative and outstanding of this variety. As is treated below, he generally reads the Youth Congress as a *majlisi* organ, and consequently is more dismissive of its place in stimulating transformative change within the movement. Although he is careful to trace a set of contingent developments beyond the Istiqlal which propelled the 1933 demonstrations, the overall tenor of his account lends great weight to the Istiqlal as a party and to the activists who created it as the motive force behind the movement's turn towards confrontation.

controlling the body, its activities and its orientation. It then turns to the creation of the Istiqlal party, assessing its vanguardist model of political mobilization and its drive to radicalize the national movement through the cultivation of public opinion, mass assemblies, and the advocacy of a particular nationalist sensibility and subjectivity. The episodic efforts of the Youth Congress and the Istiqlal party to advance a popular anti-colonial politics opposed to British rule (as well as Zionism) are taken up in the rest of the chapter, first through an examination of the Istiqlal's Indian-inspired campaign for non-cooperation and subsequently through the youth trend's turn to street demonstrations in late 1933 in response to the rising tide of immigration.

Youth between old and new politics: the first Congress of Youth and the National Fund

After the Nablus AE session in September 1931, the *majlisi* faction sought to assure its dominance over the Congress of Youth. In late October, Zionist intelligence reported that Jamal al-Husayni was pushing for the congress to be sited in Jaffa and maneuvering to circumvent an opposing *mu'arada* proposal.¹² By late December Jamal Effendi had grown increasingly worried about Opposition participation in the congress and moreover about their potential to block *majlisi* plans. To thwart any such outcome, he summoned Rasim al-Khalidi and Nafiz al-Husayni, the heads of the YC preparatory committee, and discussed the issue with them at length. In an apparent demonstration of *majlisi* influence, the two reportedly sent “detailed orders” afterwords to local youth figures in Jaffa (Faiz al-Kanafani, Sa'id al-Khalil), Gaza ('Adil al-Shawa), Hebron

¹² Ovadia transmits, 28.10.31, CZA J/1 – 205/1.

(Rashad al-Khatib), and Haifa (Ahmad al-Imam) to circumscribe Opposition participation.¹³ To bolster his own credibility among youth, Jamal Effendi became involved in coordinating boycott efforts after the Nablus meeting, supervising the creation of a clandestine boycott committee in November to oversee the campaign and muster youth support.¹⁴

Despite the move to obstruct *mu'arada* attendance and to render the Youth Congress a *majlisi* front group, there were indications early on that the congress might be less amenable to the reigning factionalism. At an inter-faith meeting in late October preceding the formation of the preparatory committee much criticism was leveled at the factional (*hizbi*) spirit besetting the nation.¹⁵ Though the first proposal for the committee was to have it composed along a balance of family lines, this was voted down in favor of individual rather than corporate representation.¹⁶ More importantly the lead youth organizers of both factions, Jamal al-Husayni and Fakhri al-Nashashibi, were ultimately excluded from the Youth Congress itself, in an effort to tamp down the potential for discord.¹⁷

Hamdi al-Husayni was not the only known youth activist to view the preparations and the congress with skepticism. Akram Zu'aytir, in his copious diaries kept at the time, comments little on the Youth Congress and not at all until its actual convening.¹⁸ He was elected in absentia to the Nablus preparatory committee for the

¹³ Intelligence, 25.12.31, CZA J/1 – 205/1

¹⁴ From Arab Bureau information, 1.10.31, CZA J/1 – 205/1.

¹⁵ Ovadia transmits, 28.10.31, CZA J/1 – 205/1.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 121.

¹⁸ Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 378.

congress, but declined to participate.¹⁹ Similarly, Hamdi al-Husayni was also elected to represent Gaza and declined, arguing that the forum did not appear to be serious in its intentions.²⁰ Ibrahim al-Shanti, a future Istiqlal party member who went on to edit the newspaper *al-Difa*, withdrew from the preparatory committee after two sessions, making similar charges as Hamdi Effendi had done in his press attacks on Jamal al-Husayni, stating that he believed the congress was designed to produce a body conciliatory towards British rule.²¹

The die turned unexpectedly for the skeptics, however, when Muhammad ‘Ali Darwaza succeeded in bringing the preparatory committee to surpass the agenda originally laid out for the YC. ‘Isa al-Bandak, a youth activist and newspaper editor (*Sawt al-Sha‘b*) who represented Bethlehem on the AE, had suggested that the YC hold to the lines and tasks with which it was entrusted by the AE. Tellingly, though al-Bandak was affiliated to the *mu‘arada*, both factions agreed on circumscribing the purview of the new body, as is evidenced by *al-Jami‘a al-‘Arabiyya*’s counsel, just prior to the congress, echoing al-Bandak’s recommendation. While both elite camps appeared to fear being upstaged by militant youth, Muhammad ‘Ali Effendi opposed al-Bandak’s motion and suggested instead that a pact be drawn up which would enshrine the pursuit of national independence at its core, and that this pact be voted on at the YC proceedings. The result was a strong statement, decided in mid-November, which affirmed the AE’s line of seeking independence within Arab unity, but added non-

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 112.

²¹ Ibid.

recognition of the Mandate as well as the Balfour declaration and rejection of “any policy contradicting the goal of complete independence.”²²

In the actual event, the congress, convening at Jaffa from 4-6 January 1932, proved to be a mixed affair. Somewhere between 200 and 400 people attended its sessions, including delegates from throughout the country and members of the AE and the press.²³ For of its framework the congress adopted a version of the National Pact recently set down by a group of politicians headed by ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi on the sidelines of the Islamic Conference.²⁴ It thereby carved out a more radical national line than its political sponsor, the AE, and both elite factions. The congress took up the agenda set at the Nablus AE session, but expanded its focus significantly. Much like the debates among educated youth before the 1929 events, the tension in aims between those who wanted to see youth play a more strident and galvanizing role in the national struggle and those who envisioned something more modest in tenor were reprised and on display at the Youth Congress. Other tensions were also palpable: the congress was not free of factionalist rancor, and more significantly, was seen as heavily weighted towards urban youth, much to the resentment of their rural brethren, some of whom walked out in

²² Ibid., p. 112-13; 119.

²³ Ibid., p. 120; *Filastin*, 5.1.32. The higher estimate is *Filastin*’s. Some YC delegates were AE members, including Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman, Fahmy al-‘Abushi, ‘Isa al-Bandak, and Sidqi al-Tabari, all of whom were elected to the Youth Congress’s executive. Other AE members, including ‘Abd al-Qadir Shibl, an informant for Zionist intelligence, were also present.

²⁴ The national pact and basic law of the Congress of Arab Youth and regime of the National Fund, reproduced in al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p.728; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 118. The National Pact (cited in Matthews, *ibid.*) was a brief, three point anti-imperialist and Arab nationalist manifesto, declaring that the Arabs constituted one national community and urging resistance to both colonialism and to the restriction of politics to regional or local agendas (i.e. to acceptance of the Middle Eastern states system as it was being constructed).

protest.²⁵ The administration of the convention thus seemed to impress few people.²⁶

The problematic environment in which the congress took place presented an illuminating microcosm of troubles and divisions brewing in Palestinian society, and this was as evident in the items and arguments taken up in its proceedings as it was in disputes among attendees.

The congress's sessions treated the issues of the National Fund and the boycotts of Jewish and foreign goods and government revenue sources at length. During discussion of the boycott of Jewish and foreign goods, debate centered on the management and means of conducting the campaign. Some supported recreating the roving patrols of the 1929 effort and a model of aggressive intervention to enforce the sanctions.²⁷ The majority dissented from this plan, backing the use of indirect methods to persuade merchants to comply with the venture.²⁸ This softer format for the boycott was paired with sharper and wider strictures adopted vis-à-vis its Jewish component, as the resolution passed called for a total boycott not only of Jewish products, merchants, and firms, but of Zionists socially, politically, and economically, including via joint

²⁵ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 83.

²⁶ *Filastin*, 5.1.32, p. 1. *Filastin* commented in its coverage of the first day that there was a noticeable lack of procedural experience with such fora among the attendees, which contributed to some of its disorganization. The somewhat tumultuous character of the proceedings, recorded in depth by the paper and noted by others, in turn has shaped the YC's reception by historians and other scholars, whose treatments of it on the whole have been slender and diminutive. This includes essentially every existing account, including those who offer somewhat more coverage, such as Matthews. Porath, for instance, doesn't bother even to enumerate the final resolutions or subjects taken up at the conference, and his discussion focuses on the divisions surrounding it and its leadership, before passing over to a broader evaluation of the YC's significance before 1936 (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 121-22).

²⁷ Information from the Arab Congress of Youth at Jaffa, 8.1.32, CZA J/1 – 2216.

²⁸ Ibid.

union membership.²⁹ The boycott of foreign goods was also approved although it was a more contentious topic, since many well-off delegates “represent[ed] an economic stratum that owed its existence to commerce with European markets.”³⁰ The sum of boycott calls at the first Congress of Youth thus amalgamated the existing if flaccid campaign against Jewish goods and the call to decrease sources of government revenue (from the Nablus meetings of 1931), placing both efforts under youth supervision.

Regarding the omnipresent concern with land transfers from Arab to Jewish hands, the congress agreed to take up management of the National Fund, as it had been called to do. Sentiment on the land question in Palestine was near feverish and was embodied in the National Pact embedded in the congress’s basic law (*qanun asasi*). The provision dealing with land, formulated in the declarative mode of political manifestos, coupled a normative, sacralizing claim with the threat of total social prohibition: “The lands of Palestine in their entirety are holy Arab lands, and anyone who engages, permits, or aids in the sale of these lands to Jews, in whole or in part, will be considered a traitor.”³¹ The AE had pushed for an official, government-sanctioned ban on land sales to non-Arabs for some time, but its efforts had always been rejected by the state, most recently and most significantly with the MacDonald letter. Given the dashed hope for serious government regulation, the congress proceedings underscore the fitful shift

²⁹ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 83. It should be noted that although the language targets Zionists, as the 1929 events demonstrated, in many people’s thinking there was little separating Jews *in toto* from Zionists. See chapter 1 for more on the erosion of this distinction.

³⁰ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 120.

³¹ The national pact and basic law of the Congress of Arab Youth (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p.728).

underway towards developing and deploying an alternative approach to stemming land sales that relied on forms of internal social regulation and normative discourse.³²

According to the report of the subcommittee, adopted by the YC, the National Fund would be run by a joint board composed of four of its members and four members of the AE.³³ YC members of the board were selected at the congress, while in dilatory fashion the AE took another two months to elect its portion of seats.³⁴ As testament to the importance attached to the project by the congress YC membership was made conditional upon subscription to the fund.³⁵ While the sense of urgency regarding the Fund and the land question were evident at the congress, the Fund's function and the partnership with the AE were subject to some debate and dispute. Some thought that the association with the AE was a liability, given its poor reputation in some quarters and its former handling of the Fund.³⁶ At least one motion from the floor argued that the National Fund should devote the entirety of collections to purchasing land, yet this was argued down by Fuad Saba, the Fund's primary architect, who held that its scope needed to remain more flexible.³⁷

Ultimately the most significant decisions taken at the first Congress of Arab Youth were not those pertaining to the boycott campaigns, the National Fund, or other

³² This subject is taken up detail in chapter 3.

³³ The national pact and basic law of the Congress of Arab Youth (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 730).

³⁴ AE meeting minutes, 6.3.32, ISA (65) 984 – 5p. The four YC members were 'Aziz Miqati, 'Adil al-Shawa, Hamdi al-Nabulsi, and Fuad Saba, while George Antonius, Yusuf 'Ashur, Alfred Rok, and Ahmad Hilmi 'Abd al-Baqi joined from the AE.

³⁵ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 17.

³⁶ *Filastin*, 6.1.32, p. 8. See chapter 1 for background on the Fund.

³⁷ Ibid.

items on its original agenda.³⁸ Rather, they concerned the continued expansion of the nationalist field in Palestine, and in particular the growth of what might rightly be seen as an infrastructure for extending youth influence. The YC saw the organization of youth as its bedrock. Like the YMMA, it decided that one of the primary means of attaining this goal was the establishment of scout troops. Over the years preceding the Great Revolt, the YC helped to advance the spread of scouting throughout the country, and unlike its involvements with the National Fund and the boycotts, it enjoyed great success in this field.³⁹ Scouting would become a major source of the YC's strength, and its proliferation in the years following the first congress further heightened the profile of youth within the national movement while creating an informal national network of hands-on, zealous nationalist activists.⁴⁰

Of similar importance was the decision at the first congress to adopt a branch structure for the YC. In order to implement its plans for growing the National Fund and multiplying the ranks of scout troops, the congress entrusted its executive with founding branches throughout Palestine.⁴¹ In the three years which followed, 20 local chapters were founded,⁴² thereby institutionalizing a presence for the YC in cities and villages

³⁸ The agenda is reprinted in *Filastin*, 4.1.32, p. 4.

³⁹ Porath refers to this as "the most important aspect of the activities of the Congress" (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 122). The subjects of scouts and scouting are treated in chapter 3.

⁴⁰ The support for scouting development at the congress was credited by a Zionist informant (who wrote for *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*) to propagandizing by Subhi al-Khadra, an AE member from Safad who joined the Istiqlal. According to the informant, al-Khadra was convinced that the Arabs needed an effective counter to the Revisionist Zionist youth force, the Brit Trumpeldor (Betar), which was suspected of conducting paramilitary training. Arab scouting, it was proposed, would provide a vehicle to produce a Palestinian equivalent. See: Information from the Arab Congress of Youth at Jaffa, 8.1.32, CZA J/1 – 2216.

⁴¹ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 258-59; The national pact and basic law of the Congress of Arab Youth (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 729).

⁴² Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 121.

throughout the country and presenting local youth with a venue for political activism. In its geographic reach the Youth Congress came to rival the AE and the Muslim-Christian Associations, and its chapters, like its involvement with scouting, presented the national movement with a fresher, younger face and an alternative institutional network which advanced a more pro-active, mass-oriented politics than its forebears.

The executive wing elected to administer and direct the congress's activities was comprised of 38 members representing the cities and regions of Palestine.⁴³ Rasim al-Khalidi was elected president. His selection would seem to owe to a reputation for being above Jerusalem's partisan politics, but rumors circulated that he had been bought off by the *majlisiyyin* who were likewise said to have paid a great amount for the congress.⁴⁴ Rasim Effendi is mostly depicted in the historical literature as an independent figure and an interview conducted years later by Bayan al-Hut affirms that this was how he saw himself, at the very least.⁴⁵

⁴³ The following list of the first executive's members is provided in Akram Zu'aytir's memoirs: 'Adil Turjaman, Yusef 'Abdu, Mustafa Darwish, Jamal al-Qasim, Akram Zu'aytir (declined the position), Tawfiq al-Khuri, Muhammad 'Ali al-Ja'bari, Rashad al-Khatib, Fahmy 'Abbushi, Fadil al-Tahir, Sa'di al-Shawa, Musbah Farah, 'Ali Frayh, 'Abd al-Qadir Hathat, Ibrahim Hamza, Ya'qub al-Ghusayn, Rushdi Tamimi, Kamal al-Dajani, Salim Shihab al-Din, Edmund Rok, Hamdi al-Nabulsi, 'Atif Nurallah, Lutfi 'Awda, 'Isa al-Bandak, Jabran Muslih, Salim 'Abd al-Rahman, 'Abdullah Samara, Farid Fakhr al-Din, Sidqi al-Tabari, Jamal Hamid, Ilyas Kitfaku, 'Isa 'Ali, 'Isa Ghunaym, Sa'id Abu Sharakh, Sha'ban al-Shaykh 'Umar, Fuad Saba (*Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 379). According to the aforementioned Zionist informant reporting on the event for *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*, only 11 of the members were known affiliates of the Opposition (Information from the Arab Congress of Youth at Jaffa, 8.1.32, CZA J/1 – 2216).

⁴⁴ On the rumors, see: *ibid.* Al-Khalidi's alleged engineering of invitations to the congress to skew in *majlisi* favor has been noted above.

⁴⁵ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 121-22), al-Hut (*al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 258; 260), and Kabha (*The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 83-84) all see al-Khalidi as essentially unmotivated by factional spirit, while Matthews (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 120), following Akram Zu'aytir's opinion (*Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 379), depicts him as a quietist figure who the mufti could approve of and trust to not provoke tension between the national movement and the government. See also ft. 51 below.

Analysis which focuses on the president or executive, or depicts the YC as a whole, primarily in factional terms, however, misses the clear aversion of many attendees to the factionalism wracking the movement. Throughout the proceedings repeated calls to remain above factional politics were heard, and disputes that erupted were at least once publicly lambasted as the woes of Jerusalemite politics being aired at the expense of all.⁴⁶ More importantly, such an assessment of the congress misses the broad social compass which it charted for itself. The basic law of the congress lists among its objectives “spreading the spirit of cooperation between peasantry and worker [while] elevating them [both] economically and socially,” and revisits the YMMA’s concern for Arab workers, committing the YC to “organize the ranks of the Arab worker and attend to his issues.”⁴⁷ Versions of these statements appear in many of the official founding documents of the YC’s local chapters, and judging by the composition of local memberships (discussed in chapter 3), it appears that the YC considerably expanded the ranks of youth in politics. During the proceedings of the first congress, attendees also created a subcommittee on prisoners and another on cultivators that described the body’s intended close association to the population and its concerns.⁴⁸

In the profile of its activities, the YC in many ways represented a continuation of the YMMA’s previous focus on the everyday aspects of national marginalization and the predicaments faced by Arabs under the dual colonial order. This is certainly true of the

⁴⁶ See coverage in *Filastin*. The rebuke to Jerusalem’s factionalism came during discussion of the National Fund (*Filastin*, 6.1.32, p. 8).

⁴⁷ The national pact and basic law of the Congress of Arab Youth (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 728).

⁴⁸ *Filastin*, 5.1.32, p. 8. Subcommittee memberships for the first congress can be seen in: al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 875.

charges passed on to it from the Nablus AE session, reviving the National Fund and running the boycott campaigns. The congress's concern for what was termed national education (*ta'lim qawmi*), the fate and treatment of prisoners, the vexations of Arab workers, and the tribulations of the *fellahin* all reflect its desire to address the travails and injustices felt and experienced by broad strata of Palestinian society. Its portfolio effectively ran the gamut of national issues, even straying into the AE's prized diplomatic territory by creating a subcommittee on constitutional matters.⁴⁹ But the overarching valence of its activities was set upon the granular level of everyday struggles which Palestinians were living through. The urgency attached to these issues was great in general, but especially tremendous regarding land sales and the boycotts, transgressions against which were branded as treasonous.⁵⁰ Though there may have been some hyperbole in invoking such threats, given the past or present dealings of many prominent families in the import trade and the land market, the fierceness of such declarations marked the quickening temperament infusing the youth and popular fields, and suggested the continued pursuit of nationalist vigilance and internal discipline.

With its ambitious program, the first congress sought primarily to energize and reorganize the youth wing of the national movement and to break the hold of factionalism and family politicking. In many respects, the creation of the Youth Congress quickly exceeded the bounds set for it. Already in late January an Arab informant to the Zionist Joint Bureau reported that the YC was a site for heated

⁴⁹ See previous footnote.

⁵⁰ The national pact and basic law of the Congress of Arab Youth (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 728); Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 83.

discontent with the AE.⁵¹ The potential for expanded youth influence in national politics was demonstrated almost straightaway.

One of the YC's first communiqués called for a boycott of the Levant Fair to open in April in Tel Aviv. The statement, issued on 5 March 1932, was not especially remarkable given the boycott of Zionism, and argued that the fair was intended “to mislead the people and give the appearance of [Zionism] working for the good of the country and its elevation.”⁵² What was unusual about its issue was the rapidity with which the AE responded and echoed the YC's call, which it did four days later.⁵³ This episode, which al-Hut reads to have damaged the fair's potential to augment linkages between Jewish and Arab business interests,⁵⁴ offered an early taste of the potential for turn-about between the Youth Congress and its would-be patron.

In its first months the YC strove to act on its program and set its plans in motion. By early February the executive branch was devoting time to the anti-Jewish boycott, tracking Arab merchants doing business with Jews, and planning to shame them into compliance by publishing their names.⁵⁵ At the outset of March, ‘Adil Shawa, one of the YC's members on the National Fund board, participated in a meeting with merchants

⁵¹ Digest from Tet Dalet [Taysir Dawji], 27.1.32, CZA J/1 – 205/1. Considerably more murky was the YC's relationship to the mufti, who according to Zionist informants in a number of reports throughout this file, was seen to be influential within the body, particularly through contact with its president. Bayan al-Hut, the only historian to have interviewed Rasim al-Khalidi, makes no mention of strong relations (or any relations, for that matter) between the mufti and the YC president, and her text generally shows a favorable view of the mufti and his actions.

⁵² Quoted in al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 259. A frequent Arab informant to Zionist intelligence, codenamed Ovadia, attributed the YC's statement to the mufti, who he said instructed Rasim al-Khalidi to call for the boycott and further to boycott Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani, one of the YC's own members, for his participation in the fair (Ovadia's information, 2.3.32, CZA J/1 – 205/1).

⁵³ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 259.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ovadia's information, 4.2.32, CZA J/1 – 205/1.

and other boycott organizers, including Ahmad Hilmi ‘Abd al-Baqi (an AE representative also on the National Fund board), Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, Mahmud al-Dajani, Yusuf Ziya al-Dajani, and Shukri al-Taji, at which a broader schema for managing the insufficiencies of local production of goods was drawn up. The assembled agreed to buy Syrian and Egyptian goods through a trading company to be established with capital from wealthy Palestinian investors that would be managed only by persons with known nationalist credentials.⁵⁶ Boycott efforts hit a major roadblock by May, however, when merchants banded together to resist the call to sever ties to Jews. Around 150 Arab businessmen advised the AE president, Musa Kazim Pasha, against the economic boycott of Jews.⁵⁷ Several other letters received by the president’s office from merchants threatened to flout the boycott openly.⁵⁸ Short of a catalyzing event and more rigorous enforcement, the national movement did not appear to have the capacity to actualize its hopes for organizing a more ethnically autarkic economy.

The Youth Congress struggled to give life to the moribund National Fund and turn it into an economic backstop for Palestinian causes, yet some in the AE were displeased with its joint management, and in particular with the idea that young radicals would be managing the movement’s purse-strings. Musa Kazim al-Husayni was reported by *Mir’at al-Sharq* to have left in protest from the 6 March 1932 session where the AE chose its members for the Fund’s board.⁵⁹ As a result of such misgivings, the AE decided within the month to unilaterally change the composition of the National Fund

⁵⁶ Ovadia’s information, 7.3.32, CZA J/1 – 205/1.

⁵⁷ Ovadia’s information, 30.5.32, CZA J/1 – 205/1.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 18, 308 (ft. 134).

board, augmenting the AE's share from four members to seven (opposite four from the YC) and thus effectively returning it to elite control.⁶⁰ 'Umar al-Bitar, 'Isa al-'Isa, and Jamal al-Husayni joined the new version of the board, which was to be headed, also by unilateral AE decision, by Musa Kazim Pasha, who was also added to its roster.

Irrespective of the contention over its management, members of the Youth Congress, led by Rasim al-Khalidi and Fuad Saba, devoted themselves to boosting National Fund collections. The YC convention in January produced a plan to rebrand the organ and regularize its social presence by creating an insignia for it and establishing donation points in towns throughout the country.⁶¹ Women's groups, mosques, churches, nationalist schools, associations and clubs were all enjoined to participate, to spread the Fund's propaganda, and to generate subscriptions and donations.⁶² It is difficult to ascertain exactly how much these activities were carried out, or what effect they had on receipts, but they certainly demonstrate a desire to surpass the older model of collections which resembled Ottoman tax farming and was thus unlikely to be found appealing or particularly trustworthy by the public.⁶³

When the board of the Fund resumed regular meetings in June, after significant delay following the AE's reconfiguration of its composition, an initiative was put forward to tie the drive for "national goods" to the National Fund. Under the schema, Arab producers were to donate one percent of profits from their enterprises to the National Fund, in return for being able to advertise their goods under the National Fund

⁶⁰ AE meeting minutes, undated (but between 6.3.32 and 3.4.32), ISA (65) 984 – 5p.

⁶¹ The national pact and basic law of the Congress of Arab Youth (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 730).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ See Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 14-17 for background on the National Fund.

label. The plan remained unrealized however, as the only business owner to contract with the Fund was ‘Aziz Miqati, a YC member on its board who owned a cigarette factory. Miqati was negligent in remitting the agreed share of proceeds to the Fund and the arrangement was terminated after only a year.⁶⁴

Under resumed elite stewardship, the National Fund struggled to remake itself. It continued to benefit from the energies of the Youth Congress members, its methods were retooled and did meet some minor successes (see below), but these efforts did not ultimately turn the organization into the dynamic venture which it was intended to be.

The Palestine Istiqlal Party: the vanguard model of mass politics

In mid-1932, months after the inauguration of the Youth Congress, a second, more immediately influential new force joined the field of Palestinian politics, in the form of the Istiqlal Party. The Istiqlal (independence) was the first Palestinian Arab political party formed along lines of ideology and not based on the structure of the *hamula*, family interest, or patronage. According to its founders, the purpose of the party was to rectify the course of the national movement: to rise above its factional schisms and its complacency, reassert the primacy of the independence struggle within a

⁶⁴ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 18. From the existing evidence it is unclear why the venture failed to garner support, though it can be observed that some merchants and businessmen developed a somewhat antagonistic relationship to the national movement, resenting its various calls for strikes, donations and, as per the aforementioned example, severing business links with Jews. Still, many merchants and businessmen were part of the movement and it remains to be sufficiently explained why they were not more assiduously enlisted into plans like the National Fund labeling scheme.

pan-Arab framework, and to direct that struggle against British rule, not Zionism, as the central obstacle to attaining liberation.⁶⁵

The party chose a vanguard model for itself and its politics, which meant that its ranks were quite small and its membership greatly restricted, numbering somewhere between 30-60 persons at peak.⁶⁶ However, its power came not in numbers, but in strategy, political innovation, and zeal, all of which were aimed principally at propelling mass-based resistance to British rule and its policies. The party had influence well beyond its size as well in part owing to the prominence of many of its members, some of whom had been part of the very organizations which they now ferociously critiqued. Of the Istiqlal's leadership committee, seven of eleven members had been delegates to the Seventh Palestinian Arab Congress in 1928, and five were members of the AE itself.⁶⁷ The party's creation thus represented a kind of high-placed defection from the AE and illustrated the latter's organizational decay and indirection.

The Palestine Istiqlal had great affinity to the Syrian party of the same name and its associate, *al-Fatat*, which were active a dozen years earlier during the time of Faysal's reign. Some of its founding members were veterans of these Syrian organizations and it seems that the key to apprehending the historical trajectory of the Palestine Istiqlal, and in particular its vanguardism, traces back to the experiences of its Syrian predecessors. Al-Fatat was an important early Arab nationalist organization that

⁶⁵ Subhi al-Khadra, "Why we formed the Arab Istiqlal Party in Palestine," *al-'Arab*, 27.8.32, reprinted in *Watha'iq al-haraka al-wataniyya al-Filastiniyya, 1918-1939: min awraq Akram Zu'aytir*, Bayan al-Hut and Akram Zu'aytir, eds. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 1984), p. 363-64.

⁶⁶ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 137.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 150. Subhi al-Khadra, 'Izzat Darwaza, and 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi had all been members of the AE's office or secretariat as well, making them especially intimate with the affairs of their erstwhile political home, and their loss that much more telling about the AE's status.

became a vital pillar of support for the Faysali regime. The party began as a secret society before World War I and had the honor and prescience of being the first Arab organization to call for independence from the Ottoman empire. It allied with the Hashemite revolt which brought about Faysal's regime and for a time its record was studded with "fortuitous tactical choices." Throughout the period of these triumphs, James Gelvin suggests, it relied on secrecy, small numbers, and a conspiratorial mode of subterranean political agitation. Shortly after the first Arab republic's birth, the growth of al-Fatat caused consternation amongst its founders and leadership that "the tenuous commitment and low quality of those who were joining would impede the ability of the organization to set the agenda for the Arab government." The solution devised by its administrative committee was to create a conjoined body, the Arab Independence Party (*Hizb al-istiqlal al-'Arabi*) as a front group charged with propaganda and messaging functions which could "absorb the new, lower quality volunteers." The Syrian Istiqlal was quickly filled with contradictory personalities and self-seeking notables of varying persuasions that rendered it a dysfunctional fiasco and led to its marginalization by the very Faysali government which it was established in order to serve. It appears that many of its older hands no doubt had in mind avoiding the pitfalls of the first Istiqlal and emulating, through reliance on a small core of dedicated and reliable members, what they saw as a principal strength of al-Fatat.⁶⁸

The idea of forming a new party to reorient national politics in Palestine and revive the struggle for independence was in gestation for months before it was finally

⁶⁸ Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, p. 55-64, esp. 59-62. Quotes from p. 59 and 56. On overlapping members of the Syrian parties and the Palestine Istiqlal see: Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 76-78.

settled upon.⁶⁹ The wider context for the party's emergence was related to the creation of the National Pact in December 1931 and to planning underway at the time by a clutch of soon-to-be Istiqlal members and others for a pan-Arab Congress intended to boost efforts towards regional coordination on independence struggles.⁷⁰ Memoranda and notes were exchanged between the future party leaders in early 1932 and in mid-July the party was founded by 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi, 'Izzat Darwaza, Subhi al-Khadra, Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, Mu'in al-Madi, Fahmi al-'Abbushi, 'Ajaj Nuwayhid, Dr. Salim Salama, and Akram Zu'aytir.⁷¹ Several other prominent nationalist figures, such as Hamdi al-Husayni and Sami al-Sarraj, and known stalwarts like Mamduh al-Sukhn and Dr. Sidqi Milhis, were admitted soon thereafter.⁷² The membership mostly derived from elite family backgrounds, though some, such as Darwaza, were middle class.⁷³ Most were Palestinian by birth, but several members ('Ajaj Nuwayhid, Sami al-Sarraj, and, for some time, Shukri al-Quwatli) were from Lebanon or Syria and had come to reside in Palestine. Together, this band of Arab nationalists and renegade elites helped effect a strategic reorientation of the national struggle towards resistance to British rule.

The party's major innovation in political practice, as Bayan al-Hut observes, was to address itself to the Arab population, and not to British authorities in Palestine or

⁶⁹ Akram Zu'aytir credits Nabih al-'Azma, a political exile from Damascus and a veteran of Faysal's regime, with originating the call for creating the party (*Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 402). Al-'Azma had served as the chief of police in Aleppo under Amir Faysal (Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, p. 84).

⁷⁰ Matthews treats the plan for the congress in depth (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 117-119, 123-26, 131-32, 157-58). The concept animating the congress was the ultimate creation of a single, unified greater Arab state in the Levant and Iraq, ideally inclusive of all of the former Ottoman lands in the *mashriq* (the Arab East).

⁷¹ Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 402; 412.

⁷² Ibid., p. 415.

⁷³ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 265-73.

London.⁷⁴ Rather than petitioning the colonial rulers as the elite organs of the movement had fruitlessly done for over a decade, the Istiqlal operated on the premise that mass mobilization was key to the national struggle. To reenergize the independence movement the party aimed to stir up nationalist sentiment and infuse Palestinian politics with a pan-Arabist spirit that would propel the national movement to confront colonial rule head-on. Its focus was on the cultivation of public opinion (*al-ra'i al-'am*) and rallying the Arab population, and with them the national leadership, into a new posture of militant resistance towards the British. As 'Izzat Darwaza argued, public opinion was the weapon of the weak – the primary tool of which the Palestinians could avail themselves in their uphill struggle – but one with great promise.⁷⁵ To this end, the party initiated an action plan in August which centered on convening public meetings, festivals and commemorations through which Istiqlalist politics could be disseminated and received in a mass format.⁷⁶ As Zu'aytir straightforwardly explained: “at them we will shake [*nahizz*] the patriotic spirit. We will explain our principles. We'll call for serious struggle. We set an example through our operations. We'll challenge the authorities, and our slogan will be: 'England is the root of the illness, and the basis of all disaster.’”⁷⁷ Completing the circle, public exhibitions of nationalist sentiment would be complemented by a skillful and highly self-conscious use of the press. Through these media – public gatherings and the press – the Istiqlal would tap the already existing revulsion towards British rule and forge a discourse which recentered the quest for

⁷⁴ *Al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 274.

⁷⁵ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 141.

⁷⁶ Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 415.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

independence while enjoining the public to see that its sufferings were tied to the colonial yoke, and that only forthright action could rescue the nation from the perils of colonial settlement, dissolution, and expulsion.

The endeavor to bring about an uncompromising politics in the independence struggle inevitably clashed with the diplomatic strategy of the elite leadership, and moreover with the style and the form of elite politics. As Matthews writes, the party was “part of a conscious transition from the secretive politics of notables to mass politics.”⁷⁸ The politics of persuasion through personal ties and cordial relations – the method at the heart of the idealized model of notable politics still alive and represented in the AE – had not served the national cause well, as even its adherents admitted. Furthermore, the atmosphere in elite circles had long grown poisonous, rent by factional rivalries which damaged national politics and drained precious energy from the pursuit of independence and an end to the dual colonial regime. In its inaugural proclamation to the Arab community, the party was unsparing in its critique of the factionalist malaise.⁷⁹ Though the Istiqlal’s unflinching assault on the reigning complacency and self-interest among the political elite was not well-received by those under scrutiny, the intention was not to jettison them, but to corral them and bring them onboard. The orchestration of public opinion was intent on pressuring the leadership to put aside its own differences,

⁷⁸ Matthews, *Confronting and Empire*, p. 135.

⁷⁹ ‘Izzat Darwaza suggests in his subsequent history *Hawla al-haraka al-‘Arabiyya al-haditha* that the statement was very general, even self-critical, in its ambit, holding its own members up for censure as well as those of the *majlisiyyin* and the *mu‘arada* (110). This interpretation is perhaps overly generous, as the Istiqlal founders distinguish themselves and their principles quite strongly in the statement, which is reproduced in: Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 412-13.

aspirations and feuds, and to prioritize (or to join) the battle to oppose British rule.⁸⁰

Rather quickly, however, many of the Istiqlal's attacks on the national leadership became savage, and the language around elite employment in the state, and those who were referred to as its "supporters" (*mumali'in*), became more caustic, to the point of associating them with colonial rule itself, and calling for requisite, unspecified action in response.⁸¹

For the party, the transition to a politics of collective struggle, one in which the masses of the population participated and through which an ideological hegemony could be crystallized that would include all ranks of society, was predicated not on mere numbers, but on the interpellation of new subjectivities. In Subhi al-Khadra's article explicating the reasons for the party's creation there is a weighty emphasis placed on contrasting the national upsurge that surrounded the Faysali period and that which followed. In al-Khadra's rendering, not only was the geographic framework of politics different before and after the overthrow of the first fleeting Arab republic, but the character and motivation of the national movement and of its activists were distinct: "If we return to the history of the greater Arab issue [greater Syrian unity], we find that the work put into it was built upon being entrusted [*al-taklif*] not [on] employment, and on voluntarism not elections."⁸² The fallen Arab nationalists and partisans from the earlier

⁸⁰ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 141.

⁸¹ See, for instance the text of a public resolution passed at the Istiqlal's first Balfour day commemoration in Nablus (2.11.32), reprinted in Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 450. The final line of the resolution suggests that distinguishing between postures amenable to the British and to Zionism is untenable: "They [those gathered] renew their indignation at land-brokers and sellers of land, and see that the time has come for this nation [*umma*] to take the path of punishing and fighting them, and to regard supporters of the English as supporters of Zionism."

⁸² Subhi al-Khadra, "Why we formed the Arab Istiqlal Party"

time, whether killed by the notorious final Ottoman governor of Syria, Jamal Pasha, or otherwise in “the various Arab uprisings,” gave of themselves freely, “inspired by their patriotic conscience [*biwahi min damirihim al-watani*].”⁸³ It was this spirit of self-sacrifice and voluntarism which the Istiqlalists saw sorely missing in the Palestinian national movement. And it was this model of the intrepid, selfless national subject – one unafraid to pay a price or even lay down their life for the sake of the nation – that the movement sought to propagate and inspire through its own program.

The national or patriotic consciousness at the heart of the Istiqlal mission surpassed questions of bravery and loyalty to encompass a way of inhabiting the world that was to be reflected in all aspects of personal and national life. As Zu‘aytir intoned in a piece written prior to the Istiqlal’s formation: “The Istiqlal principles and the wish for independence should be evident in all our actions: our protests, our work, our parties, our ethics, our dress, our press, and even our distinctly personal relations.”⁸⁴ The party’s activities and its *cri de coeur* were aimed at inspiring a certain consciousness, an ideal nationalist subjectivity, whose animation sprung from its cognizance of an unbreakable bond uniting it with the nation, and from the need to honor and serve the nation through fulfilling the charge of securing its natural independence and freedom. Only with such motivations and only with such a consciousness could the struggle gather force, and it was through such nationalist subjects that the movement could advance from frustration to action: “A member of al-Istiqlal is a person who objects to degradation and refuses to

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 86.

surrender in [the] face of difficulties and calamities. This person is better than a thousand people who call for independence but do nothing to achieve it.”⁸⁵

Consonant with the pan-Arab vision driving the party, the discord in the national movement in Palestine owed in no small measure, in this view, to the territory’s separation from Syria. *Bilad al-Sham*’s geographic dismemberment was followed in Palestine, which the party sometimes referred to as Southern Syria (*Suriya al-janubiya*), by a descent into parochialism, proceduralism, and personal ambition. The Arab cause became *mahali* (local or parochial), and was “affected to a great degree by personal disputes, family whims, and the power of elections.”⁸⁶ The severing of Palestine from Syria and the growth of factionalist politics were of a piece: as the *Shami* vision was eclipsed, and with it the grandest scale imagining of the national identity of Arabs in the *mashriq*, the older units of politics, family-based groupings, returned to the fore. That is, as nationalist and Arabist sentiments were saddled with the borders imposed in the Levantine Mandates, they became inherently more provincial and more localized, directed at the colonial states and European metropolises which replaced the Ottoman empire. In the pan-Syrian imaginary of the Istiqlal party, this diminishment of the *true* national identity of the Arabs, with its promise of a new independent political future, allowed for a recrudescence of the local units of rule (the notable families), complete with their familiar methods and proclivities (rivalries and jealousies), that were characteristic of an older imperial order. The families in turn either carried on with their

⁸⁵ Ibid, from the same quoted article.

⁸⁶ Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 412. Zu‘aytir evidently had a hand in drafting the Istiqlal’s proclamation, as this exact phrasing appears in the latter, along with a number of other passages appearing earlier in his diary.

preoccupations, irrespective of nationalist agendas, or acted in a manner to utilize nationalist sentiment as a new rubric for the prosecution of familial politics.⁸⁷

The organization of politics according to family interests and loyalties was the antithesis of the Istiqlal's notion of individual subjectivity as the ideal unit of a zealous national community and movement. While the continuation of notable politics, or that organized around corporate family groups, signaled the lack of dedicated national consciousness of those leading the national movement. The importation of family politics into the national sphere via elections within the national associations effectively recreated the divided map of family politics within the national movement's organs. Instead of creating unity, the family model within politics sowed disunity and a lack of "homogeneity" (*tajanus*) or uniformity. Devoid of a national consensus the constituent groups of elite politics and the national associations were "prey to different disputes and conflicting factors." Add to this the elites' habit of fraternizing with those in power and seeking to cultivate the personal ties so essential to notable politics and it was little surprise to see national leaders, as al-Khadra acerbically penned, "deep asleep until awoken by an invitation from the High Commissioner."⁸⁸

In their approach to the national organizations the Istiqlal echoed aspects of the popular discursive field during the tumultuous period of Faysal's rule in Syria.⁸⁹ In his study of the Faysali era, Gelvin demonstrates that indigenous media discourses offered several different narrative foci, but perhaps most strikingly, split between giving

⁸⁷ This point is developed extensively by Ilan Pappé in "From the 'Politics of Notables'" and *The Rise and Fall*.

⁸⁸ Subhi al-Khadra, "Why we formed the Arab Istiqlal Party"

⁸⁹ There is some historical irony in this, owing to the important posts held by many Palestine Istiqlalists under Faysal and to their great support for his regime.

precedence either to the new Arab king and his regime or to the nation and its corporeal representation as a social body. The gap between these two concentrations loosely denoted the divide between elite and popular constituencies. Elite investments in the state project under Faysal's hand led its proponents in the media to foreground Faysal, his retinue, and state functionaries as the incarnations of an Arab nationalist success and as the beating heart of the national project itself. Popular discourses, as Gelvin assesses them, were less openly laudatory of Amir Faysal and the fledgling state, and their representations of the political reality of Syria offer a more nuanced representation of "the nation" as comprised of different social strata and as non-homologous with the head of state and the state apparatus.⁹⁰

Without effacing the points of difference between the Faysali period and the stateless condition of the Palestinian national movement over a decade later, it is possible to observe a similarity in the treatment of national leaders, politicians, and the key movement institutions. Where the AE and its members often saw themselves not only as leaders of the nation, but as its embodiment and its self-representation in organizational form – indeed this was the AE's ostensible original purpose as the executive of the Palestinian Arab National Congresses – the Istiqlal drew a distinction between the nation and the national leadership and called attention to the growing drift and lack of congruence and alignment between them. In rearticulating the national question, and in revisiting the national movement's quandary in Palestine, the party suggested that the national movement had gone astray, with the AE presuming its

⁹⁰ Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, p. 141-146.

correlation with the nation while in actuality its members substituted factional and personal interests for those of the nation as a whole. In this diminished context the Istiqlal sought to bring the nation back to the center of discursive focus and nationalist praxis. Instead of assuming that the national leadership functioned as an organic representative of the nation and its will, they sought to reframe relations between the movement and the Arab community (regarded as a nation) such that the movement would be recognized as the servant of the nation and as the agency seeking the nation's freedom. As Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim put it during the Istiqlal's first commemoration of Balfour day: "The Istiqlal party is taking a new path and returning to the nation its [position of] supremacy [*wa yurajji 'ila al-umma sahibat al-kalima al-'ulya*]." ⁹¹ The nation and its woes, not the national leadership, was to be the central protagonist of national narrative. While the Istiqlal declared themselves to be a band of men dedicated to principle and not to ulterior interests (and hence were not entirely removed from putting themselves forward as model nationalists), their intent was certainly to regenerate energy and momentum within nationalist organizing and the community at large, and to rescue the independence struggle from the consuming dramas of familial imbroglios and notable politics. It was with these goals in mind that they first embarked on their program of nationalist agitation through public gatherings and media activism. ⁹²

As a means to broadcast its political vision while challenging the remove of elite politics from the public, the Istiqlal chose to convoke and participate in a series of mass

⁹¹ Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 449.

⁹² In this paragraph I am making general reference to the two statements referred to already above, the party's proclamation and the additional explanatory piece by Subhi al-Khadra.

assemblies. As ‘Ajaj Nuwayhid notes in his memoirs, the party saw public assemblies, such as festivals and commemorations, as a key venue for the stimulation of mass sentiment, and in his judgment it was through these assemblies that it made its strongest impression on the population.⁹³ Commemorations of Balfour Day (2 November), the British capture of Jerusalem (9 December), the hangings of Arab nationalists and activists by Jamal Pasha (6 May), and other pivotal historical events had the power to touch “the people’s psyches” (*nufus al-sha‘b*).⁹⁴ In its hands commemoration and memory became sites for rallying the public to the dangers and necessities of the present via unearthing Arab history in its past struggles, glories and setbacks.

At festivals and other types of public gatherings audiences were not just exposed to speeches by political activists, but also to literary figures, poets, Muslim scholars, and other intellectuals, who lent breadth and eminence to the message of the Istiqlal.⁹⁵ Speakers articulated understandings of identity and history in which the Arabs were seen as a proud and accomplished people with settled rights in the Levant; in part through the act of warding off invaders the Arabs had sealed their possession of the region in whose lands were buried generations upon generations of forebears. Such events drew large crowds at points and news of their occurrence also spread far and wide through newspaper coverage, including excerpts or transcripts of speeches.

The party’s first public event took place on 27 August 1932, when it and other organizers, including the YMMA, convened a commemoration of the battle of Hittin, the

⁹³ ‘Ajaj Nuwayhid, *Sittun ‘aman ma‘a al-qafila al-‘Arabiyya*, prepared by Bayan N. al-Hut (Beirut: Dar al-Istiqlal li-l-dirasat wa-l-nashr, 1993), p. 171.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid. Nuwayhid notes this in particular in relation to festivals hosted by the party.

1187 encounter in which Salah al-Din al-Ayubi led Muslim forces to victory over the Crusaders in Palestine, thereby returning the territory to Muslim rule. Convened shortly after the party's unveiling, the event served as an auspicious debut for the Istiqlal. Held on the premises of an Islamic school in Haifa, it was attended by thousands of onlookers and included esteemed guests such as Rashid Rida, the noted and influential *salafi* scholar from Egypt, and Khayr al-Din al-Zirikli, a famous Syrian poet and journalist. Most of the proceedings made relatively oblique but telling references to the national struggle in Palestine. 'Izzat Darwaza argued that the current situation was but another episode in a longer struggle between "East" and "West," of which the Crusades were an earlier iteration. Rashid Rida held forth that the present danger facing Muslims from European imperialism was worse than during the Crusades, and that its quelling would correspondingly require more from them than what it took to repel the Crusaders. He also cautioned against splitting the religious and national aspects of Arab Muslim identity, seeking instead their consanguinity. When Akram Zu'aytir took the stage he turned to directly vocalize the party's political line that "Zionism is a branch and the Mandate the root" of the injustice suffered by Palestinians, before going on to remind his audience, as he would do continuously and with considerable flourish in his speeches and articles, of the inextinguishable power of the colonized to resist, and to do so through self-sacrifice for the sake of the nation.⁹⁶ Featuring poems and songs as well as political and religious discourse, the Hittin celebration presented the Istiqlal as a

⁹⁶ On this occasion Zu'aytir went so far as to laud martyrdom: "... if we are banned from everything in this existence [*al-kawn*], if we are forbidden from the air we breathe and the food we eat, and if the pens are crushed and tongues tied, our solace will be that there is no power in the world, however tyrannical and despotic, that is able to ban us from the blessing of martyrdom for the nation [*fi sabil al-watan*] and the virtue of sacrifice for honor" (*Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 421).

cultured, self-aware, and proud entrant to Palestinian politics, astute in balancing overt political address with enduring themes of historical identity, and willing, unlike the established leadership, to advocate confronting colonial rule.⁹⁷

Over the subsequent months in 1932 and into at least mid-1933 the Istiqlal hosted forums similar to that commemorating the battle of Hittin. Its subsequent public assemblies, such as on Balfour day in 1932, were more expressly oriented towards the present plight of the Palestinians, while continuing to deploy older idioms of local identity. The attendance at these events was not always so massive as at the Hittin rally, though several other events organized by the Istiqlal succeeded in drawing substantial crowds in the hundreds or the thousands.⁹⁸ Whether with a larger or smaller audience, the method was essentially continuous: practices of commemoration became an organizing tool for the party. As such, the party's utilization of the mass assembly as a format represented an innovation in Palestinian politics wherein many of the tactics used at Nablus in July and August 1931 to jar the national movement back into a higher state of activity were consciously refined and given regular deployment. The aim in 1932 and 1933 was much the same, yet with a more focused strategic analysis of the need to target the British.

The Istiqlal also gained stature and influence through its links with youth. The party is often in fact credited with being the driving force behind the development of the

⁹⁷ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 153; Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 416-422 – quotes from p. 419, 420.

⁹⁸ Matthews speculates that later turn-outs could have been lower because of the overtly political character of the assemblies and their agenda (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 153), as opposed to forums in which the contemporary was blended with other elements of collective memory and social experience.

youth trend and independent, radical youth associations in general.⁹⁹ Such a judgment is an oversimplification of the broader social and political transformations affecting youth as a whole. The party's intellectual influence on the younger generation in Palestine was highly important yet difficult to precisely gauge, while organizationally its closest ties were with the YMMA and various independent scouting troops. The party clearly saw promise in youth organizing and many of its members lent a significant amount of attention to the activity, working directly with scouts and the YMMA or doing press work encouraging the youth trend.¹⁰⁰ Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, Hamdi al-Husayni, Akram Zu'aytir, 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi, and 'Izzat Darwaza were directly involved with the YMMA from its origins in Palestine, as was Shaykh 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam.¹⁰¹ For most of the period between 1928 and late 1935 Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim or Shaykh al-Qassam operated as the Haifa branch's president.¹⁰² After the branch closures in the Southern district in 1930 (discussed in chapter 1), the center of gravity inside the YMMA moved northwards, into the Istiqlal's territorial strongholds.¹⁰³ The party also built alliances with or took charge of numerous scouting groups throughout the country, including the

⁹⁹ Porath writes that the YMMA and scouts in general "gradually... [came] under the influence of this Party" (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 125-26). Matthews pays more attention to the YMMAs than the Youth Congress, no doubt in part owing to their relations with the Istiqlal party (see below). Subsequently he accurately maintains that the ascent of youth within the national movement in the years preceding the revolt was not attributable to any one faction or party (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 212; 230), yet on several occasions depicts the Istiqlal as the intellectual engine and inspiration for youth or the Youth Congress (185; 230). Shai Lachman, in by far the most tendentious terms, sees youth (and workers) as "exploited" and manipulated by the Istiqlal ("Arab rebellion and terrorism in Palestine 1929-39: the case of Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam and his movement" in Sylvia Haim and Elie Kedourie, eds., *Zionism and Arabism in Palestine and Israel* (Totowa, NJ: Frank Cass, 1982), p. 54; 74).

¹⁰⁰ 'Ajaj Nuwayhid refers to "the new generation which grew up in the age of the Mandate" as the Istiqlal party's focus (*Sittun 'aman*, p. 166).

¹⁰¹ The above all appear on the rosters of the YMMA in its early years, assembled by al-Hut (*al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 861-63).

¹⁰² Records of the branch: ISA (25) – 871/61/141m; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 863.

¹⁰³ Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 184. Arnon-Ohana notes that the Jerusalem branch was closed, but other sources do not indicate this.

Jaffa Boy Scouts (under Hashim al-Sabi', a party member), the 'Umar al-Faruq scouts in Gaza (attached to the local YMMA), the Khalid Ibn al-Walid troop in Nablus (attached to the Nablus Athletic Union run by party member Mamduh al-Sukhn), a troop at Qalqilya (from August 1933, under party member and newspaperman Ibrahim al-Shanti), and *Kashshaf al-sahra* (Desert Scouts - under 'Atif Nurallah) in the Haifa area.¹⁰⁴

Almost right from its founding, the Istiqlal became a leading force within the YMMA, which served as a platform for it to organize among youth, spread the Istiqlalist message, and stimulate more assertive and central roles for youth within the national movement. The day after the Istiqlal party's public debut, the YMMA convoked its annual conference with Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim serving as president. One of the measures adopted at the conference was support for centralizing the organization and bringing about greater unity between its chapters. A committee was created to advance the centralization plank, and al-Hajj Ibrahim chaired it.¹⁰⁵ The drive to unify the association was complemented by an extensive organizing push, especially in the north, which produced many new local chapters in villages as well as the principal towns.¹⁰⁶ At the close of 1931 there were 12 local chapters; by March 1933 there were 30, and by

¹⁰⁴ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 126; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 184. 'Atif Nurallah was a YC member, and *Kashshaf al-sahra* was aligned to the Youth Congress in June 1932 before the Istiqlal arrived on the scene. Nonetheless, some in the Haifa YMMA were members of the troop, illustrating that on occasion the emerging youth formations commingled with one another. In other cases this was prevented by the statutes of associations which rejected multiple simultaneous memberships.

¹⁰⁵ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 153.

¹⁰⁶ CID, 2.6.33, periodical appreciation summary 16/33, PRO – FO 371/16926.

June of the same year the association counted 39 chapters in all.¹⁰⁷ This expansion was credited by the CID to the efforts of al-Hajj Ibrahim and Subhi al-Khadra, who had become a prominent member of the Acre YMMA and an energetic youth organizer.¹⁰⁸ The same report contended that “The increased interest of Arabs in sports and in independent Boy Scouts troops, as is witnessed in their frequent excursions and displays, with political manifestations, is due to the spirit which the party is spreading.”¹⁰⁹ The police saw within the party a “dangerous element who hold revolutionary views,” hence they regarded its position among youth in general and its association with the YMMA in particular as troubling.¹¹⁰ At a meeting of the YMMA’s executive on 10 February 1933, the administration’s fears appear to have been confirmed, as the Istiqlal members present reached consensus that the party should take charge of the association and direct it.¹¹¹

The unification and expansion of the YMMA at the hands of Istiqlal party members was a considerable accomplishment and not attained without some difficulty. It will be recalled that in June 1930 the colonial state barred government employees from affiliation with the YMMA, owing to the society’s political involvements before and after the 1929 events. By the time of the Istiqlal’s formation, but before the consolidation of its position within the YMMA, the state regarded the society with some equivocation. The Acre chapter, which the government regarded as beset by factional

¹⁰⁷ Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 183.

¹⁰⁸ CID, 18.2.33, periodical appreciation summary 6/33, PRO – FO 371/16926. Al-Khadra was seen as an old hand within the Acre chapter, though his membership in it dates to sometime after 1930. See the remains of the Acre chapter file: ISA (27) – 5000/16m, and below.

¹⁰⁹ CID, 18.2.33, periodical appreciation summary 6/33, PRO – FO 371/16926.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ CID, 28.2.33, periodical appreciation summary 7/33, PRO – FO 371/16926. Somewhat oddly this report fails to make clear whether this suggestion met general agreement in the executive, though the implication from its inclusion as relevant news is that it did.

divisions between what it perceived to be *majlisi* and Opposition-affiliated groups, was closed in September 1932.¹¹² Political division within the chapter had led to physical assaults and a disputed election, allowing the government to shutter it on the grounds that it was a drain on public resources and “a serious source of danger to public security.”¹¹³ Part of the rationale behind the decision, however, concerned the chapter’s political activities, such as its commemoration of the 1929-related executions, which were seen as distasteful, if not threatening, by the state.¹¹⁴ In Gaza, on the other hand, the YMMA branch was reopened in late 1932. Its closure in 1930 had followed the government’s objection to its activities, and to the roles of two of its leading members, Hamdi al-Husayni and Khudr al-Ja‘farawi.¹¹⁵ When the branch was permitted to reopen, Hamdi Effendi became its president and al-Ja‘farawi its secretary, while Gazan Istiqlalists joined its ranks. The Istiqlal was thus able to take charge of one reopened YMMA branch while the government closed another that had been a base for one of its key youth organizers.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Much of the state correspondence in ISA (27) – 5000/16m voices this assessment. However, the factionalist reading is somewhat questionable, as the “old” party within the association was fingered as headed by Subhi al-Khadra, whose interests were aligned with the Istiqlal (though he was also part of the *waqf* administration for the Northern district at the time: chart of SMC employees, 1933, CZA S25 – 22403). The Opposition grouping within the branch was led by Ahmad al-Shuqayri, son of the influential Acre notable As‘ad al-Shuqayri.

¹¹³ District officer (Bawarshi) to Assistant District Commissioner (ADC), 28.9.32, ISA (27) – 5000/16m. The society’s final closure was approved at: Acting District Commissioner to ADC, 12.10.32, *ibid*.

¹¹⁴ District officer (Bawarshi) to ADC, 28.9.32, ISA (27) – 5000/16m.

¹¹⁵ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 155.

¹¹⁶ Local administrations had the power, in keeping with the Ottoman law of associations and other legal strictures, to approve or close branches of Arab organizations. The disparate results of these two decisions on YMMA chapters, somewhat puzzling when taken together, may have had to do with different figures presiding in the respective district administrations at the time and their own assessments of legal claims and potential threats to local “order.”

The Istiqlal's success with youth organizing, most visible in its relations with the YMMA, reveals both the party's greatest strengths and its Achilles' heel. Its members understood that youth as a social force offered tremendous potential and were, under certain conditions, given to types of idealism and vigor often absent in the older generation of notable leaders. With the perspective of experience from the days of *al-Fatat* and the Syrian Istiqlal and with an ear to the ground amongst a younger subset of politicized youth in Palestine, represented in the party by figures such as Akram Zu'aytir (b. 1909), Hashim al-Sabi' (b. 1912), George Mansur (b. 1905), and Hamdi al-Husayni (b. 1899),¹¹⁷ the party recognized that youth was a key constituency in the struggle to reshape the national movement, its goals, and its mode of operations. The party's abiding interest in generating a mass movement of resistance to colonialism and imperial rule and its perspicacious reading of the contours of local political geography led it to focus significantly on youth organizing, gaining influence within the YMMA, augmenting it through branch development, and forging links with various scout troops. Its success with youth, as represented in these developments, demonstrates the party's political acuity and its great ability to build the constituency for its political message organizationally.

It is quite ironic that this savvy in building a radicalized political constituency for its agenda was paired with an antithetical organizational model for the party itself. While outwardly the party sought to make waves through its uncompromising nationalist discourse and public assemblies, to seed its members and their writings throughout the

¹¹⁷ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 268-72.

print media, and to stoke the youth trend into revolt against elite quietism and complacency, its internal structure was inherently limited. Its tightly controlled membership allowed for great “homogeneity” (*tajanus*) in ideology, disposition, and political messaging, but left the organization with only three small branches and no means of building the mass anti-colonial movement it sought other than through proxies. Despite its strong influence with the YMMA, the party did not grow its own independent organizational capacity. It was not intent on being a mass party itself, or interested in developing a vibrant branch network through which to build an alternative to the moribund MCAs and the AE.

The party’s vanguardism led it to rely on other means to further its aims, principally the use of the public sphere. Its model for raising a revolutionary movement relied on the active development of a youth base, but at least equally if not more so, on rousing nationalist discourse and a searing critique of British colonialism and the insufficiencies of the notable-led national organs. As such, the authors of this discourse saw themselves as the town criers of the nation, awakening it to the true nature of its situation under the dual yoke and to the danger of following an inept and dated leadership. They deployed a fiery and penetrating rhetoric which consistently homed in on the contradictions of British fealty to Zionism and colonial disinterest in the will and communal integrity of the Arab majority, while circling back to skewer the Arab leadership’s false hopes of securing even a modicum of the national demands. Laced with moving intonations of the greatness and glory of Arab history and the richness of Arab culture, identity, and links to the lands of the “Arab world” and Palestine, the

party's discourse interpellated the nation, assembling its prior non-national history and present adversities into the genetic teleology of essential national being, somnambulance, and final "awakening." The conundrum of dual colonization was presented as one of consciousness, or one in which the key to salvation lay through consciousness and the development of the proper national subjectivity. The resolution of the freedom struggle, as the activists of the Istiqlal envisioned, lay in self-awareness and political consciousness – the rest of the course to national liberation would follow if these could be distilled and activated. Their powers, unleashed, would issue via the familiar themes of Istiqlalist discourse, in courage, sacrifice (*tadhiya*) and self-sacrifice (*fida'*), leading to victory over the imperialists and colonialism.

The highly ideological vision which the Istiqlal brought to the national struggle, and the zeal with which its proponents acted, had a great effect on the already leery Arab public, which had distanced itself from its leadership and signaled its repulsion at the effects of British rule in 1929. The charged environment which the Istiqlal helped to stoke culminated in its signature campaign for non-cooperation with the British authorities and the colonial state (treated below) and helped spur a growing spirit of resistance, especially among youth. Somewhat paradoxically however, because of its vanguardism the party was too limited in its own manpower to conduct or directly lead the wide-scale effective action against the Mandate for which it strove.¹¹⁸ The dynamic discourse which they brought to Palestinian politics continued to inform public opinion long after the party met its premature organizational demise and ceased holding

¹¹⁸ Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 225.

functions and meetings in late 1933. As well, its activists continued to be deeply involved in shaping the development of an increasingly popular, confrontational anti-colonial politics before and after the commencement of the Great Revolt.

Restructuring the Youth Congress

The reimposition of elite authority that was manifest in the scuttling of youth control of the National Fund was extended six months later in September 1932 when Rasim al-Khalidi was ousted from the presidency of the YC. In Rasim Effendi's short tenure he brought vigor to many of the organization's pursuits. His considerable efforts at fundraising on behalf of the National Fund were noted early on in the press.¹¹⁹ Rasim al-Khalidi and Fuad Saba personally traveled throughout the towns and villages of the country "distributing registers for donations and explaining to countrymen the importance of the *qirsh* project."¹²⁰ Despite the Fund's lackluster record, which likely owed as much to the impoverishment of the Arab population as it did to negative perceptions of the AE's relationship to the Fund, their exertions did not go unrewarded, and reportedly they were able on a single serendipitous day to raise an impressive £P 2000.¹²¹ This sum, massive by the standards of the time, was never again matched.

Rasim Effendi was also instrumental in establishing the branch network, and utilized the

¹¹⁹ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 83-84, and ft. 85, p. 148.

¹²⁰ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 258.

¹²¹ Ibid. Al-Hut does not cite a source for this relatively Herculean achievement, which is not mentioned in any other text of which I am aware.

YC as a forum to host numerous events to collect relief monies for peasants, prisoners, and struggling laborers.¹²²

Despite these accomplishments Rasim al-Khalidi resigned only nine months after being elected as president of the YC. By his own account, he was subjected to pressure from elites to take the organization in a direction contrary to “the effectiveness [fa ‘iliyya] of youth.”¹²³ The activist spirit and performance of the organization under Rasim Effendi was not the only cause for elite disquiet. As Kabha elaborates, his character and disposition as an educated youth who rejected the preeminence of family loyalties and believed in youth as a generative element of social change contributed to elite opposition to his stewardship of the YC.¹²⁴ In this light the motivations behind the pressures which he consequently faced appear with greater clarity. The YC was established to be an organ of the AE and to harness youth and maintain their subordination, politically and otherwise. In spite of the independent spirit of the inaugural convention and the relative autonomy of the organization, the AE proved unwilling to cede the field to younger, more strident and less conciliatory activists, and al-Khalidi’s departure demonstrated the established leadership’s perseverance in seeking to maintain its grip on authority.¹²⁵

¹²² Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 84. The first branches were opened at Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Lydda, and Ramle in March and April, while efforts to open a branch at Gaza around the same time were stymied by the authorities since several key activists making the application for the chapter had been involved with the previously closed YMMA branch there (Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 120-22 and ft. 85).

¹²³ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 260. The phrase is al-Hut’s, not Rasim Effendi’s.

¹²⁴ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 84.

¹²⁵ Matthews argues contrary to the tenor of accounts by al-Hut and Kabha, depicting Rasim al-Khalidi as career-oriented as well as quietist (see above), noting that he took a job in the state bureaucracy after resigning the YC (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 120). This explanation suits Matthews’s overarching narrative on the weaknesses of the YC, that it was both largely an elite appendage of the Husaynis and

The exit of the first president of the YC also appears to have been related to his background as a scion of a prominent urban family.¹²⁶ Much like the contention at the first Congress of Youth over the relative eclipse of rural elements from representation and from the executive, Rasim al-Khalidi's presidency exemplified the image of urban dominance over the rural population and had no real backing in the countryside. When al-Khalidi resigned at a meeting of the YC executive, the organization elected both a new president and a new executive wing.¹²⁷ Ya'qub al-Ghusayn, the son of a wealthy former Ottoman official, Tawfiq al-Ghusayn, from Wadi Hanin in the Ramle area, was chosen as president. The al-Ghusayns were among the richest families in Palestine, and Tawfiq Pasha had invested profitably in citriculture.¹²⁸ The rural background of the new president, though certainly of notable stature, stood in sharp contrast to his predecessor. The family's wealth was an important resource that the YC earned in selecting Ya'qub, and in future years he was not hesitant to personally bankroll the organization's activities to a great degree.

Unlike the first YC president, Ya'qub Effendi had a background in youth organizing. He was head of the local YMMA chapter at Ramle and had standing among

more representative of those educated youth who were still interested in employment in the colonial state, and thus more tepid or conflicted in their anti-colonialism than the Istiqlal party (p. 175, 185). However, al-Khalidi's resignation from the presidency did not prevent him from remaining active in the national movement, most visibly by serving on the National Fund board after its September 1932 reorganization (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 877). His state employment may also have lent assistance to the movement, though this matter is unclear. He was hired by the Cooperatives division of the Lands Department, and was noted in a 1935 Zionist report as carrying out survey work on land sales to Jews in the Jerusalem region, possibly in connection with attempts to limit land transfers (Arab Bureau information, 4.3.35, CZA S/25 – 22224). Irrespective of his employment after his stepping down from the YC presidency, Matthews's sidestepping of al-Khalidi's work for the organization and his dismissal of al-Khalidi as a careerist unduly limits our understanding of the YC and its first president.

¹²⁶ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 84.

¹²⁷ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 154.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

the scouts attached to the organization. He was also a founder of the local YC chapter. His ambition to a greater role in politics was commonly noted and upon his election as president of the YC he poured his energies and resources into it and demonstrated his capacity as an able organizer.¹²⁹

Al-Ghusayn's ascent in the YC has often been seen as confirming the organization's orbit of the Husaynis.¹³⁰ His relationship with the mufti and with certain members of the *majlisi* camp has been adduced as proof of this orientation, as well as, for Matthews, the YC's lukewarm response to the Istiqlal party's non-cooperation campaign, which the Husaynis helped stonewall.¹³¹ Yet this reading flattens the complexity and shifts in the YC president's negotiation of the factional split among elites and generally and erroneously equates his own positions with those of the organization as a whole. Within a year, while the mufti was out of the country, the YC would play a leading role in producing the first direct clashes between the national movement and the British, which al-Hajj Amin then took pains to stifle (see below). Such an occurrence, representing an open turn towards confrontation with the colonial authorities, was anathema to the mufti, who forestalled national opposition to British rule (as opposed to British policies, which he regularly opposed) for as long as

¹²⁹ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 154. Al-Ghusayn was elected head of the YMMA chapter in October 1930 (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 863).

¹³⁰ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 314; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 154; Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 84. In contrast, Porath (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 122) is agnostic on al-Ghusayn, while Arnon-Ohana (*Herev mi-bayit*, p. 187) sees him as a neutral figure.

¹³¹ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 154, 175, 185. Matthews also reads far too much into al-Ghusayn's membership and activities within the Islamic Conference (p. 154, 296 (ft. 95)), though he offers no similar reading of many Istiqlalists' participation in the same.

possible.¹³² While this is the most dramatic example of its type, disjuncture was a regular feature of the relationship between the YC and the Husayni camp: the YC operated in alliance with the *majlisi* faction at points, and at others seemed to follow its own course, including in challenging the positions of the *majlisi* leadership.¹³³

The YC witnessed a flurry of activity after its September reorganization. A week after the new executive took charge, the society proclaimed its dedication of a National Fund day in the Palestinian press, calling on Arabs to fulfill their obligations and donate what they could to the fund, which would funnel that money directly to saving national lands from “the coveters.”¹³⁴ Less than a month later, on 11 October, the executive of the National Fund announced that all of its collections would henceforth be spent solely on land purchasing and that a company was being created expressly for the purpose.¹³⁵ The YC also issued a spate of statements in October protesting British policies and legislation, including the new press law (which advanced powers of censorship) and the state of Arab education and educational opportunities under the Mandate.¹³⁶

¹³² Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, p. 50-64. In this case too the factionalist paradigm precludes a finer view which would reveal internal differences within the Husayni camp. Jamal Effendi appears from the historical record to have been less averse to prompting a serious confrontation with the British than the mufti. Indeed in its immediate aftermath he sounded very menacing notes threatening to fight the British as the national movement did Zionism, though he quickly changed his tune. This episode is detailed below.

¹³³ This dynamic is also not that unlike the later accommodation of Istiqlalists with the mufti.

¹³⁴ Announcement of National Fund day in the national press, (published in *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*, 16.9.32) in 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Kayyali, ed., *Watha'iq al-muqawama al-Filasitniyya didd al-ihtilal al-Baritani wa-l-Sahyuniyya 1918-1939* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 1988), p. 265-66.

¹³⁵ Resolution of the National Fund to establish a company to save lands (published in *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*, 13.10.32), in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 268-69. Only two of the seven members present taking the decision were from the YC: Fuad Saba and 'Aziz Bey al-Miqati.

¹³⁶ Protest of the Youth Congress executive against the policy of spreading ignorance in Palestine, 4.10.32 (published in *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*, 6.10.32); Protest of the Palestinian Arab Youth Congress executive against the draft press law (published in *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*, 28.10.32); Communiqué of the First Palestinian Arab Youth Congress calling for a strike on the anniversary of the Balfour declaration

The tenor of these statements was not only caustic towards British policies, but unflinching in castigating British colonialism. In its declaration of National Fund day, the YC referred to colonialism (though without direct reference to the British) as one of the two “jackals” plaguing the country – Zionism of course being the other.¹³⁷ The statement for Balfour day, which was addressed to “the noble Arab nation” and not Mandate authorities, aimed to resuscitate the annual strike that the AE had sidestepped for the two previous years.¹³⁸ Its language reflected the existential fears of Palestinians. The Balfour declaration was a “sentence” served on the Palestinian people to “evacuation and being made homeless, wrongfully and hostilely.” The policy it underwrote was concerned “to eliminate a whole nation, in its entirety.”¹³⁹ The stridency of such an evaluation suggests that if elites had bet on replacing Rasim al-Khalidi and the YC executive with quieter and more pliable figures, they miscalculated. The call did not focus on Zionism, but on the Jewish National Home policy which sprang from the Balfour declaration, assigning responsibility squarely to the British for what its authors saw as the planned or at least anticipated annihilation of the Palestinians as a people, possessed of its ancestral homeland. In its assessment of the colonial plight of the Palestinians, the communiqué reads as an indication of the emergent orientation of

(published in *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*, 31.10.32), all reprinted in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 266-67; 269-70; 274.

¹³⁷ Announcement of National Fund day in the national press, in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 265.

¹³⁸ The annual strike was suspended in 1930 owing to the Passfield White Paper (see chapter 1), and in 1931 owing to the economic straits in which the Arabs found themselves (AE meeting minutes, 28.10.31, ISA (65) 984 – 5p).

¹³⁹ Communiqué of the First Palestinian Arab Youth Congress calling for a strike on the anniversary of the Balfour declaration in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 274.

the activist youth wing of the national movement, which would soon turn to invest its energies in direct challenges to British rule.

Towards a new strategy: the campaign for non-cooperation

As the AE struggled to restrain and put its stamp on the youth movement, the Istiqlalists presented the established leadership with another challenge, in the form of their advocacy of a campaign of non-cooperation with British authorities. The opening salvo in the Istiqlalists' venture came during a meeting of the AE on 9 September 1932. 'Izzat Darwaza motioned that the AE should oppose its members' participation in administrative boards advising the colonial state on a variety of matters (labor, industry, etc.). With backing from fellow Istiqlalists Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim and 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi, and from 'Isa al-Bandak of the YC, the AE approved Darwaza's resolution. 'Awni Bey subsequently resigned his position on the Roads Board two weeks later, but despite the resolution, there was little movement by other members to follow suit.¹⁴⁰

Though 'Awni Bey's resignation caused the High Commissioner some consternation, the latter was confident that he maintained the upper hand, especially as his closeness to both the mufti and the Opposition seemed to portend ill for a campaign of non-cooperation. In mid-September he wrote to the Colonial Office that "the Mufti and a number of Nashashibi party [sic] who support me will probably arrange that this resolution shall not be acted on." Nonetheless in November he argued that the establishment of a legislative council (a formal objective of policy since the 1930 White

¹⁴⁰ AE meeting minutes, 9.9.32, ISA (65) 984 – 5p; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 38; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 168-69.

Paper which the Colonial Office then froze in 1931) provided the best means of making an end-run around non-cooperation and the rise of radical forces among Palestinians.¹⁴¹

Sentiment in support of non-cooperation and civil disobedience spread in the final months of 1932. Though both notions had been raised earlier in 1931 (after the MacDonald letter and during the Jewish armories controversy respectively) by late 1932 pressure was building for the national movement to take new steps and find a new approach in its struggle. As the CID reported in mid-December, a larger shift seemed to be underway within the national movement away from what deputy commandant H.P. Rice called “policies of protestation and appeal” and toward “more practical steps” such as purchasing lands, promoting local Arab manufactures, and other often economically-inflected priorities.¹⁴² Echoing the High Commissioner’s apprehensions, the report concluded that “political sentiment” would continue to intensify unless the economic situation could be improved and political reform instituted.¹⁴³

The pursuit of a program of non-cooperation necessitated breaking the links between key sectors of society and the state which had been fostered by the British as a means of pacifying the population and facilitating the business of rule. As Matthews suggests, the campaign waged by the Istiqlal party for non-cooperation was aimed internally not only at elites, but at youth as well.¹⁴⁴ Educated youth from the middle and upper classes were accustomed, as noted in chapter 1, to seeking employment in the state. Among Arabs Christians held a disproportionate percentage of state jobs – a fact

¹⁴¹ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 168-69, quote from 168.

¹⁴² CID, 16.12.32, periodical appreciation summary 49/32, PRO – FO 371/16926.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 171-85.

which caused much discontent among some Muslim circles. Since at least the late 1920s Muslims made representations to the government, protesting the imbalance and seeking greater opportunities in the bureaucracy.¹⁴⁵ By the early 1930s this issue threatened to produce a sectarian rift and to derail, most visibly among youth, the sharpening focus on nationalist activism. In Jaffa a short-lived association called the Congress of Educated Muslim Youth was formed and pressed the case for balancing the proportions of Muslims and Christians in state service according to their relative weights in the population, while calling for the dismissal of British and Jewish officials and functionaries.¹⁴⁶ By contrast, the Gaza YMMA, under an Istiqlalist leadership, took the Congress of Educated Muslim Youth to task for undermining national unity in pitting Muslims and Christians against each other.¹⁴⁷ The AE concluded similarly that sectarian organizing and aims must be condemned.¹⁴⁸

The contention over state jobs reflected not only the class perquisites and aspirations of the educated, but also a concerted state strategy. Upon taking office, High Commissioner Wauchope commenced a charm offensive among Arabs, seeking to use

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 172.

¹⁴⁶ Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 170-71. For further on the society, see: ISA (2) 294 – 22m. Matthews cites another example of similar claims, also emanating from Jaffa, from a figure from the YC who was also a member of the Jaffa Muslim Youth Society, Dr. Khalil Abu al-‘Afiya (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 172-73).

¹⁴⁷ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 173.

¹⁴⁸ AE meeting minutes, 9.9.32, ISA (65) 984 – 5p. During discussion of the issue, Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim argued that the MCA network should be recomposed to send a clear signal against sectarianism. ‘Isa al-‘Isa contended that the matter dated back to the proselytizing conference in 1928 which had served as the inspiration for the YMMA’s founding, and to the supposition among Muslims, which he argued was incorrect, that Christians were supporters of the government. ‘Izzat Darwaza cautioned that the national movement and its discussion must remain above the jobs issue. The only member of the AE on record at the session as sympathetic to the young Muslim complainants was Sa‘id Darwish, a representative from Maliha west of Jerusalem, who made inflammatory allegations about Christians desiring to “enslave” Muslims. The resolution taken, proposed by ‘Isa al-‘Isa, called for government to hire only in-country, and to expel Westerners from state jobs.

the lures of association with the state, at official functions like parties and dinners, as well employment, to blunt nationalist activities.¹⁴⁹ ‘Izzat Darwaza referred to the High Commissioner’s use of state employment as a cooptation scheme, and believed it was intended to avert regionalization of the Palestine question and the threat this could present to Britain’s position in the Middle East.¹⁵⁰ At their public events and in their semi-official newspaper, *al-‘Arab*, edited by ‘Ajaj Nuwayhid, the Istiqlalists inveighed against consorting with British colonialism and currying favor.¹⁵¹ As well as attacking notables who used the state or contacts with the British for personal advancement, articles in *al-‘Arab* singled out the YMCA for its missionary character and urged Muslim state employees, who had been banned from association with the YMMA, to condemn the cultural and associational straitjacket into which they were pressed.¹⁵²

In December *al-Jami‘a al-‘Arabiyya* reflected the stiffening resolve on national questions, putting forward the proposition that if government failed to accede to Arab demands on immigration and land transfers it should be met with a campaign of civil disobedience.¹⁵³ Models of struggle from the Indian independence movement, typically imputed to Gandhi, had been batted around by figures in the Palestinian movement and

¹⁴⁹ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 173.

¹⁵⁰ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 91-92. Darwaza traced the origins of this approach to the events of 1929, but singled out HC Wauchope for special attention. However, given the creation of the SMC and the strategy of sectarian management (featuring significant religious autonomy for the Muslim community in Palestine), there is cause to see bureaucratic employment, as Matthews essentially argues, as the premier and original method for ruling the Arabs deployed by the British, as early as the onset of the occupation.

¹⁵¹ Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 448-49 (on Balfour day), 465 (15th anniversary of the occupation), 469 (communiqué against attending government functions); Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 174.

¹⁵² Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 174-75.

¹⁵³ CID, 16.12.32, periodical appreciation summary 49/32, PRO – FO 371/16926. Matthews notes that contrary to this official appreciation, the *majlisi* mouthpiece was circumspect on noncooperation (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 176).

in the press for a number of years and in 1931 had been a rhetorical touch-point during the armories controversy. Yet as Jamal al-Husayni pointed out in the AE discussion of the government boards, the “negative” policy adopted at the Nablus session had never been actualized.¹⁵⁴ By February 1933 the pressure to formulate an effective stance on immigration and land sales, driven foremost by the Istiqlal party, caused the AE to call a special session on the 24th.¹⁵⁵

The AE tried to close the session on 24 February 1933 to the public, but interest in the agenda drove onlookers to force their way into the venue. AE members were in a minority at the meeting, which also featured Youth Congress representatives who had been invited. The quarrelsome proceedings evoked little unity among the politicians, who themselves were assailed as “lethargic leaders” by the more activist-leaning attendees. In a reprise of the first AE discussion on non-cooperation in the aftermath of the MacDonald letter, members of the Opposition joined the Istiqlalists in support of non-cooperation, again cynically instrumentalizing it in a ploy to embarrass al-Hajj Amin and make his ties to the state a liability in the public’s eyes. At length the parties in favor of non-cooperation prevailed, and it was decided to send a delegation directly from the meeting to the High Commissioner to apprise him that failure to halt Jewish immigration and to protect peasants from eviction by ceasing land transfers from Arabs to Jews would result in the Arabs pursuing an agenda of non-cooperation. The delegation’s threat proved to no avail, and hours later they returned to the AE session

¹⁵⁴ AE meeting minutes, 9.9.32, ISA (65) 984 – 5p. He also took the occasion to firmly underline his preference for securing a legislative council, despite his earlier flirtation with a more confrontational national posture.

¹⁵⁵ Matthews credits this development in part to the Istiqlal’s contemporaneous ascendancy within the YMMAs (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 175).

and decided to call a public meeting in one month's time to forge a national consensus and hammer out the contours of the new policy.¹⁵⁶

The events of the general assembly of 26 March 1933, held at the Apollo theater in Jaffa, are well-known in Palestinian history. The largest meeting of its kind (with some 600 present), the Istiqlalists' success in bringing about a forum at which commoners jostled alongside the political elites, and at which their signature political campaign was front-and-center, quickly devolved into a "scene of undignified party conflict."¹⁵⁷ The non-cooperation program was again hi-jacked by Opposition politicians, who with al-Hajj Amin in attendance this time, initiated a ploy by which the mayors of Jerusalem and Jaffa, Raghib al-Nashashibi and 'Asim Sa'id, volunteered to resign their posts if the nation called upon them to do so.¹⁵⁸ The proposals made by Opposition-affiliated attendees were intended to depict them as willing to bear great sacrifice and surpassed the modest proposals that the Istiqlal had prepared, whose first stage of implementation required non-attendance at government functions and disaffiliation from Arab-Jewish events and associations.¹⁵⁹ As in previous episodes, the implication was that the mufti should follow the offer of the Opposition mayors and relinquish his posts. After 'Asim Bey forwarded his motion, acrimony erupted. Demonstrating his political prowess al-Hajj Amin then stole the moment back from his opponents, declaring that he would give his life for the nation, whose political movement

¹⁵⁶ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 176-77; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 169. Quote from Kayyali.

¹⁵⁷ CID, 1.4.33, periodical appreciation summary 11/33, PRO – FO 371/16926.

¹⁵⁸ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 179. Raghib Bey was not present, but agreed by phone.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178-79.

he headed, and explaining (incorrectly) that he was not a civil servant.¹⁶⁰ Depicting non-cooperation as a means of “entrapment” the mufti refused to resign.¹⁶¹ After the assembly broke for a recess, most Opposition politicians departed.¹⁶² In the afternoon session the Istiqlal limply put forward their proposal for a three-staged program for non-cooperation, but after the morning fiasco, none of the party members even attended the second session or spoke on their proposal’s behalf.¹⁶³ Non-cooperation, as *al-‘Arab* reported, was stillborn.¹⁶⁴ It was approved but referred to a committee – a procedural motion which had been used in the past to kill measures which elites found undesirable to carry out.¹⁶⁵ And indeed, by the beginning of June, only five of 20 bodies invited onto the non-cooperation committee had deputed delegates, and weeks later the CID reported that there was no momentum behind the measure and even the Istiqlal figures involved were uninterested.¹⁶⁶

The Istiqlal’s pyrrhic victory with non-cooperation had a number of ramifications. For all intents and purposes, the campaign, at the level of the national leadership, was dead in the water. The High Commissioner evinced little concern over non-cooperation in his dispatch following the Jaffa meeting, since, as *Filastin* pointed out, its primary advocates didn’t hold high positions in government.¹⁶⁷ At the same time he noted that *mu‘arada* politicians like Fakhri Nashashibi, who constituted the “the so-

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 179-80; Police daily intelligence summary, 27.3.33, PRO – CO 733/239/4.

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 179-80.

¹⁶² Police daily intelligence summary, 27.3.33, PRO – CO 733/239/4.

¹⁶³ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 178, 180. For details on the proposal, see p. 178.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 180.

¹⁶⁵ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 170.

¹⁶⁶ CID, 2.6.33, 20.6.33, periodical appreciation summaries 16 and 17/33, PRO – FO 371/16926.

¹⁶⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 1.4.33, PRO – CO 733/239/4.

called moderate party,” had moved to “denounce the Government as loudly as anyone in the country from fear of losing what political influence they possess.”¹⁶⁸ The Istiqlal, along with other critics, had helped generalize rhetorical opposition to British rule, even among the political class.¹⁶⁹ While the depth of this opposition was open to question, and certainly in some quarters was not bereft of cynical machinations, the conversion of Britain into a whipping post of the movement foreshadowed and helped facilitate both the first explicitly anti-government demonstrations later that year, and the wider shift towards an uncompromising anti-colonialism which crystallized between 1933-36. The consolidation of broad opposition to colonial rule was summed up by the CID a month after the Jaffa meeting: “It has been observed that feeling of the Arabs is becoming increasingly anti-British and anti-Government. It is the general belief of the Arabs that if the things follow the present trend of events then within a few years no Arabs will be left in the country.”¹⁷⁰

After the debacle at Jaffa the Istiqlal moved somewhat away from its goading courtship of the established leadership. Its members continued to assail elites for the softness of their positions towards Britain, and for their non-compliance with non-cooperation, but its focus turned to building its program through work among other associations and constituencies, including youth.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ In this vein, Matthews suggests that the non-cooperation campaign, in spite of its abortive practical results, illustrated the new power of public opinion (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 185, 196).

¹⁷⁰ CID, 22.4.33, periodical appreciation summary 13/33, PRO – FO 371/16926.

¹⁷¹ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 180-82.

The CID assayed that the Jaffa meeting indicated the party's relative weakness, and its inability to rally effective support for its campaign.¹⁷² This was not how the mufti saw things. He appeared to take the Istiqlal's campaign as a personal affront. The party, at the time of its formation, had conducted negotiations with the mufti, in an effort to bring him on board to their political program, or short of this, to reach a *modus vivendi* that would make their relations peaceable.¹⁷³ The Istiqlal had fairly quickly broken with the mutual neutrality that had been arrived at, berating al-Hajj Amin as a civil servant like others, quiescent in his relations with the state.¹⁷⁴ Although amicable relations were maintained between some members of the party, such as 'Izzat Darwaza and Subhi al-Khadra, and the *majlisiyyin*, the threat posed by the Istiqlal to the mufti's ascendancy was not something that al-Hajj Amin was willing to brook.¹⁷⁵ The party was in disarray by summer 1933, facing financial difficulties and beset by a number of internal fractures, including over how to handle its own members' or their relatives'

¹⁷² CID, 1.4.33, periodical appreciation summary 11/33, PRO – FO 371/16926. The CID tellingly conflated public opinion with elites, seeing the latter as the only engine of social influence. Thus its estimation contradictorily concludes that the Istiqlal were not able to mobilize public opinion in favor of non-cooperation, though in its reports it notes the generalization of the party's opposition to the colonial authorities (FO 371/16926). As Matthews writes, the CID's faith in the notables, like that of British administrators more generally, is illustrative of their view of Palestinian society (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 181).

¹⁷³ Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 406; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 125-26.

¹⁷⁴ Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, p. 66. Darwaza, who was intimately familiar with the row between the parties and close to the mufti, is circumspect in commenting on the source of dissension, noting somewhat obliquely that the Istiqlal's critique of politics could not but include, if by implication, the mufti (*Hawla al-haraka*, p. 110). Surprisingly, though dedicated to analyzing the Istiqlal's politics as an antithetical model to that of the mufti, Matthews also does not elaborate on the matter other than to say that discord prevailed between the two (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 126).

¹⁷⁵ 'Izzat Darwaza writes on this score in *Hawla al-haraka* that not all of the party members were critical of the mufti, or favored confrontation with him (p. 110). It is obvious retrospectively at least that this was of little solace to al-Hajj Amin.

involvement with land-dealing.¹⁷⁶ The mufti and his allies added greatly to the party's troubles, most sharply by helping disseminate rumors about 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi's service as a former legal counsel for parties who sold the Wadi al-Hawarith lands, on the coastal plain approximately mid-way between Haifa and Jaffa/Tel Aviv.¹⁷⁷ The fate of the Wadi al-Hawarith lands and its longtime Arab residents had become a metonym for the plight of peasants and the Palestinians more generally and symbolic of their fears of collective expulsion to suit Zionism's designs. 'Abd al-Hadi's involvement in the affair during the 1920s, though murky, had surfaced in late 1932 and was subsequently stoked further, contributing to the party's decline.¹⁷⁸ The Istiqlal soon ceased holding public events. Most members continued to cluster around the ideas that had galvanized their party, sometimes acting in concert, but organizationally the Istiqlal disappeared as quickly as it appeared on the scene, in part a casualty of attempting to wrest the elite from its fixation on the bureaucracy as an opportunity for social advancement.

Although the program of non-cooperation failed to attain more than sporadic adherence and never passed beyond the first stage envisioned by the Istiqlal, the campaign and the resistance to it put the question of the national movement's

¹⁷⁶ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 108; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 126; Mathews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 193. Aside from the 'Awni affair noted above, the Jaffa branch was witness to an enflamed debate between Hashim al-Sabi' and Ibrahim al-Shanti over publication of names of the latter's family members who had been implicated in land sales (ibid.). The party lost its pan-Arab caché when Yasin al-Hashimi, prime minister of Iraq, had been forced by the British to retract support for the party's aspirations to create a unified and operatively interlinked pan-Arab movement. The further loss of an Iraqi subsidy only deepened the party's financial trouble.

¹⁷⁷ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 126. The mufti also fired 'Awni Bey as lead council for the SMC, for which he had earned an annual £P 500 (ibid.). Darwaza wrote that the move away from the mufti was likely a source of weakness and confusion for the party (*Hawla al-haraka*, p. 110).

¹⁷⁸ Matthews offers the most comprehensive treatment of 'Abd al-Hadi's entanglement in the affair (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 188-93).

relationship with the colonial state and authorities at the center of national debate. In the process it flushed into the open a contradiction which had long been subject of popular derision: elites were willing to seek employment from the same colonial power from which they supposedly sought independence and which supported Zionist 'rights' over those of the Arabs. The failure of the non-cooperation program thus illuminated an important blockage for the national movement: the unwillingness of most elites to sacrifice personal, material, and class interests for the sake of more ardent national struggle. Given this configuration, elites were less persuaded by tactical escalation or of the need for making a strategic break from Britain, despite their occasional bluster (such as after the MacDonald letter). This reluctance, and the constant rumors of elite corruption, led popular forces towards further autonomy and independent initiative.

The rising pressure of immigration and the Wadi al-Hawarith lands

The break which the Istiqlal and many youth activists desired from the British orbit did not originate in the non-cooperation bid. It arrived several months later, as the torrent of Jewish immigration into Palestine ignited Arab fears of displacement. While the exact number of immigrants was (and still is) unknown, owing to a sizable illicit volume, the scale of change in the early 1930s was easy to appreciate without the certitude of precise numbers. Between 1929 and 1931 immigration fluctuated between approximately 4000-5250 persons. The year 1932 initiated a sharp upward trend, which was sustained even through the Great Revolt. From 1931 to 1932, Jewish immigration trebled from an estimated 4075 persons to over 12,553. In 1933, with Hitler taking

power in Germany in January, this number trebled again to some 37,337, for an almost 950% increase over two years.¹⁷⁹

The great influx in immigration led the Zionist Labor movement to escalate its call for the “conquest of labor.” Whereas “Hebrew labor” had previously been advanced with an eye to decreasing Jewish unemployment, its slogans in the 1933-36 period switched to contending that the employment of Arabs by Jews (or by the state) would decrease immigration. Displaying its own brand of paranoid minoritarian politics, the Histadrut argued during these years that Jewish citrus growers, who regularly hired seasonal Arab laborers (and guards), were colluding with the government to diminish Jewish immigration.¹⁸⁰

Although state figures were not based on precise counts and cannot be seen as wholly accurate, they do offer a relative picture of the disparity in Arab and Jewish employment.¹⁸¹ In 1931, Arab unemployment was estimated to range between 11,000 and 35,000, while Jewish unemployment remained between 2000-2600.¹⁸² With the Arab population approximately five times the size of the *yishuv* that meant relative

¹⁷⁹ Official tabulations released by the government underestimated totals for 1932 (9,553) and 1933 (30,327) by roughly a third and a quarter, respectively, since they did not include illicit immigration (*Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 35). The above figures are taken from Porath (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 39) who relies on the *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1974*, which attempts to calculate the total number of immigrants, including those without permits.

¹⁸⁰ Steven Glazer, “Picketing for Hebrew Labor: a window on Histadrut tactics and strategy” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, v. 30, n. 4 (summer 2001), p. 39-40; 42.

¹⁸¹ The Mandate administration in Palestine did not establish a systematic method for gauging Arab unemployment, despite being urged to do so by different parties (such as John Hope Simpson), and its own annual reports to the League of Nations discount the reliability of the figures it adduced as little more than vague approximations (*Report to the League of Nations, 1932*, p. 76). Jewish figures were often obtained through Zionist offices, and should be regarded as more accurate. ‘Unemployed’ was also a widely-defined category, and included the underemployed (those with less than three days of labor a week) as well as persons without any work (*ibid.*, p. 76).

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

unemployment was anywhere between on par to up to three and a half times as great among Palestinians. In January 1932 Arab unemployment was judged at 21,000, while 2400 Jewish workers were counted without work, making Arabs almost twice as likely to be affected.¹⁸³ As of November 1933 Arab and Jewish unemployment was estimated to be 16,500 to 1,100, or in relative terms, on the order of 3:1.¹⁸⁴ About a third (5000) of the Arab unemployed at the time regarded themselves as skilled laborers, and, in another sign of the straitening economic situation among poor Palestinians, 1000 of this number were women.¹⁸⁵

Rising Jewish immigration, the pressures it created within the labor market, and the associated drive by Zionist purchasing agencies to acquire lands for settlement formed the basis for a new cycle and pattern of Palestinian political activism in the early 1930s. The issue of Arab unemployment had attracted the attention of educated youth in the YMMA since the late 1920s, and youth concern for the well-being of Arab laborers formed part of a nascent orientation in popular politics towards issues of the everyday world inhabited by non-elites. This orientation continued in the early 1930s, with land and land campaigns garnering considerable popular attention.

The issue of land and land sales reached a fever pitch in the Arab press and political circles after 1929, with the publication of numerous official reports documenting the declining position of the Arab *fellahin* (especially the Shaw Commission and that of Johnson and Crosbie, both in 1930) fueling the fire. Popular

¹⁸³ Ibid. January is the only month in which figures for both communities are cited, but the respective low estimates for each (in different months) were also in a 10:1 ratio, suggesting that Arab unemployment remained in relative terms at least twice as high all year.

¹⁸⁴ Mathews, *Confronting and Empire*, p. 207.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

forces responded to the furor through a variety of land campaigns: fighting evictions, encouraging tenants and landlords not to transfer their lands out of Arab hands, and urging tenants to remain on their lands.¹⁸⁶ The YC, other youth forces, the Istiqlal party, and communists all played a part in crafting this new site of political activism. The aim was to assemble as much opposition to land sales as possible, using an array of means: through popular campaigning among peasants and in villages, press agitation, mounting or contributing to legal challenges to particular purchases/transfers, protesting to the state administration and various authorities, and eliciting Arab elite support on the issue in pressing for legislative or administrative controls on transfers. Land campaigns became one of the “practical steps” which the CID had remarked upon as lending the national movement a new footing and coloring. From late 1932 until the summer of 1933 the contest over Wadi al-Hawarith was the central outstanding land struggle in Palestine.

The Wadi al-Hawarith lands, purchased in 1929, were one of the Jewish National Fund’s (JNF) three largest acquisitions during the Mandate. They were obtained through a clandestine agreement followed by a purchase at auction after the title-holders (the Lebanese Tayan family) were forced to sell the property as collateral on a debt. The *wadi* (valley) comprised around 30,000 dunams of land in a region targeted for purchases by Zionist entities, and was inhabited by what the state estimated was 920 persons in 1929. Since the formal title was obtained by the JNF through auction, the usual right of the tenants to preemptive purchase (the right of cultivators to buy

¹⁸⁶ Issues related to these campaigns, and a deeper view of their context, are presented in the next two chapters.

inhabited lands put up for sale, according to Ottoman land law) was bypassed. The cultivators had no such right under court-enforced sales. An eviction order was issued by the Nablus District Court in November 1929 but the tenants, poor Bedouin belonging to the Harithi tribe, refused to vacate, and fought their dispossession through legal and extra-legal means for another four years.¹⁸⁷

Both the JNF and the colonial state feared the popular reaction that could be stirred by a forced mass eviction. During most of the years of legal appeals the lands were effectively partitioned between the JNF and the Arab tenants. At each stage of the struggle preceding the final evictions in June and November of 1933, the Wadi al-Hawarith residents physically resisted, and they regularly harassed the Jewish colonists through agricultural sabotage and other means. As Raya Adler has argued, this resistance owed primarily to the will of the resident Bedouin themselves. The AE was disinclined to stoke further anti-British sentiment after 1929 and was little involved in the Wadi al-Hawarith affair, though it occasionally gave lip-service to the struggle against dispossession. Local activists, mostly from the Tulkarm area, including joint AE and YC representatives Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman and ‘Abdullah Samara, showed greater dedication to the issue after 1931. In winter 1932-33 violent altercations between settlers and the Arab residents became more frequent, and it appears that backing from local national activists increased and may have included arms smuggling.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Raya Adler (Cohen), “The Tenants of Wadi Hawarith: another view of the land question in Palestine” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, v. 20, n. 2 (May 1988), p. 200-04.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 202-07.

When the first eviction of the Arab tenants became imminent in June 1933 the CID reported that the YC and the Istiqlal party were trying to persuade the residents to continue to resist. A month later Wadi al-Hawarith was still seen as “the center of agitation,” but communists and nationalists were fingered as the leading parties inciting the Bedouin to cling to their lands. When the support from local non-resident activists quieted by mid-August, the CID noted that a “genuine feeling of anxiety” over increasing transfers of lands, including more fertile plots, was pervasive among Arab nationalists. Given the CID’s penchant to dismiss the support for the local residents as “agitation” and intriguing, this admission of “genuine feeling” demonstrated a level of acknowledgement by the police of the depth of disquiet the Wadi al-Hawarith affair had caused. The faceless nationalist activists referred to in the report were doubtless not alone in seeing in the evictions a microcosm of transformations and dynamics they feared most for Palestine: usurpation and dispossession by alien foreigners, abetted by the colonial state, its police, and its legal system.¹⁸⁹

Youth, the immigration crisis, and the 1933 demonstrations

On the heels of the evictions at Wadi al-Hawarith, immigration became the focus of mounting, sustained popular Palestinian opposition. By late August the press began an inflammatory campaign charging that the administration was permitting a flood of immigrants into the country with the intent of displacing the Arabs, irrespective of any

¹⁸⁹ CID, 2.6.33, 7.7.33, 21.7.33, 10.8.33, periodical appreciation summaries 16/33 and 18-20/33, PRO – FO 371/16926. Quotes from 7.7.33 and 10.8.33 reports respectively. The deputy commandant of police, H.P. Rice, commented on the Wadi al-Hawarith affair as exemplifying Arab fears regarding land loss in September as well, when attention had turned towards immigration (police HQ report, 8.9.33, PRO – CO 733/257/11).

purported absorptive economic capacity.¹⁹⁰ At the invitation of the YC, Musa Kazim al-Husayni, head of the AE, delivered a speech against immigration at the annual Nebi Rubin festival on 4 September, following which he sent a protest to the High Commissioner demanding a halt to immigration and condemning the Mandate.¹⁹¹ Buttressing the rage and angst of the print media, public meetings were conducted by the YC, the Istiqlal, and the Jaffa MCA in Haifa, Jerusalem, and Jaffa, at which immigration was resolved against.¹⁹² The tenor of outrage over the situation was perhaps best captured, however, in a letter sent by a group of notables and elites from Nablus to the government at the close of the month.

Addressed to the officer administering the government (in the High Commissioner's absence) and sent by six members of the AE, one emeritus AE member, and three others, the missive knit the swell of existential themes in circulation among Palestinians neatly together. It begins:

The Arab people believe that the Government of Palestine aims, through its policy and by various means, at their destruction and replacement by Jews. They further believe that no principal ordinance is enacted unless the underlying object there-of [sic] is to pierce the Arabs in the heart so that they may be driven to despair and prompted to leave the country to those aliens. They further believe that Government does not take any measure unless the object there-of is to deprive them of their means of livelihood. The Arabs are of the opinion that Government has deprived them of all their political rights and has taken every measure to undermine their existence and entity. Thus government is considered by the Arabs as a destructive body which has failed to pay any consideration to the recommendations contained in the reports of its experts and to the advice of its many committees all of which recommend that justice be done to the Arabs and that the policy which aims at their extermination be discontinued....

¹⁹⁰ *Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 5.

¹⁹¹ CID, 22.9.33, periodical appreciation summary 23/33, PRO – FO 371/16926; HC to Colonial Secretary, 23.10.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5.

¹⁹² HC to Colonial Secretary, 23.10.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5.

The threat to “their existence and entity” posed by immigration had pushed the Arabs into a corner, and had created an environment in which tensions were reaching a threshold beyond which communal “self-defense” might entail violence:

The Arabs, who observe the continual undermining of their national existence through the admission of tens of thousands of Jews into Palestine, without giving any consideration to Arab opinion, consider themselves to be acting in self-defence should they themselves adopt any means in order to prevent the flow of immigration and any act which may be taken in opposition to their so doing will be unjust.

Given that most of the signatories were from the AE, the despairing and terse language and the warning and sense of foreboding which the protest contained is all the more striking, and illustrates the ubiquitous impulsion to action felt by Palestinians as immigration soared.¹⁹³

Police commentary on the character of Palestinian politics at the time highlights both its mass, poly-centric quality and the recognition of the dual colonial regime and turn against British rule:

Although the political movement is not now run by one centralized body, yet the various groups which are operating are active in propagating hatred and disloyalty to Government, and however little their influence may be, their teachings must leave an imprint on an already disaffected

¹⁹³ The letter, dated 30.9.33, appears in PRO – FO 371/17875. Its signatories from the 7th AE are: ‘Adil Zu’aytir, Sa‘id Kamal, Farid ‘Anabtawi, Ahmad Shak‘a, ‘Abd al-Rahim Nabulsi, and ‘Abdul-Fattah Tuqan; along with Tawfiq Hammad (a leading figure in the early Palestinian national movement and veteran of the 1922 5th Palestinian Arab Congress and delegation), and Mustafa Bushnaq, ‘Abd al-Rahim Tamimi, and Qasim Agha Nimr. The legalistic response drafted (it is unclear whether it was sent) by the administration could hardly have given any comfort to the protesters, as it recited strictures imposed on classes of immigrants and more importantly, dryly offered the number of immigrants for year ending 30.9.33 (the immigration calendar year) as 23,582 – a number which dwarfed every preceding year under British rule, save 1925 (Memo by HMG in response to petition 30.9.33 from Tawfiq Hammad and others, n.d., PRO – FO 371/17875).

population, which is laboring under the impression that it is politically and economically oppressed by two colonization powers, the Zionists and “British imperialism.”¹⁹⁴

In this swirling milieu of unrest, with the Zionist campaign for the “conquest of labor” and a boycott against Arab merchants exacerbating tensions, youth forces became the leading edge of the movement.¹⁹⁵ In late September the YC resolved to protest against immigration and, alongside other youth formations, compelled the AE to convene a special session on 8 October at which a program of demonstrations was agreed upon.¹⁹⁶ Public processions, save of a religious nature, had been banned since 1929, so the motion for demonstrations courted conflict from the outset. Where the Istiqlal had previously been reported as raising the profile of the immigration issue, youth were seen in October by the CID to have overshadowed both the Istiqlal, whose members absented themselves from the 8 October AE session, and the SMC.¹⁹⁷

The AE had grown increasingly moribund in 1933, but the relentless hammering it took in the press on the immigration crisis, and the push for action on the issue by youth groups, with the YC prominent among them, stirred it back to life.¹⁹⁸ When it issued a call on the day of its special session for a demonstration and a general strike on

¹⁹⁴ Police HQ report, 8.9.33, PRO – CO 733/257/11.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.; CID, 7.10.33, periodical appreciation summary 24/33, PRO – FO 371/16926.

¹⁹⁶ CID, 23.10.33, periodical appreciation summary 25/33, PRO – FO 371/16926; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 209. Youth in Jerusalem met independently around this time, marking a further departure for the local scene, in which they typically operated in concert with elites. The AE initially evaded formulating a direct response to the immigration situation at a meeting on 1 October by advocating hosting the long-delayed eighth Palestinian Arab Congress, thereby suggesting that “the current Arab Executive was too weak to take a decisive position.” The independent Jerusalem youth were instrumental, along with the YC, in quashing this position and forcing the issue at the meeting which the YC had called for on the 8th (ibid., p. 209-10; see also: CID, 23.10.33, periodical appreciation summary).

¹⁹⁷ Police HQ report, 8.9.33, PRO – CO 733/257/11; CID, 7.10.33, periodical appreciation summary 24/33, PRO – FO 371/16926; Air Force HQ to Air Ministry, 9.10.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5.

¹⁹⁸ HC to Colonial Secretary, 23.10.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5.

the 13th, the administration responded quickly, attempting to force the elites to cancel the protest. On 9 October, J. Hawthorn Hall, the officer administering the government, called Musa Kazim al-Husayni to an audience at which he underscored the ban on political processions since the 1929 events.¹⁹⁹ Musa Kazim Pasha, acting for the AE, refused to comply with the government's urgings.²⁰⁰ With state intercession through the notables failing to affect the desired result, an official communiqué announcing that the government would not issue a permit and that participation in any demonstration or procession would be deemed illegal and subject to penalty was issued two days later.²⁰¹ Elites, both in the planning and during the demonstrations and events themselves, largely sought to avoid confrontation, yet, cognizant of their precarious public position, they endeavored to do so without withdrawing entirely from holding the protests. The CID described the situation after the first demonstration in Jerusalem, retrospectively and with some presumption, as follows: "The Young Mens [YC] leaders, as also the militant members of the Istiqlal, were from the beginning intent on organizing demonstrations, and, had the Central Executive Committee [the AE] failed to adopt the decision which it did, they, supported by the Istiqlal and extremists, would no doubt have advanced to assume leadership."²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Murison commission report, 4.1.34, section II (A.), available at: ISA (65) 325 – 5p.

²⁰⁰ This position was backed by 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi on behalf of the Istiqlal and Ya'qub Ghusayn, Edmond Rok, and Sa'id al-Khalil for the Youth Congress, in consultations following the meeting with Hall (Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 213).

²⁰¹ Official communiqué 38/33, 11.10.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5.

²⁰² CID, 23.10.33, periodical appreciation summary 25/33, PRO – FO 371/16926. The report elaborates further on this idea, adding that the moderates were forced into action under duress by the above mentioned parties (the YC and the Istiqlal principally) and "public opinion." Matthews is a bit unclear on the point, first noting that the YC were the greatest "source of pressure" on the AE, but then arguing somewhat to the contrary, and without clear supporting evidence, that other youth societies played a greater role than the Youth Congress in the push for demonstrations (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 212).

Though it was joined by other Jerusalem-based youth societies in pressuring the AE, the YC received the greatest attention in the police reports from the period. In the CID appreciation from 7 October the YC is noted as unusually active following Yaqub al-Ghusayn's taking charge of the executive. The organization had formed branches in all of the major towns and cities, save Jerusalem. Yaqub al-Ghusayn was expending his personal funds to propel the association's activities. Although he had been pegged earlier as an "ambitious wealthy young man" likely shopping for a position within the SMC or on a municipal council, such a careerist estimation was belied by his tenure at the YC, which under his watch exhibited a "tendency" towards "militant activity," especially by the Fall of 1933. This inclination was evident in the lead up to the first demonstration, during which the YC was continuously active and "held several formal and informal meetings" with independent and "unorganized" youth in Jerusalem, as well as with the Jaffa MCA.²⁰³

The AE's call on 8 October envisioned a series of demonstrations in various cities, beginning with Jerusalem on 13 October. The environment before the first demonstration was, according to the police, "verging on sedition" with such sentiment "pervading all classes." Rumors fed the public tempest, as the police acknowledged in noting the publication in the Arab press of a report purporting that Zionist organizations were preparing for the arrival of 80,000 new immigrants within the next three months. The necessity of using force and "riots" was also commented upon by the CID as an idea circulating with considerable currency. Repeating the core themes of the Palestinian

²⁰³ CID, 22.9.33, 7.10.33, 23.10.33, periodical appreciation summaries 23-25/33, PRO – FO 371/16926. The three quotes are drawn from each of the three reports, in chronological order.

discourse of despair, immigration was popularly equated with future “expulsion” and the “extermination” of the Arabs in Palestine.²⁰⁴

On 13 October 1933 some 2000 people participated in the demonstration in Jerusalem’s Old City.²⁰⁵ The *mu‘arada* opposed holding the demonstration and Raghib and Fakhri Nashashibi acted to dissuade villagers from the surrounding areas from joining the protest. Their actions were credited by police with diminishing the size of the procession and with rendering it largely urban in make-up.²⁰⁶ Notably, Arab women, both elite and non-elite, participated directly in the protest.²⁰⁷ In a pattern that was repeated at the subsequent Jaffa demonstration, altercations occurred between the crowd and the police after the latter acted to restrict the movement of demonstrators. Upon reaching the New Gate, proximate to government offices, the crowd, “headed by a number of young men, not of a good type” (as the Murison Commission derisively described them), confronted a police cordon.²⁰⁸ The police ordered their dispersal and charged the procession with batons, bringing on a melee in which the police were stoned.²⁰⁹ This scene was repeated again, with further baton charges and stoning, including by smaller crowds after the main procession broke up in the early afternoon.²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ CID, 23.10.33, periodical appreciation summary 25/33, PRO – FO 371/16926. On the desirability of “riots” the report held forth: “That riots are the only means of delivering them and that a European war is the only chance for the Arabs to rid themselves of foreign rule are also the opinions expressed freely by the politically minded.”

²⁰⁵ Ibid. A subsequent appreciation remarks that this number is an undercount: CID, 15.11.33, periodical appreciation summary 26/33, PRO – FO 371/16926.

²⁰⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 23.10.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. The police inspector general denied that police had molested or injured any women during the demonstration and attributed them with goading men to disobey police orders (Inspector General of Police to Chief Secretary, 14.10.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5).

²⁰⁸ Murison commission report, 4.1.34, section II (A.).

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

The AE, some of whose members had been extracted by the police from the crowd for fear of injury after the initial baton charge, including the octogenarian Musa Kazim Pasha, decided later that day to set the next demonstration for Jaffa in two weeks time on the 27th.²¹¹

When the High Commissioner returned to the country on 25 October, he summoned AE representatives to a meeting the same day. He began the meeting by remarking on the Jerusalem demonstration in his absence, noting instructively that “it must be obvious that I cannot allow a large crowd to be assembled outside my offices, or in the streets of Jerusalem” because “such a course would only lead to disorders.” The threat posed by a gathering of protesting Arabs had attained an “obvious,” factual quality for the High Commissioner and was naturally antithetical to law and order. He therefore sought to deflect any repeat of the phenomenon at Jaffa by advising the Palestinian leaders to follow the old course of petition politics, submitting a written protest through the offices of the District Commissioner.²¹²

The AE representatives’ replies were remarkable in commingling a lack of compliance with the High Commissioner’s watery suggestion with the overwhelming sense that this was not of their choosing. After Musa Kazim al-Husayni asserted that Arab rights hold primacy over the cause of security and order, Jamal al-Husayni explained the present position by implying a common interest of the colonial state and the Arab politicians in reining in the potential for conflagration:

²¹¹ Ibid.; Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 173.

²¹² Note of an interview between the HC, Chief Secretary, and AE representatives, 25.10.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5, p. 1-2.

The Arabs have done their best in the past to save themselves, but they cannot do it. I think the decision of the leaders of the people to hold the demonstration is to the benefit of the country, because it will enable the people to give vent to their feelings. If demonstrations are not permitted, I fear there will finally be an explosion.

He continued in a vein that asked sympathy of the High Commissioner for the politicians' conundrum while reiterating their shared interest in maintaining 'order':

We as leaders confess that we have not done our duty in the past to the people because we have never adopted other than peaceful means. We have never in the past resorted even to peaceful demonstrations; now we have been pushed to it by the people themselves. Being so pushed, we hope that government would help us and not force us to lead people to more serious trouble.

In a clear moment of frustration Musa Kazim Pasha bluntly complained at the end of the meeting that: "You tell us to do nothing, to wait as we have waited in the past, to wait to be slaughtered. I assure you that if it were in my power I would try to stop this demonstration but, as I told Mr. Hall a fortnight ago, the people prefer to die." The administration refused to permit the march but the AE representatives were, as they saw it, powerless to back down.²¹³

The Jaffa demonstration on 27 October bore the strong imprimatur of youth organizers. Contingents from around the country, including Wadi al-Hawarith and as far away as Huleh in the Upper Galilee, arrived to take part, and were joined by delegations from Syria and Transjordan.²¹⁴ A group of women from Jerusalem attended, and despite official reports to the contrary, workers were present in force, with rural districts also

²¹³ Ibid., p. 2, 5, 9-10.

²¹⁴ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 215.

represented.²¹⁵ The crowd which amassed was estimated by colonial authorities to be between 7000-10,000 people, or roughly three and a half to five times the size of the Jerusalem demonstration.²¹⁶ Many of its members provocatively came armed with bars and sticks of wood and metal.²¹⁷ Internal discipline and direction was provided by the crew leaders of the lightermen working at the port, in conjunction with the YC, which had been charged along with the Jaffa MCA with supervising preparations for the procession.²¹⁸

Preceding the demonstration there had been a dispute between members of the YC and the AE over the route of the procession, in part precipitated by the District Commissioner's suggestion on 24 October to take what was called the 'short route' from the Great Mosque to government offices, with leaders quickly thereafter dispersing the assembly.²¹⁹ Musa Kazim Pasha and 'Umar al-Bitar (of the Opposition) pushed strongly for this course, with the former even threatening not to attend unless it was agreed upon.²²⁰ Nonetheless, no consensus was reached and thus on the appointed day the route

²¹⁵ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 172-73. Using an analysis of Arab casualties, their professions, and their place of origins, Matthews concludes that workers, some from villages, were the mainstay of the demonstrations (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 217 – see also p. 217-18 for a similar analysis of events and casualties at Haifa, treated below). The official view was represented by the High Commissioner, who reported to the Colonial Office that peasants were not significantly involved (HC to Colonial Secretary, 23.12.33, PRO – CO 733/257/11).

²¹⁶ The lower number is cited as a minimum in the Murison commission report (4.1.34, section II {B.}). The higher figure was given by Mr. Campbell, District Commissioner for the South (Report by DC-Southern, 24.11.33, enclosure to HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5).

²¹⁷ Murison commission report, 4.1.34, section II (B.), ISA (65) 325 – 5p. The Southern District Commissioner's report claimed that even the pulpit of the mosque from which the demonstration began had been dismantled and torn apart for staves (24.11.33, enclosure to HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5).

²¹⁸ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 214, 216; Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 173.

²¹⁹ Report by DC-Southern, 24.11.33, enclosure to HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5.

²²⁰ Ibid.

of the march was unclear even to participants.²²¹ In the event, the youth forces prevailed, and the march proceeded on the “long route,” which led it into a direct confrontation with a police cordon of 100 men at Clock Tower Square.²²²

As in Jerusalem, police constraint on the movement of the demonstrators ultimately led to clashes, though this time with far more deadly consequences. After baton charges and efforts to repel and disperse the crowd which included the use of mounted police were met with stoning, projectile attacks and one stabbing of a police officer, the police commander on the ground, J.A.M. Faraday, received authorization to fire on the crowd.²²³ Forming a lethal phalanx, “the firing-squad divided into three groups, each one shooting into the [three] roads leading to the Square,” one team of which fired inside a café on Siksik street in order, ostensibly, “to clear it of missile-throwing protestors.”²²⁴ The fire had a withering effect on the assembly. An estimated 19 Palestinians were killed outright or fatally wounded, dying soon thereafter, with another 70 or more injured.²²⁵ During the affray, one police officer, an Arab, was killed by demonstrators who dropped heavy stones upon him from above, and some others

²²¹ Murison commission report, 4.1.34, section II (B.).

²²² Ibid.; Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 174. Kolinsky refers simply to “radicals” taking control of the march route, while the Murison commission makes clear that these were youths, who had pressed for the ‘long route’ from the start.

²²³ Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 174. See also: Murison commission report, section II (B.).

²²⁴ Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 174.

²²⁵ This casualty count is a deduction based on the Murison report and a dispatch from the HC to the Colonial Secretary on 29 October 1933. The historical accounts give different numbers for those killed and injured at Jaffa, with fatalities ranging from 12-22 (c.f. Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 173; Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 175; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 216). The number of fatalities herein was arrived at using the Murison commission’s final death tally of all demonstration-related incidents through 3 November (26), subtracting the four killed at Haifa, one at Nablus, and two at Jerusalem, all subsequent to Jaffa, all of which, save for the two at Jerusalem, were recorded in the Murison report. The Jerusalem information derives from the above mentioned dispatch by the High Commissioner (HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.10.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5). This tally also presumes, perhaps incorrectly, that fatal injuries subsequent to events stemmed from Jaffa and not from the other locales, with the exception of Nablus, where the death is recorded in the Murison commission report as occurring after the incidents.

were wounded.²²⁶ By mid-afternoon the demonstration was quashed and Jaffa placed under curfew.²²⁷ At the Jaffa MCA, demonstration leaders and organizers, including Ya‘qub al-Ghusayn and Jamal al-Husayni, were arrested in the midst of drafting a call for the next round of demonstrations, to take place at Nablus on 10 November.²²⁸

The police action at Jaffa was seen by many Palestinians as a massacre.²²⁹ When news of the Jaffa events circulated throughout the country’s population centers, further protests and altercations transpired, particularly at Haifa and Nablus. In Haifa, a crowd of around 2000 gathered and, as in the previous incidents, clashed with police when their movement was restricted. The crowd then boldly attacked the police barracks, pelting it with stones and other missiles, to which the police responded with gunfire. The following day, the police station was again attacked by Arabs, and make-shift barricades were set-up across town, including at the railway station, which was effectively blocked to traffic. Confrontations occurred in multiple places and military reinforcements were brought in to clear the railway. A Jewish-operated lorry and its driver were seriously attacked. Police actions killed four Palestinians and injured dozens more. At Nablus on the 27th, crowds attacked the local branch of Barclays Bank and the post office, and were fired upon by police, killing one.²³⁰

Tensions remained high throughout the week after the Jaffa demonstration. A general strike was declared by the AE and called off only after a week, on 3 November,

²²⁶ Murison commission report, 4.1.34, section II (B.).

²²⁷ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 216.

²²⁸ CID, 15.11.33, periodical appreciation summary 26/33, PRO – FO 371/16926.

²²⁹ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 173.

²³⁰ Murison commission report, 4.1.34, section II (C. and D.).

making it the longest political strike by Palestinians to date.²³¹ The authorities were determined not to witness a repeat of popular revolt on the scale of the 1929 events. Troops were deployed to Jerusalem, Safad, Nazareth, and Tulkarm on 28 October, and the air force was dispatched to Wadi al-Hawarith.²³² In Jerusalem the police killed two Palestinians during clashes with crowds on 28 and 29 October.²³³ Protests also occurred on the 29th in Lydda and Beersheba, though from that date they were averted, in some cases narrowly, at Nablus, Tulkarm, Jenin, Ramle, and Gaza.²³⁴

On the 28th Musa Kazim al-Husayni, Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, and a group of Jerusalem notables met with the High Commissioner. During the audience, Rashid Effendi pleaded with HC Wauchope to ratchet down the “friction and enmity” between the government and the Arab population. He requested that prosecutions of the organizers and detainees be dropped, and asserted that the government could palliate the situation by stopping immigration and land transfers from Arabs to Jews, and by establishing a legislative council. In the midst of his discourse, he alluded directly to the shifting constellation of forces within Palestinian society, declaring that: “In the past, the leaders were able to appease the people, but now they have lost their influence.” The following day Musa Kazim Pasha and the Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, Ya‘qub Farraj, were summoned by the District Commissioner for Jerusalem, and urged to use their

²³¹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 6.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5. After the AE voted to call off the strike, the cessation order was opposed in Jerusalem, where the town crier who was breaking the news was halted and forced to desist by youth who opposed an end to the rising (CID, 15.11.33, periodical appreciation summary 26/33, PRO – FO 371/16926).

²³² Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 173; DC-Jerusalem. 6.11.33, summary of events, enclosure to HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5.

²³³ HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.10.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5.

²³⁴ Report by DC-Southern, 24.11.33, enclosure to HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5; HC to Colonial Secretary, 6.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5.

stature to quell the seething unrest. In their reply “They both admitted that the agitation brewing was being fomented by youthful extremists over whom they had no control.” Further, both “seemed convinced of impending trouble and only wanted to keep out of it.”²³⁵

Despite strong evidence to the contrary, the High Commissioner alleged in a preliminary estimation to the Colonial Secretary on 6 November that Arab leaders were to blame for the situation, thereby vocalizing the colonial state’s top-down conception of Arab society in which a cadre of Arab leaders was perennially held responsible for resistance to state policies. Yet he acknowledged in the same dispatch the existence of what he called a “genuine national feeling” suffusing the Palestinians that was “growing constantly more powerful... and more bitter against [the] British Government.” He added that “Arabs of all parties [are] united in abusing Government... for preventing Arabs for 15 years from carrying out their national aims and for encouraging [the] establishment of a Jewish National Home.” Thus HC Wauchope was clear that while Jewish immigration was the touch-point of the demonstrations, the protests had not been aimed at Zionism, but rather at the colonial authorities. Despite the gravity of this development, which marked a first for the Palestinian national movement (which had typically targeted Zionism and Jews during moments of rebellion or unrest), the High Commissioner was largely confident of his administration’s ability to maintain order and to contain the situation. This owed largely to reform of the security regime and the

²³⁵ Interview, HC w/ Musa Kazim al-Husayni, Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, others, 28.10.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5 (first quote); DC-Jerusalem, 6.11.33, summary of events, enclosure to HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5 (second and third quotes). The previous day, the same day of his audience with Rashid Effendi and the High Commissioner, Musa Kazim had acted to disperse youth who collected at his residence, waiting in expectation of a demonstration.

amplification of state powers after 1929, and to Wauchope's assessment of the protests as political and not religious in character.²³⁶

Elite collusion and the end of the protest cycle

The greatest concern in managing the Arabs, as the High Commissioner envisioned it, was avoiding “the religious cry.” This turn of phrase was colonial shorthand for the violence of 1929, which had been the gravest point of disorder in the annals of British rule in Palestine. His understanding of that seminal episode disregarded the Shaw Commission's findings that the true sources of the rising were political, dealing specifically with Arab fears of displacement and future Jewish domination deriving from land transfers, the growth of landlessness, immigration, and the absence of self-rule institutions. In place of the Shaw Commission's diagnosis of the immanently political, social, and economic grievances of the Palestinians, Wauchope focused on the religious tropes and themes that had been the lineaments of the campaign around preserving the al-Aqsa mosque and the *Haram al-sharif* from Zionist encroachment. Where for Palestinians the pungency of a threat to the *Haram* compound symbolized the creeping dispossession that was feared or in places actually occurring, Wauchope saw a kind of Orientalized Islam: a widely-popular religion capable of inciting homicidal fanaticism in the masses of its adherents, if its leaders were not properly managed. His view of ruling over the Arabs and maintaining order was

²³⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 6.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5. On state reorganization see Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 91-102, 110-111.

consequently greatly invested in relations with the mufti, and it was to al-Hajj Amin that the High Commissioner turned to help forestall the demonstrations from continuing.

As alluded to previously, HC Wauchope enjoyed positive relations with al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni. In 1932 the High Commissioner had solidified his own view that the mufti was an irreplaceable figure in the Arab scene, despite an Opposition push for SMC elections and other moves designed to circumscribe the SMC and the mufti. During the same year the colonial state, under HC Wauchope's hand, bailed out the SMC after its revenues were pinched by crop failures (which lowered the tithes collected on agricultural *awqaf*) and chronic financial maladministration. The agreement reached between the High Commissioner and the mufti alleviated "the problem of the SMC's bankruptcy in terms that reinforced al-Hajj Amin's dependency on the government." The bridging loan and reconfiguration of revenue streams which the SMC received through the state were seen by the Colonial Office as part of a trade off to curb the mufti's political ambitions and quiet his anti-Zionism. The 1932 arrangements left unresolved one issue advanced by the mufti, concerning state recognition of certain lands as *waqf*, that would further boost SMC revenues (and for which arrears would be retroactively owed it by the state). This piece of unfinished business became leverage for the state in seeking the mufti's cooperation regarding the demonstrations.²³⁷

When the mufti returned to the country on 17 November from a fund-raising trip to India for the Islamic Conference, negotiations on the disputed *waqf* lands were in the

²³⁷ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 127-130, 220-221. For further insightful analysis on the shared interest of the colonial state and the mufti in the practices and hallmarks of notable politics entailed in these arrangements and negotiations, see also p. 131-33.

offing. The AE held a full meeting on the same day at which it agreed to slate the next demonstration two months later, on 17 January 1934, coinciding with *'Id al-fitr*. The YC subsequently endorsed the plan. Disagreements had broken out preceding the AE meeting between the Istiqlalists and the *majlisi* camp. Both groupings favored continuing mobilization, but the latter proposed switching the focus to Zionism while the Istiqlal insisted on targeting the government. The Istiqlal was also reported by the CID in January to be internally divided over the protests, with some figures (Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim and Mu'in al-Madi) opposing them.²³⁸

Overshadowing the dissonance were the criminal trials against the purported ringleaders of the demonstrations. Guilty verdicts were obtained and sentences passed in December regarding the charges pending from the Jerusalem round. To the CID's surprise, these did not noticeably stifle the mood of widespread "dissatisfaction and disaffection" or the sporadic ongoing strikes and shop closures.²³⁹ At trial, 'Izzat Darwaza and Jamal al-Husayni were reported inclined to use the proceedings as a political stage, while Ya'qub al-Ghusayn and Edmond Rok of the YC were less disposed to bravado.²⁴⁰ The trials for the Jaffa round were not concluded until March 1934 and thus their verdict hung in the balance before the next round of demonstrations.

²³⁸ Ibid, p. 221, 219; CID, 5.1.34, periodical appreciation summary 1/34, PRO – FO 371/17878. 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi was noted as desiring to avoid further legal complications while 'Izzat Darwaza, 'Ajj Nuwayhid, and Subhi al-Khadra were the party members most intent on further militancy.

²³⁹ CID, 19.12.33, periodical appreciation summary 27/33, PRO – FO 371/17878. The report is a bit vague but it appears that the shop closures reference is to Jerusalem, where merchants were noted as increasingly resistant to the frequent impositions upon their businesses.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. Jamal Effendi struck a defiant note after the verdict and appeal on the Jerusalem charges, claiming that being bonded over would not guarantee his docility: "I assure the Court, the Police and the Government beforehand that my behavior will be during this year, in their opinion, more wicked than any behavior they have ever known. I will not spare one single minute to join in national activities and to embark upon the most rough behavior, so long as I believe that will benefit the Arab cause in general" (*al-*

Ahead of the January 1934 demonstration, the High Commissioner implicitly compared the 1933 unrest to the events of 1929 in an extended appreciation of the situation in late December 1933. He informed Colonial Secretary Phillip Cunliffe-Lister that he did not see great cause for concern. There was no religious content to the agitation against immigration and peasants were not involved (both unlike the situation in 1929). Further hobbling the “purely political” character of the upheaval, and despite the turnout at Jaffa, he cavalierly opined that “the leaders showed no powers or organization.” He judged the “political” elements driving the unrest to be the fear of the Jewish National Home policy, the aforementioned growth of “national feeling” and corresponding distaste for foreign rule, and a dynamic of competition among Arab politicians whereby they outbid one another in opposing government as the sponsor of the Balfour declaration. He contended that Arab leaders might wish to propel the population to further “disturbances,” but short of religious motivations he did not foresee that their efforts would be successful. His agreements and amicable position with the mufti in turn gave him surety against any untoward development in this regard.²⁴¹

Although in late 1933 the AE maintained its insistence on holding a peaceful procession, the High Commissioner’s intercession with al-Hajj Amin soon muted the 17 January 1934 protests to the point that they were “scarcely recognizable as demonstrations.” A quid pro quo was arrived at between Wauchope and the mufti according to which a demonstration at Nablus, subject to tight strictures, would be

Jami‘a al-‘Arabiyya, 18.12.33, translated and excerpted in PRO – CO 733/258/1). His position soon changed (see below).

²⁴¹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 23.12.33, PRO – CO 733/257/11.

permitted. The procession, scheduled between 7 and 8 am only, was to be remote from government offices and speeches other than an AE statement would not be allowed, after the delivery of which the gathering would disband. Only religious banners were permitted and music and of course weapons were disallowed. Under these terms the Nablus protest passed without incident, and the anti-immigration demonstrations begun in October 1933 were effectively brought to a halt.²⁴²

Members of the AE were not all predisposed to the mufti's quietist maneuvering. In early January al-Hajj Amin invited YC and Istiqlalist figures to a meeting in his home with his supporters in the *majlisi* camp. There he lectured those in attendance that the recent demonstrations had damaged the national movement by complicating or endangering ties to its "friends" in Britain. Echoing the *majlisi* line in the disputes over the direction of future actions, he proposed that in place of the anti-government course which had been followed in the earlier demonstrations, the movement should focus its energies on exclusively combating Jews and Zionism. Jamal Effendi, who had earlier insisted on continued defiance of the government, was won over by the mufti and helped smooth the path inside the AE towards accepting the liquidation of the 17 January protests.²⁴³

Two months later in mid-March 1934 the Jaffa demonstration trials ended. The stiffest sentences were given to 10 leaders: 'Izzat Darwaza, Jamal al-Husayni, 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi, and 'Abd al-Qadir Muzaffar from the AE; Ya'qub al-Ghusayn, Edmond

²⁴² Ruhi Bey 'Abd al-Hadi to Chief Secretary, 29.12.33, PRO – CO 733/257/11; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 221-23. The mufti subsequently was rewarded for his assistance when a second favorable financial agreement was struck between the SMC and the state in April 1934 (ibid., p. 221).

²⁴³ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 221-22

Rok, Saliba ‘Arida, Farid Fakhr al-Din, and Sa‘id al-Khalil from the YC; and Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman, a member of both organizations. Each received 10 months with hard labor under the Sedition Law. Most were not found to have engaged in incitement, save for Farid Fakhr al-Din, and ‘Awni Bey was seen as having directly opposed it. Five others were also convicted of offenses and given five month sentences with hard labor. These sentences were viewed by the chief magistrate at Jaffa, who imposed them, as being “exceptionally lenient.” The convicted were later offered bail in July at £P 100 each on condition of three years of good conduct, which did not require them to refrain from political activities so long as they remained within the bounds of the law. All of the convicted accepted the agreement, with the exception of ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Muzaffar, who, as in 1929, preferred prison to early release.²⁴⁴

The state’s “restraint” and popular reaction

While the High Commissioner’s skillful use of the state’s ties to the SMC and its head largely brought about the dilution of the Nablus demonstration and arrested an open-ended cycle of mass mobilization that had taken aim at British rule, his recourse to notable politics to bring about the *coup de grace* was built upon amplified state capacity to combat unrest and the increased use of lethal repression. As discussed above, the colonial state acted rapidly and with great force to suppress the demonstrations after they could not be prevented altogether. The official narrative that was produced in HC Wauchope’s dispatches, and subsequently in the Murison commission report, heaps

²⁴⁴ HC to Colonial Secretary, 5.4.34, PRO – CO 733/258/1; HC to Colonial Secretary, 6.7.34, PRO – CO 733/258/1.

praise on the security forces for their “restraint and forbearance.”²⁴⁵ The state’s preparedness and ability to put down the protests while they were happening was seen as a tremendous advance over its delayed suppression of the 1929 events.²⁴⁶ For the colonial authorities this was the key aspect of the situation and was central to maintaining state authority. The deployment of state violence on a wide scale to quell popular protests was thus not only legitimated and approved, but warmly praised and seen as a redemption after the state’s failure in 1929. This was the case in spite of the fact that, as reviewed here, it was police constriction on the free movement of the public assemblies which precipitated the violent altercations. The casualty data further demonstrates that the state’s narrative of “restraint,” and indeed its explanation for its conduct, stands largely as an inversion of events. Where the police and state were implicitly and explicitly depicted as under serious threat, the High Commissioner freely admitted in early November that the vast majority of deaths and injuries were caused not by any public rampage, but by police gunfire.²⁴⁷ The Murison commission later tabulated that in all of the associated events in late 1933, 26 members of the public (all Arab) were killed, along with one policeman, and 187 Palestinians and 56 police injured.²⁴⁸

What is significant in the state’s response is not only the approbation lent to inflicting mass violence on the Arab public, or the crooked view that held that the quantum of violence was in fact minimal, but the idea that it was the state and not the

²⁴⁵ Murison commission report, 4.1.34, (V.). In addition, see the High Commissioner’s dispatches, cited above and Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 28.3.34, CP 95 (34), PRO – CO 733/257/12.

²⁴⁶ See the discussion in: Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 177-181.

²⁴⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 6.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5.

²⁴⁸ Section (III.).

Arab public that was under assault during the demonstrations. While portions of the public responded to the state's repressive measures by attacking its symbols and personnel with relish, this cannot obscure the order of events, the inequality in weaponry and force available to the public and the police, or the fundamental hostility of the state in dealing with masses of Arab demonstrators. In unleashing the state's powers of suppression with abandon on protestors, the colonial authorities underscored both their minimal regard for Arab life and their willingness to freely utilize lethal violence to suppress Arab outrage at state policy and hold the national movement in check.

While state officials may have felt that they dodged a bullet in late 1933 and early 1934, many of their reports and internal commentary are suggestive of a rather different appreciation. As HC Wauchope had informed the Colonial Office, opposition to government had become generalized and was a currency through which Arab politics were conducted. The demonstration at Nablus in January 1934 was staid in the extreme, but speeches given at events in other locations and protest memorials sent to the state were full of despairing and bitter excoriations of colonial policy.²⁴⁹ Wauchope viewed the mufti as a critical asset in containing the "urban crowd," without whom disorder and popular resistance would spread – a perspective that was shared and endorsed by the

²⁴⁹ Such statements were made not only by expected sources like the Youth Congress, but also by some in the Opposition, such as 'Umar Salih al-Barghuthi of the AE, who called in a speech given at Ramallah/al-Bireh for independence within Arab unity or death. The only real exception to the tone of remarks made at the events and in protest memoranda at the time was that of Jamal al-Husayni, who projected great optimism at a speech in Jerusalem in which he flattered his listeners by telling them that they had grabbed international attention with the recent demonstrations, and that patience and sacrifice had achieved the laudable end of informing the world of Palestine's deprivations (23.2.34 enclosures to unspecified document, PRO – CO 733/258/1).

Colonial Office.²⁵⁰ The mufti was, however, on increasingly thin ice, caught between his own assessment that violence could not achieve the desired changes in policy and the strength of public opinion and alienation from the British, with whom he was seen as having damagingly close relations.²⁵¹ Moreover, maintaining “influence with and ascendancy over the Mufti,” as the Colonial Secretary put it, could not contain the Palestinian national movement indefinitely.²⁵²

The state’s bloody suppression of the protests, far from stamping out the determination of popular forces, stimulated debate in Arab circles over the potential of moving in the direction of more radical and purposively violent means of struggle, including political assassination and the organization of guerilla bands. The Arab public was divided in opinion, but some contended that clandestine methods held more promise of shaking the state. As the High Commissioner noted, such talk moved in late 1933 from “whisper[ing]” to public discussion, denoting the growth of stridency and militancy within Arab discourse. Unbeknownst to the Palestinians, in private Colonial Secretary Cunliffe-Lister validated the radical wing of the national movement, commenting in March 1934 in a memorandum for the cabinet that British deaths during further immigration protests or other disturbances could have the effect of scuttling official support for Jewish immigration. While of course there was no disclosure of this potential vulnerability in British policy, several fractions within the Palestinian

²⁵⁰ HC to Colonial Secretary, 5.2.34, PRO – CO 733/258/1; Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 28.3.34, CP 95 (34), PRO – CO 733/257/12.

²⁵¹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 5.1.34, PRO – CO 733/257/11.

²⁵² Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 28.3.34, CP 95 (34), PRO – CO 733/257/12.

nationalist movement had already or shortly would reach the same conclusion on the prospects of using violence.²⁵³

Conclusion

In the two years after the 1931 Nablus arming conference and the AE session that followed, the forces of the new politics quickly gained great influence in Palestinian circles. These forces, chiefly the Youth Congress, the Istiqlal party, and the broader youth trend on which each was dependent, struggled in different manners to remake the national movement. While battling elite power plays, the YC built a network of branches which helped advance youth involvement in politics throughout the country. The YMMA, tightly aligned to the Istiqlal party, did the same. The interests of these organizations were increasingly attuned to local developments, such as struggles over land transfers and peasant evictions. The effects that everyday struggles had on the

²⁵³ CID, 15.11.33, periodical appreciation summary 26/33, PRO – FO 371/16926; HC to Colonial Secretary, extract, 10.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/4; Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 28.3.34, CP 95 (34), PRO – CO 733/257/12.

In the wake of the demonstrations, both the Colonial Secretary and the High Commissioner also implicitly acknowledged, in secret undertakings, some of the justice of Arab claims concerning immigration and the campaign for Hebrew labor. With the general strike still in effect, HC Wauchope introduced new measures to fight illegal immigration on 2 November 1933. Importantly, he also secretly issued a cut-off for amnestying immigrants who had entered the country illicitly (a practice much derided and commented upon by Arabs), effective the same date. By taking these steps, the state conceded that illegal immigration was a major issue and would have to be taken more seriously by the authorities. Similarly, in the above-mentioned paper put before the cabinet in March 1934, Colonial Secretary Cunliffe-Lister proposed to scale back British approval of Hebrew labor, which he saw as needlessly divisive. The Colonial Secretary planned to do so in coordination with Zionist representatives, among whom Chaim Weizmann and Nahum Sokolow (head of the World Zionist Organization and, from 1931-33, the Jewish Agency) had admitted that Hebrew labor was an irritant which should be curbed (Weizmann later retreated from this position). Arab unemployment also rose in prominence as an outstanding issue, and as per the MacDonald letter's opening, was to be utilized in calculating the country's "absorptive capacity." While these reforms were mostly superficial and intended primarily to facilitate and ease Britain's position and not to validate or buttress Arab claims, they nonetheless demonstrate that popular campaigning, particularly on a national scale and in mass numbers, could and did affect colonial policy (Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 28.3.34, op. cit.).

political practice of youth, and consequently on the broader national movement, will be considered at greater length in the next chapter, but during 1932-33 these involvements served to continue to expand the field of Palestinian politics and to grow the ranks of *engagé* youth. The organization and self-organization of youth did not, in spite of most elite hopes, render them more pliable and subservient to notable interests. On the contrary, their growing weight, combined with the stagnancy of elite politics, gave them cause to begin to advance their own political vision.

At the same time Palestinian elites were broadsided by the creation of the Istiqlal party. The party's model national subject, and its emphasis on engaging the public, presented a fervent challenge to the style and presumptions of elite politics. Its ties to the youth wing of the movement, through scouts and the YMMA, helped seed its brand of uncompromising anti-colonialism throughout one of the most vibrant Palestinian constituencies. Though its signature campaign for non-cooperation fell flat among its elite audience, it nonetheless further tarnished British rule in the eyes of the public, and contributed to generalizing the notion that the British were at the root of the problems facing Palestinian society. The short organizational life of the party did not reflect on the lasting power and resonance of its political discourse.

In the environment of popular assertiveness cultivated variously by the Istiqlal, the Youth Congress, and other youth formations, the events of 1933 presented a perfect storm. Following on the heels of the non-cooperation campaign and the evictions of the Wadi al-Hawarith Arabs, the inaction of the Palestinian elites in addressing the surge in immigration again illustrated the political weakness and inefficacy of the established

leadership. Popular forces had implicitly and at times explicitly been striving to articulate a new strategy for the national movement. With desperation running high and alienation from the British widespread, the Youth Congress and supporting youth and other associations led the charge to redraw the bounds of Arab politics and challenge the colonial state openly and directly.

The demonstrations of 1933 inaugurated the national movement's turn against British colonialism. British rule had long been opposed, but until that year unrest had centered on the Zionist movement. In pressing for street demonstrations youth forces took a major step towards a new strategy by bringing the movement to confront the British head-on for the first time. To do so, youth had to act as a disciplining force on elites.

The elites who dominated the national movement in its first decade had accepted the analysis that fighting two colonizers at once was untenable and consequently adopted the notion that a *modus vivendi* was necessary with the British overlords. As we saw in chapter 1, even when confronted with mass peasant and popular rejection of their diplomatic strategy, they were reluctant or unwilling to seriously countenance a new course. This was illustrated again in early 1933 with the hollow acceptance of the non-cooperation program. By late 1933 however, the tensions wracking Palestinian society were too great for elite evasion. The dynamic of discipline that attended enforcement of the boycott campaign of 1929 – where youth forces regulated the population in accordance with nationalist principles and dicta – was brought to bear on national elites. Though al-Hajj Amin's alliance with the High Commissioner and the state suppression

of leading national figures broke the hold of the youth wing and killed the cycle of protests, the potential application of discipline to elites had been demonstrated, and would in subsequent years be repeated. The virulence of the British response to the demonstrations only further consolidated the movement's new direction.

While contrary to the CID's over-exuberant (or paranoid) reporting, youth did not threaten to usurp the leadership of the Palestinian national movement, there was good cause for the increasing attention they garnered in police and other reports throughout 1933. The 1933 demonstrations and their aftermath owed greatly to the efforts of youth and clearly illustrate that they had become a powerful force which elites were not always capable of controlling or directing. The balance of forces between the popular and elite wings of the national movement remained in constant flux, but in the acute moment of the immigration crisis in 1933, youth formations effectively took charge and dictated the course national activism would follow, though importantly they elected to do so indirectly, without pushing aside elites.

The complex rearticulation (or rearticulations) of elite-popular relations during this period is something typically unnoticed in the extant historiography on the Palestinian national movement. The nuances of the shifting balance between these constituent forces were something which perhaps on occasion got the better of elites or which they sometimes misjudged. For despite their plaintive statements before and after the Jaffa demonstration denoting their loss of stature amidst the growing weight of notions like public opinion and constituencies like youth, elites still held considerable

sway.²⁵⁴ Though the importance of youth within Palestinian politics grew greatly after the demonstrations, and had developed to the point of being able to compel the program of protests to begin with, in the event they still looked to elites to represent the national movement (through the offices of the AE). Rising popular forces sought to unify the movement around a new basis, and that meant retaining meaningful and influential roles for elites.²⁵⁵ On the other hand, some elites acted to contravene popular will during the 1933 unrest. British authorities credited local elites with preventing demonstrations at Acre and Nablus on 28 October and at Ramle and Gaza on 30 October.²⁵⁶ And it was elite intercession through al-Hajj Amin and his allies that ultimately snuffed out the cycle of popular mobilization that had gained momentum from September through late 1933.

²⁵⁴ While it could be objected that many such statements, such as those cited herein, were designed for purposes of cajoling or pleading with the British, I think to believe that they were nothing other than dramatic performances concealing ulterior means would be to deny the context of serious ferment among youth and the real pressures for action they levied against elites. Further, though some elites were adept at playing chameleon-like roles (the mufti and his deputy, Jamal Effendi, being primary examples), their historic interest in accommodation with British power was envisioned as consanguine with the model of notable politics in which personal relations could not easily or continually be reduced to mere artifice.

²⁵⁵ The indirect character of the new youth wing's leadership, though at first blush appearing as incidental, suggests further insight on the internal dynamics of the movement, including the self-positioning of the newly ascendant youth forces as well as the continued political survival of elite figures in an environment of popular upheaval and growing radicalism. In opting to push elite forces into conformity with youth demands, popular forces enjoyed a large measure of control and political power within the movement without the profile of acting as the official leadership, and hence, were somewhat shielded from holding direct responsibility before the public. At the same time, bringing elites who had been hitherto less militant along projected a stronger veneer of internal unity, and could be seen as intended not only to put some steel into the elites, but also at galvanizing the public behind a more unified national movement. The conservation and redeployment of elite authority thus also buffered the appearance of a rift between "radicals" and "moderates" within a movement already beset by elite factionalism. In this way, the activist youth's orchestration of key events in 1933, acting as a kind of man behind the curtain, served a variety of ends.

²⁵⁶ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 173; DC-Jerusalem to Chief Secretary, 6.11.33, summary of events, enclosure to HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5. The mayor of Haifa also notably acted to attempt to dampen the local uprising (DC-Haifa to HC, 7.11.33, enclosure to HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/5).

The conflict in orientations and priorities between the elite and popular wings of the national movement, and among elites themselves, continued after the 1933 protests, but elites were increasingly subject to models of political action initiated by non-elites. The expansion of the popular field, which was already on display by the time of the demonstrations, meant that popular forces gained greater influence in shaping the trajectory of the national movement and its forms of struggle. It is to this character of the growing popular field, and specifically the broadening and deepening of the youth trend in the years directly preceding the Great Revolt, that we turn next.

Chapter 3: In search of popular sovereignty: youth and direct action, 1934-36

The bloody confrontations that attended the British suppression of the Palestinian national movement's 1933 anti-immigration protests rocked Arab society for months after their conclusion. The series of demonstrations which had begun in October of that year had been driven by the zeal of an amalgam of Arab youth forces, led foremost by the Youth Congress. The formal leadership of the national movement, represented by the desultory and decaying Arab Executive, had been goaded by youth, the Istiqlal party, and the Arab press into sponsoring the street protests, but in their aftermath the movement's momentary unity of purpose crumbled and the familiar division between its elite and popular wings reemerged.¹

The end of the protest cycle sparked renewed discussion on the proper course for the national movement. By February 1934 if not earlier, the majority of elites had returned to their stock position of favoring the dispatch of another diplomatic delegation to London. Such talk was bitterly excoriated by youth, who assailed the formal leadership.² In contrast, as the CID noted in mid-February: "Young extremists opine that the slightest disturbance will have greater effect in promoting their cause than any other action."³ Similarly, during the founding meeting of the YMMA branch at Tulkarm the same month, Salim 'Abd al-Rahman, a youth organizer with the YC and an AE member, concluded a critique of the recent demonstrations by calling for better organization and by supporting the formation of guerilla groups such as that of Abu

¹ The demonstrations are extensively detailed and analyzed in chapter 2.

² RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 1.3.34, monthly summary of intelligence (February), PRO – FO 371/17881.

³ CID, 12.2.34, periodical appreciation summary 4/34, PRO – FO 371/17878.

Jilda, a highwayman whose evasion of the British authorities made him popular among Arab populace.⁴

Despite their rejection of the elite's return to its diplomatic avocation, there was no consensus among youth on how to move forward in early 1934. After the program of rolling demonstrations was brought to a close by violent state repression and elite Palestinian collusion, many looked on the venture as a tactical failure and saw public processions as an unnecessary liability.⁵ When continuing a course of open confrontation with the colonial state failed to gain broad assent, youth activists gradually moved towards an assortment of popular campaigning and direct action. The turn towards popular campaigning built upon prior initiatives, and eventually coalesced into an acephalous and episodic new repertoire of political activism which, despite its amorphous character, nonetheless posed a new and fervent challenge to the colonial state.

Rather than confront the state head-on, youth activism from 1934 to early 1936 was characterized in part by its pursuit of attributes of sovereignty and the occasional imitation of sovereign functions of the state.⁶ This was illustrated poignantly, if fleetingly, by a brief campaign by youth to establish and run their own patrols against illegal Jewish immigration on Palestine's beaches. Youth in this period also resumed their earlier interest, as discussed in chapter 1, in using practices of internal social regulation in furtherance of national objectives, such as halting land transfers to Jewish

⁴ CID, 12.2.34, periodical appreciation summary 4/34, PRO – FO 371/17878. On Abu Jilda see Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 264-65, and Ted Swedenburg, "The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry," p. 487.

⁵ HC to Colonial Secretary, 10.11.33, PRO – CO 733/239/4.

⁶ I am grateful to Manu Goswami for observations that helped open this line of inquiry.

buyers. Here too, youth perceptions of the state's opposition to Arab interests played a critical role. As the state had repeatedly demonstrated its unwillingness to control land transfers in a manner that protected the Arab peasantry's traditional usufruct and tenancy rights (as the national movement had demanded for years), youth aimed through popular campaigning in various villages and areas to directly discourage land sales and to fight against the eviction of *fellahin* on the ground. In some cases they supported direct physical or violent resistance to the state and Zionist settlers. As with the question of illicit immigration, the interest in devising practical solutions to the conundrums facing Palestinians led activists to seek to usurp and replace the colonial state's authority, in this case by redefining the socio-political parameters of the land market.

In the minds of Arab organizers the task in the early 1930s was to move from the failed realm of elite diplomacy to popular, mass action. To this end youth displayed an abiding interest in materializing an alternative *modus operandi* within the national movement, based in popular campaigning, independent initiatives, and attention to local as well as national forces and struggles. Most distinctively, where elites had pursued the attainment of sovereignty through high politics and the offices of the British empire, the actions of youth forces were often animated after 1933 by a motion towards directly enacting a *popular* sovereignty in the face of state opposition. The popular sovereignty which youth and other horizontal social forces were intent upon was not bound up with a negotiated solution to their colonial plight, nor was it invested in the institution of a legislative council or models of representative democracy. Instead it was composed in *practices* that were premised on the centrality of the Arab majority's right to control and

determine its own affairs. These practices were organically embedded in efforts and campaigns, such as those mentioned above, undertaken to address Arab concerns and grievances. Where sovereignty and the premise of indigenous majoritarian centrality were common to both elite and popular aspirations, youth strove to give these notions tactical embodiment.

The looseness of the new repertoire and the manifest failure of many specific campaigns to achieve their aims have led to disinterest and the marginalization of activist praxis during this sub-period in the literature, save for the attention to underground paramilitary organization. Yet paradoxically, the weak results of the campaigns did not stymie the ascent of youth in national circles or lead to resignation or demobilization. On the contrary, in the most extensive existing treatment of the subject, Weldon Matthews argues that by 1935 an informal network of youth associations held “considerable sway over policies of the Majlisi and other major factions.” Alongside journalists, youth became the source of “initiative in the national movement.”⁷

Sometime between 1933 and 1935 the youth field recognizably became the largest single organized constituency within the movement. As such, and given the dynamism and rising credibility of youth as dedicated and ardent nationalist partisans, their activism helped set the pace for what followed. Youth interest in tactics and practices which strove to take on aspects of sovereignty – however successful their individual efforts may be deemed – represented an important precursor to the Great Revolt. Indeed, the developments in youth activism between 1934 and early 1936 render

⁷ *Confronting an Empire*, p. 210, 224.

the Great Revolt in a new light: where it has commonly been seen as a sudden break or rupture with the past, it appears on reexamination as a radical escalation of the leading edge of national activism which preceded it.

This chapter traces the burgeoning growth of the youth trend after 1933, and offers a portrait of its growing internal diversity, including its appeal in rural areas and among non-elite youth. It looks briefly at a sampling of associations, their memberships, objectives, and activities. It then examines the effect on youth of participation in the new associations, arguing that the formation of new subjectivities was an essential aspect of the expansion of the youth field. The growth of independent scouting is treated in some depth as exemplary of the project to refashion youth, and of the concerns and contests which this sparked. The focus in the first half of the chapter on the changing sociology of the youth movement is followed in the second portion by examination of tactical experimentation and popular campaigning by youth related to the pressing issues of immigration and land. The struggles over youth as a constituency in this period, and the relation of the youth field to wider realignments within the national movement following the dissolution of the AE in 1934, are also discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a look at youth involvement in paramilitary endeavors that preceded the revolt.

The sociology of youth expansion

In the early 1930s the youth field in Palestine expanded rather dramatically. This was reflected in both the geographic spread of the youth trend and in the variety,

interests, composition, and political bearing of the youth societies which appeared. Youth associations sprang up all over the country and with great rapidity after 1929. The sheer scale of the development of the youth trend in Palestine at this time is remarkable. *Filastin* estimated in November 1933 that there were some 25,000 members of Arab youth societies.⁸ By comparison, in Egypt during the same year it was estimated that there were 4500 scouts in local troops, while the Muslim Brothers (*Ikhwan al-Muslimin*), the largest Islamic society in Egypt, was estimated four years later in 1937 to have 20,000 members.⁹ Whether or not *Filastin*'s surmise was exaggerated, as it quite possibly could have been, the proportion of youth who became organized within associations was certainly very high, and indicated more generally the rapid growth of popular social mobilization that was characteristic of the early 1930s. Indeed the state became very concerned by the profusion of youth societies and by their propensity for political engagement and "extremism." Writing in late April 1934 the CID held that "A very important feature [of the Palestinian scene] is the participation of Boy Scout formations of towns and villages, and their discipline." Scout troops were "attached to various associations, clubs and private schools," and were a commonplace feature of the socio-political landscape.¹⁰ Though scouts were probably the most popular type of youth association, the spread of the youth phenomenon was represented in a welter of different societies – sports clubs, regional (town or village) associations, religious or

⁸ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 109.

⁹ Jakes, "Extracurricular nationalism," p. 77; Israel Gershoni, "The Muslim Brothers and the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-39," *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 22, n. 3 (July 1986), p. 382. It should be further noted that Egypt's population at the time was approximately 15 million, or roughly 15 times the size of that of Palestine's Arab community.

¹⁰ CID, 26.4.34, periodical appreciation summary 7/34, PRO – FO 371/17878.

confessional groupings, as well as scouts. The changing memberships of these groups, as well as their activities and aims, offer a valuable window into ongoing social and political transformation within the Arab community under the Mandate. This section will consider aspects of the youth expansion primarily by examining a number of youth societies whose official files have survived at the Israel State Archives, supplementing the view these provide with additional sources as available.

The expansion of the youth field was powered by its growth beyond its middle and upper class origins. While previous activism had been driven by urban-based, educated middle class and elite youth, in the early to the mid-1930s the youth trend broadened past this base.¹¹ Though the shift towards cross-class composition is difficult to track with any precision, many of the new societies registered with the government and submitted membership rolls, though typically only for their administrative bodies, which give some perspective on the issue. Towards the mid-1930s, but sometimes earlier, landowners, merchants, lawyers, teachers and government clerks, all occupations of the upper and middle classes, begin to appear with less predominance on such rolls. The Muslim Sports Club of Lifta (in the Jerusalem subdistrict), for instance, registered in September of 1933, featured one government clerk, a factory owner and contractor, a paralegal, a teacher, a (manual) laborer, and one member without a profession listed. The administrative board of the Muslim Sports Club of Safad, approved as a society in 1931, included four merchants, a bank clerk, and a farmer, along with three tailors, a

¹¹ Existing accounts typically treat the youth trend as an exclusively educated and/or middle and upper class emanation. Such constructions are erroneous, as will be explored herein. The conclusion to this chapter offers further reflection on the breadth of the youth field and the historiography's treatment of this matter.

grocer, a student, and two unemployed persons. The branch of the Youth Congress formed at Tiberias in 1935 lists six merchants, four car drivers, three “chief fishermen,” and a petition writer, alongside four masons, a cook, a butcher, a tailor, two fishermen, two bakers and a barber. The YMMA branch at Safad provides a rare internal view of the trend towards greater occupational and class diversity within youth formations, as its records contain two administrative committee lists, two years apart. The first list, from June 1933, is composed of three merchants, three farmers, two lawyers, two petition writers, a landowner, and a tailor. The second, from July 1935, contains three farmers, a lawyer, a petition writer, a newspaper correspondent, a shoemaker, two masons, a carpenter, a (manual) laborer, and a barber. Where in 1933 there was possibly only a sole non-middle or upper class member (the tailor), in 1935 the same body included six craftspeople and manual laborers.¹² Although the above is anecdotal evidence, it is suggestive of the broadening of the youth trend in a manner which matched the general growth of working and lower class political involvement as the 1930s progressed.¹³

There were of course exceptions to the growing internal diversity of youth association memberships. The administrative committee of the Hebron Young Men’s Society of Jerusalem, founded in 1934, was composed entirely of merchants, save one teacher and one *awqaf* employee. As this society also illustrates, some associations

¹² This estimation presumes conservatively, without any hard data other than monthly dues which could have acted as a bar to entry, that most of the cultivators or farmers in urban associations were well-off. There is no way to ascertain whether this was the case, and in truth it may be that they ran the gamut of wealth and status, especially after youth associations began to become more broadly socially representative in membership.

¹³ See the registration forms for the various societies noted herein at: ISA (23) 4850 – 8m (Muslim Sports Club, Lifta); ISA (27) 2681 – s 221m (Muslim Sports Club, Safad); ISA (27) 5000 – 2m (Tiberias YC); ISA (27) 2680 – s 135m (YMMA, Safad).

retained a greater flavor of upper and middle class elements in their administrative bodies at the very least.¹⁴ From the sampling of files utilized for this research, this would seem to be the minority of groups. A larger exception to the general trend towards more diverse membership was to be found in those societies formed in rural and suburban areas. From some of the fragmentary records available, these appear to often have been dominated by the peasants who comprised the majority of the rural population. This was the case for the Baytunya YMMA, near Ramallah, established in 1931, and for the Faradiya Youth Society in the Safad subdistrict, founded in 1932.¹⁵ With what little data that exists from these societies' formal registration papers, it is impossible to know whether these and similar associations contained peasants of the lower strata, including the landless and the dispossessed, though it stands to reason that membership dues may have restrained the more disadvantaged from joining, if they were collected with regularity.¹⁶

The proliferation of youth societies in rural and suburban regions acted to augment the youth trend's reach beyond urban areas. The two central youth associations, the YMMA and the Youth Congress, which built country-wide branch

¹⁴ We unfortunately have no way of knowing or evaluating the composition of the general membership of these organizations. At least in the files I examined at the ISA, where youth organization documents (often restricted to registration papers) exist in the district administration *hativot* (divisions), only one file offered a general membership list, and unlike among the formal registration forms where occupational data was collected for the administrative body members, this list included names only.

¹⁵ See the registration forms at: ISA (23) 4850 – 28m (Hebron Young Men's Association, Jerusalem); ISA (23) 4850 – 17m (YMMA, Baytunya); ISA (27) 2679 – s 87m (Faradiya Youth Society).

¹⁶ Membership dues were one of the conditions of entry to the Faradiya Youth Society and amounted to an initial fee of 100 mils upon joining and 20 mils monthly thereafter (Bye-laws of the society, ISA (27) 2679 – s 87m). Given the irregularity of collections for many national causes, such as the National Fund, it may have been possible that dues could have been forgiven or collections lax in some of these associations, though the involvement of many in forms of tangible, local mutual aid may have obviated some of the distrust and skepticism with which solicitations for national ventures were sometimes greeted.

structures, were engines for this expansion. As illustrated in the previous chapter's discussions of the contention over the first Youth Congress's urban-based executive and Ya'qub al-Ghusayn's subsequent assumption of the presidency, the question of rural inclusion and representation within national associations and their leadership structures was critical to the development of the trend. For national associations like the YC and the YMMA, rural areas became important sites for organizational expansion, bolstering their ranks and the representative character of the parent societies. Importantly, this expansion sometimes entailed the incorporation of rural leadership, as well as rank-and-file, who brought credibility to the associations. The Safad branch of the YC, for instance, counted some 150 members, including from the town's hinterlands, within months after its establishment in mid-1933.¹⁷ The healthy enrollment of youth in the branch was doubtless helped along by the rural pedigree of its first head, Kamil al-Husayn al-Yusuf, who hailed from the area village of Khalisa and also headed Safad's Arab Village Association.¹⁸ According to historian Mustafa 'Abbasi, Kamil al-Husayn's rural origins paved the way for his election as head of the YC branch, which suggests that the branch's rural component played a strong role locally.¹⁹

More prosaically, local, non-national youth associations were founded throughout rural and suburban areas, as well as in towns and cities, in the 1930s. Some became aligned to larger political currents or parties, but many retained their

¹⁷ Mustafa 'Abbasi, *Safad fi 'ahd al-intidab al-Baritani: dirasa ijtimaiyya wa-siyasiyya* (Ramallah: Muwatn: al-Mu'assasa al-Filastiniyya li-Dirasat al-Dimuqratiyya, 2005), p. 210-11.

¹⁸ Ibid. Kamil al-Husayn's place of origin (Khalisa) goes unmentioned by 'Abbasi, but is noted in a Zionist intelligence report: Arab Bureau information, 27.8.35, CZA S/25 – 22231.

¹⁹ *Safad fi 'ahd al-intidab*, p. 209. 'Abbasi writes that the leadership remained urban, but with Kamil al-Husayn as head, this needs some qualification (ibid, p. 214).

independence from the factional wrangling of the national scene. Regardless of affiliation, the emergence of youth societies in rural and suburban areas demonstrated that the new horizontal associations' potential to serve local interests and to stimulate new subjectivities spoke to youth in the countryside as well as the cities.

It would be misleading, however, to consider that most of the new independent youth societies were forged with national political interests in mind. Many expressly declared their disinterest in politics, as had been *de rigueur* prior to the upheaval of 1929. As suggested in chapter 1, the nominal avoidance of politics may have owed to its identification with state policy and the Palestinian elites engaged in national representation at the highest levels. In other instances it was a dissimulation brought about by the state's gag rule barring civic groups from political activity.

Despite the formal demurrals, there is little question, however, that such societies and their memberships often became involved in political matters. This was more obvious for scout troops, but also pertained to other formations which sought to affect their surroundings at a local level. Moreover, the accumulation of active youth societies throughout the country had a larger aggregate effect on national politics, irrespective of the local societies' orientations, by creating a powerful, plentiful constituency that was fought over by politicians, and elements of which, as has already been suggested, came to play important parts in reshaping the trajectory and strategy of the national movement.

The new societies typically focused their activities on their immediate or regional environment, and played a variety of roles locally. In some instances the associations were embroiled in local feuds or contests over attaining and wielding political influence.

Though it was not billed as an explicitly youth association, the Druze Union Society of Abu Snan, in the Acre subdistrict, was enmeshed in such a tussle. The society was founded in 1932 by ‘Abdullah Khayr, whose family was locked in conflict with their rivals, the Tarifs. Khayr’s aspiration in creating the association was to build a base of support for his family and to “take power over Druze affairs away from the Tarif family,” including prying away its control of a local *waqf*. The youth orientation of the Druze Union Society is plain from a directive in its bye-laws enjoining periodic consultation with village elders, who were clearly not intended to be its members. According to its constitution the society’s purpose was to advance education in the Druze community and to strive for general social uplift, as well as offering alms to the needy. The Khayr family’s rivals were not persuaded by these goals and sought to have the colonial state shut the association down, condemning it as illegitimate and even mustering religious argument against it. The administration declined to intervene and within a few years, after Druze had shown limited interest in the organization and after ‘Abdullah Khayr took a position as a district officer, the association dwindled from the scene.²⁰

A more common drive animating youth associations was the interest in promoting varieties of local mutual aid and dispute resolution. Both the YC and the YMMA voiced support for enhancing local solidarity and elevating the status and

²⁰ Laila Parsons, *The Druze between Palestine and Israel, 1947-49* (Oxford: St. Martin’s Press and St. Antony’s College, 2000), p. 23-25; documents from the association’s official file, ISA (27) 5000 – 20m. Quote from Parsons, p. 23. Parsons notes that in founding the organization Khayr was influenced by Druze politics in Lebanon (where he attended university) and by the Zionist movement, with whom he had some contact. It could be added as suggested here that the form the association took, targeted at younger members of the community, was of a piece with the spread of youth trend in Arab Palestine.

quality of life of members, peasants, workers and society at large economically, socially and otherwise. Keeping with the aims of its parent association, the Tiberias YC, for instance, sought to promote a “spirit of cooperation among Arab peasants.” Similarly, it also called for organizing Arab workers and tending to their affairs. The YMMA-Baytunya advocated mutual support among its own members. Many societies named serving principal local constituencies like peasants and laborers and the amelioration of poverty (through aid) as objectives. The near ubiquity of broad-based aims such as championing the interests of local communities is evident in the aforementioned case of the Druze Union Society, where efforts to use the club in a power play were cloaked in the commonplace rhetoric of serving the advancement of the community.²¹

Some societies pursued more specific goals with respect to community empowerment, and moreover, advocated strategies that bespoke an interest in autonomism and self-reliance. The Faradiya Youth Society is exemplary in this respect. As well as seeking to improve the village’s health services and raise the standard of its agriculture, the association took aim at illiteracy and advocated the formation of cooperatives. The society further demonstrated a will to create local mechanisms of dispute resolution and problem solving that would bypass the state. In the second year of its existence, in early 1934, the association approached the government via the local district administration and proposed a scheme for stemming the nuisance and indemnifying the losses caused by animals grazing on farmers’ fields and ruining their crops. Court adjudication of issues arising from unrestricted grazing was not, according

²¹ Basic law of the YC-Tiberias, ISA (27) 5000 – 2m; Basic law of the YMMA-Baytunya, ISA (23) 4850 – 17m.

to the society, an adequate or timely means of dealing with the harm done. The society therefore advocated stationing villagers in the fields as watchmen and fining the owners of animals caught trespassing 30 mils, payable to the lookout who found the animal. Only in the case of an animal's owner refusing to pay the fine would the incident revert formally to district court. The society offered a similar proposal to fight illicit deforestation. Those caught logging or removing forest goods without proper permission would be fined between 100-300 mils, with half going to those providing information on any incident (presumably lookouts), and the other half deposited in the Faradiya Youth Society treasury. Both of the proposals were rejected by the state as incommensurate with the legal system and hence as encroachments on its primacy and jurisdiction in adjudicating disputes.²²

The YMMA of Baytunya presented a different iteration of the autonomist impulse. The tenth clause of its basic law, or constitution, mandated the formation of a six-member body to mediate disputes among youth. The clause does not specify its scope, though presumably it was intended to act as an arbitrating body for dispute resolution for youth within the community at large and not solely amongst the association's members. As with the society at Faradiya, the intent was to establish the resident youth society as an organ with considerable responsibility in local affairs,

²² See correspondence at ISA (27) 2679 – s 87m. Interestingly, despite his reservations concerning the society's proclaimed non-political status (fed no doubt by its appointment in January 1934 of Subhi al-Khadra as honorary chair of the organization), the ADC-Galilee was favorably disposed towards the two proposals and referred to them as "laudable." He reported to DC-Northern, Morris Bailey, that he was not able to recommend their approval based on a lack of legal basis to do so (30.3.34). Bailey then repeated, almost verbatim, his assistant's assessment in a letter to the Chief Secretary (7.4.34).

including extinguishing local strife and facilitating greater harmony among community members.²³

While modest in scale, proposals such as those discussed above illustrate the proactive approach of many youth societies, whether unaffiliated or branches of larger organizations, towards their communities. They also indicate a readiness to circumscribe the state. In advocating and instituting local mechanisms for problem-solving and for arbitration of conflicts, youth associations reached back to older traditions of resisting or avoiding state encroachment, such as represented in the widespread reliance by peasants in rural areas, in previous centuries, on *'urf* (customary law).²⁴ Earlier proclivities towards communal self-reliance and independence from the state found a ready home in the era of mass politics in many youth societies, which acted on a micro- or local scale to reclaim social, political and economic functions or space that was monopolized by the Mandate.²⁵

As discussed in chapter 1, early unofficial (i.e.- non-state-sponsored) youth formations like the YMMA carved out a space of socio-cultural autonomy in the late 1920s from the authorized youth societies and the Christian and Anglophone culture of the Mandate (represented in the YMCA, the Baden Powell Boy Scouts, missionary activity, and the Anglicization of the state and its law). This motion was adumbrated in the early 1930s by a growing, general autonomist sensibility among youth. By

²³ Basic law, YMMA-Baytunya, ISA (23) 4850 – 17m. The arbitration board was to be composed of members of the society.

²⁴ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 28. The use of *'urf* left matters in local hands and bypassed the *shari'a* courts and the formal legal sphere of Ottoman administration.

²⁵ Here I do not mean to suggest that this was an exclusive characteristic of youth societies, as it certainly informed other horizontal associations, from labor unions to women's associations to village societies, as well.

deepening the roles they played in local affairs, youth groups often strove to simultaneously augment their autonomy and that of Arab society from the state, which was variously deemed, implicitly or explicitly, unreliable, untrustworthy, derelict or hostile with respect to the advancement of Arab interests and improvement of Arab communities. The interest of select societies in acting directly to regulate their own surroundings and address the issues pertaining to their communities, without state involvement, was consonant with wider inclinations taking shape among youth to imitate or usurp state functions, which will be taken up below.

New model youth

Participation in the new youth societies gave rise to novel subjectivities among their memberships. As with similar, contemporaneous formations in the colonial world and outside it, the youth trend in Arab Palestine emanated in part from the desire to inculcate new, model forms of subjectivity, personal comportment, and disposition, particularly in young men. Underlying the widespread participation in the new societies was the view that youth were capable and vital – even central – agents in struggles to shape the present and the future. This notion was mirrored within Palestine by a plethora of Zionist youth organizations whose social and political practice informed, but did not limit or determine, that of the indigenous Arabs.

Arab youth associations enunciated a variety of models, conceptions and foci concerning the place of youth in society. Most sought variously to tackle the challenges (great and small) facing Palestinian society, protect local, religious, and Arab identities,

and uphold cherished principles of moral conduct. Youth societies shaped their members' subjectivities through social practice via their participation in the organizations' activities and also through the explicit articulation of codes of conduct and behavior which members were expected to embody and uphold. By doing so, the associations frequently acted to invert or rebuff the Mandate's claim, through its socializing apparatuses (from school curricula to the YMCA), on the "character" of the younger Arab generation. In this section, I will survey some of the norms and internal practices used by youth societies as part of their venture to foster new youth subjects shaped for civic engagement. Then I will turn to examine independent scouting as particularly exemplary of this project and as a locus of state and nationalist interest.

The spread of youth associations represented the crystallization of new ideas concerning the participation of non-elites and younger elites in society. It has already been suggested here that assertiveness, self-direction, and taking initiative were key traits and qualities which youth societies promoted and which often organically accompanied their activities. During a time of rapid, contested social change, the growth of public roles for youth meant that the institutions of youth culture were also concerned with the personal virtue and rectitude of their members, and linked these to the advancement of ideals of brotherhood, patriotic civic attachment, and dutifulness.

In matters of personal conduct some youth societies prescribed a mature, even austere outlook in which there was no place for frivolity. The Hebron Young Men's Association of Jerusalem stipulated, in this light, that joking (*mizah*) would not be tolerated in the club. Similarly, the Taybeh Youth Association (in the Jerusalem

subdistrict), which sought to “elevate the condition of its youth members, morally and socially” and to instill “commendable ethics” among them, permitted only club business to be discussed on its premises. It aimed, in a familiar register, to promote a “spirit of sacrifice and sincerity.” Not surprisingly, for some associations the resources requisite to encouraging “good character” were to be found in religious values and teachings. In addition to promoting athletics, the Muslim Sports Club of Lifta regarded its purpose as “spreading Islamic virtues, ethics, and customs among youth.” As these examples suggest, earnestness and probity, of both religious and non-religious stripes, were common among the attributes enjoined by many new youth societies.²⁶

The model of sober, dedicated, upright youth appealed in different registers to both organs of the youth trend and the wider national movement. Distilling these traits and dispositions was a fundamental task of those interested in morals and those interested in the nation, and the success of each was interlinked with wider processes transforming the socio-cultural landscape of Arab Palestine. Coming of age during the introduction to society of all manner of technological and cultural innovations, from the bicycle to the cinema, as well as the growth of education beyond the upper classes, youth were presented with a world whose basic assumptions and possibilities seemed to be quickly capable of change. The Istiqlalist journalist and editor of *al-Difa*, Ibrahim al-Shanti, often intimated that moral degeneration in Arab society emanated from foreign sources and foreign rule and saw youth trend activity as a potential counterweight to the

²⁶ Basic law, Hebron Young Men’s Association, ISA (23) 4850 – 28m; Introduction and basic law, Taybeh Youth Association, ISA (23) 4850 – 1m; Bye-laws of the Muslim Sports Association of Lifta, ISA (23) 4850 – 8m. This was true both of those with greater nationalist leanings, such as the Taybeh association (see below), and those with less clear political orientations, like the Hebron Young Men’s Association and the Muslim Sports Club of Lifta.

“ignorance” which he felt the cinema in particular represented. Partially in response to the growing fascination with cinema, he formed the Jaffa Committee of Youth (*Lajnat shubban Yaffa*), a coordinating body for local scouting and youth organizations, to steer youth towards more worthy pursuits.²⁷

Though the fear of modern entertainments was not shared in all quarters, youth organizations did actively seek to garner and maintain the fealty of their members. In many groups, attendance at meetings was mandatory for administrative members and repeated absences were grounds for ejection from the society or its governing body. In some cases associations required youth to swear an oath of loyalty upon admission. Public oath-taking was not new to Arab societies, but during the late 1920s the act became increasingly associated in Palestine with nationalist causes and was consciously used to promote nationalist allegiance.²⁸ Oaths bound the members of youth societies to agreed-on aims, whether seen as prosaic or political, and helped to individualize the meaning of the commitments they undertook. The YMMA-Baytunya oath, for instance, declared: “I swear by almighty God to strive through my efforts to realize the goals of the society and to work sincerely to serve its principles and not break this oath, as God is

²⁷ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 108, 112-13 (quote from Kabha, not al-Shanti). We know little about al-Shanti’s organization, though it must have acted at some level as a competitor to the Youth Congress, whose headquarters were in Jaffa.

²⁸ An early example of public oath-taking during the Mandate era transpired at the national religious conference convened as part of the ongoing campaign around the Buraq in October 1929 (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p.226). The Istiqlal party gradually made oath taking and soliciting active public acclamation of political statements a regular activity at its events. See, for instance, Akram Zu’aytir’s account of the party’s first commemoration of Balfour day (*Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 443-451, especially p. 450).

my agent (witness).”²⁹ While simple in form, such oaths were among the first public testimonials of their kind, as professions of loyalty to the new horizontally-based associations rather than to individuals or *hamulas*, and were, despite their ready invocations of God, given outside the context of religious institutions and rites.

The practice of taking oaths was common within Arab scout associations, which adopted and modified the act from its original context under the Baden-Powell organizations, whose members swore loyalty to God and the British crown.³⁰ ‘Ali Dandashi, a scouting pioneer in Lebanon, saw an adapted version of the British scouting network’s oath as an “ideal instrument to instill Muslim morals and righteousness in... youth.”³¹ Although specific corroborating evidence is scant in the Palestine case, it is highly likely that local scouts similarly adapted the oath of allegiance from the official scouts.³²

The interest in oaths among youth societies, both scouting and otherwise, was part of the reassignment of social responsibility that occurred in the 1930s, as horizontally-organized groupings claimed greater stakes in civic and political affairs. Oaths and the regulation of participation for members managing a society’s affairs and decision-making were means by which members’ loyalty could be publicly inscribed and regularity imposed upon administration.

²⁹ Basic law, YMMA-Baytunya, ISA (23) 4850 – 17m. The Taybeh Youth Association’s oath was nearly identical to this, suggesting that the elements of the pledge were in common circulation and were freely transposable across organizations (Basic law, Taybeh Youth Association, ISA (23) 4850 – 1m).

³⁰ Jennifer M. Dueck, “A Muslim Jamboree: Scouting and Youth Culture in Lebanon under the French Mandate,” *French Historical Studies* v. 30, n. 3 (summer 2007), p. 492.

³¹ Ibid.

³² At least two scout manuals were written in Palestine by a member of the Nashashibi family, but I have not been able to locate any copies of them.

The widest loyalty commonly cultivated by youth associations was to the nation, though the parameters of national identity ranged in scope from the territorial (Palestine) to larger geo-historical units (pan-Arab renderings). Some societies, including the two main branch networks, the YMMA and the Youth Congress, actively advanced a nationalist sensibility (see chapters 1 and 2). But in a broader view, the nationalist culture of youth was fed more simply through the common substrates of patriotism and civic engagement. Exemplary in this respect, from among the records and associations examined for this research, is the Taybeh Youth Association, whose regulations and anthem (*nashid*) illustrate the instantiation among youth of a form of the layered national identity so well described in Rashid Khalidi's *Palestinian Identity*.³³

The Taybeh Youth Association, established in 1933, was set up as a society dedicated to the betterment of its home village in the Ramallah subdistrict.³⁴ In the introduction to its basic law, its president, Hana Khoury, a post office clerk,³⁵ wrote that the association was devoted to serving town and country and that its regulations were intended as a model for Arabs in Palestine and other Arab lands for the promotion of brotherhood, “the spirit of sacrifice and sincerity,” and “the spirit of true patriotism” (*ruh al-wataniyya al-haqiqiyya*). While its membership was open only to youth from Taybeh, the introduction very explicitly invoked wider affiliations and connections to Palestine and “brother” countries. The patriotism it saw itself as serving was both local and translocal, territorial and pan-Arab. The ambiguity of these open and multiple

³³ See especially p. 35-88.

³⁴ Zacaria Michel Khoury to DC-Jerusalem, 25.8.33, ISA (23) 4850 – 1m.

³⁵ Hana Khoury's occupation is noted in the association's official registration papers at ISA (23) 4850 – 1m.

significations was given a less shifting, more obviously Palestinian coloring in its strict avoidance of “political and sectarian affairs” and other sources of schisms.

A finer portrait of the society’s inclinations arises from the themes and imagery of its anthem, which blended older evocations of manliness and chivalry with new idioms. It opens by regaling youth as “lions of honor” and “the men of the country,” and quickly moves to cloak them in the image of a modern knight: “... your sword is your knowledge, and the shield is *adab* [decency, propriety].” The song exhorts youth to exert themselves to achieve their aims while assuring listeners that the “wicked” are not victorious. Amidst verses crackling with lighting and shimmering under unsheathed blades, youth are beckoned to “comprehend the meaning of [their] promises.” In the final stanza, the thrust of these injunctions is made crystalline. It begins: “All who don’t protect their sanctuary, will be the object of insult.” Warning of the “abasement” that awaits if they don’t follow the higher example for youth, the anthem calls out for the self-sacrifice requisite to inheriting the national patrimony (*dha al-thamin*), and ends with the zealous battle cry: “so swear that we will trample upon the pride of the traitors.”³⁶

Many dimensions of the Taybeh Youth Association’s ideal representation of patriotic subjectivity are on display in the anthem. It takes the key cultural themes of honor and propriety and fuses them with the nation and nationalist renderings of identity. The obligation of self-aware youth is to recognize their primary loyalty to the homeland and to courageously rise to the challenge of guarding and defending it, in part by

³⁶ Basic law of Taybeh Youth Association, ISA (23) 4850 – 1m.

refashioning themselves. For the nation to carry on and survive, youth must take strength from older notions of manhood and combine it with knowledge, rectitude, and determination. Only then, as modern young men cognizant of the bonds between their cultural identity and the land of their forebears, and the threats to them each, can youth have the self-possession to give of themselves to their utmost in order to beat back “the wicked” while also disposing of those Arabs who spurn these truths.

In both official and independent incarnations, scouting in many ways represented the most conspicuous effort to mold Palestinian youth. Unlike the independent troops, the official scouts eschewed the inculcation of nationalist identity (though they pledged loyalty to the British crown) and were an instrument for pacifying educated Arab youth and shaping them for loyal service in the bureaucracy. Of course the Baden Powell model was not strictly instrumentalist, but intent on producing “character” in youth through a set of teachings, precepts, physical activities, and familiarity with the natural environment.³⁷ The affinity between this disciplinary corpus and the British ethos of indirect rule made scouting a useful element within the imperial cultural apparatus in Palestine.³⁸ By 1936 there were over a hundred official scout troops, comprising some

³⁷ See Jakes, “Extracurricular Nationalism,” p. 37-39 for a brief synopsis on the origins of scouting and its context. More broadly see Michael Rosenthal, *The Character Factory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986); John Springhall, *Youth, Empire, and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977); and Tim Jeal, *Baden-Powell* (London: Pimlico, 1991).

³⁸ Palestine was in no way exception in this respect. For a discussion of scouting in Africa, see: Timothy Parsons, *Race, Resistance, and the Boy Scout Movement in British Colonial Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio State UP, 2004).

3,344 members, along with another 800 young women and girls in the corresponding female scout units, the Girl Guides.³⁹

The Palestine administration was from the start eager to maintain its control of scouting, but by the 1930s its intelligence arms looked with increasing alarm at the situation of independent troops. Not only were they becoming a ubiquitous feature in Arab communities, but they were regarded as “of extreme character.”⁴⁰ Youth associations were broadly seen as “Training the younger generation in political agitation, under the cover of national culture.”⁴¹ As this estimation reveals, the CID held a diminutive view of youth and most often saw them as subject to manipulation by social superiors and political elites, the latter of whom it often imagined were the only persons truly capable of any amount of agency in Arab society. Authorities like the CID also had a difficult time comprehending that an authentic “national culture,” shaped fundamentally in many respects by the conditions fostered under Mandatory rule, was coming into being among youth, let alone that emanations of youth culture often represented the younger generation’s efforts to wrest its fate into its own hands.⁴² This was certainly true of the scouts, whose overall trajectory from a state-sponsored to an independent phenomenon served for some as a vision or model for the organization of a stronger, more militant national movement.

³⁹ A.L. Tibawi, “Educational Policy and Arab Nationalism in Mandatory Palestine,” *Die Welt des Islams*, new series, v. 4, n. 1 (1955), p. 22.

⁴⁰ CID, 22.4.33, periodical appreciation summary 13/33, PRO – FO 371/16926.

⁴¹ CID, 2.6.33, periodical appreciation summary 16/33, PRO – FO 371/16926.

⁴² By authentic here I do not mean to suggest an essentialist conception of local Arab culture, but one that is largely self-generating, within given circumstances and constraints, and not some kind of copy (of Zionist or Egyptian youth culture for instance) or instrumentalist façade for raw political ambitions.

Though the YMMA early in its history endorsed the formation of independent scout troops it was not until the time of the first Youth Congress that scout organization began to gather steam. Following the YC convention, which also supported the development of independent scouting, many troops were founded throughout 1932. The pace of such organization mushroomed thereafter, growing throughout 1933 until in January 1934, the Youth Congress succeeded in organizing a counter-association to the Baden Powell organization, after which scouting grew even more rapidly, propelled by the efforts of both the YC and the YMMA. Some 30 troops were involved in founding the new scout society, entitled the Palestinian Arab Scout Association (*Jam'iyat al-kashshafa al-'Arabiyya al-Filastiniyya*), which envisioned a pan-Arab future and named Iraq's King Ghazi as its titular head. Although we have no concrete figures as to the exact size of independent scouting, by this point it seems to have easily outnumbered and overshadowed the official Boy Scouts, as is apparent from a CID report from April 1934, only three months after the new scouting umbrella organization was created: "The statutes of such an organization [sic] have been formulated by the Young Mens' Executive, and, with a few exceptions of groups formed under the control of the Department of Education, representatives of the majority of groups supported this movement." If the state-sponsored groups, which counted over 4100 members in 1936, were, as the CID clearly thought, a slender exception to the overall trend "towards disaffiliation from the Baden-Powell organization and union in a world Arab organization," then it appears that independent scouting was significantly larger than the

state sector and in fact helped to shrink it by drawing away troops into the new association.⁴³

Some further perspective on the scale of nationalist scouting may be gained by looking at a number of regional-level estimates that do exist. Geographically, areas around Nablus, Tulkarm, and Qalqilya in the center of the country, Haifa and Safad in the north, and Ramle in the Latrun salient (between Jerusalem and Jaffa), were the regions in which independent scouting was strongest and where scout concentrations were heaviest.⁴⁴ Tulkarm, a modest town, was home to the Abu ‘Ubayda scout group, one of the largest and most successful independent scout troops. According to its head, Tawfiq ‘Abd al-Raziq, the organization grew from 12 members in 1934 to almost 400 in July 1935.⁴⁵ In Jerusalem, which by contrast, was less distinguished in scout development than many other areas, there were an estimated 160 scouts within the city and 800 in the region (presumably the subdistrict) in August 1935.⁴⁶ These numbers,

⁴³ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 122-23; Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 189; CID, 26.4.34, periodical appreciation summary 7/34, PRO – FO 371/17878. A.L. Tibawi, who worked in the Education Department, does not comment on the size of the independent scouting phenomenon in his discussion of scouting, but he is in the main interested in the relationship between the state sector (employees and scouts) and nationalist identification (“Educational Policy and Arab Nationalism”).

⁴⁴ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 109.

⁴⁵ Najib [Khalil al-Khuri], 8.7.35 dispatch, CZA S/25 – 3875. ‘Najib’ was an important informant for the JA’s Arab Bureau during 1935 and 1936. He was a Christian from Tulkarm who developed sympathies for the Zionist movement, and was well-placed to provide intelligence by virtue of his abundant contacts among local nationalist activists in Tulkarm and other areas of the country’s central and northern regions. He was a member of the Tulkarm chapter of the Youth Congress and the Palestine Arab Party (see below), and served on Tulkarm’s national committee during the general strike in 1936. This file at the CZA contains over 160 pages, mostly of his hand-written reports.

⁴⁶ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 109; Arab Bureau information, 27.8.35, CZA S/25 – 22231. The estimate in the Arab Bureau’s intelligence pertains to scouts “under the influence of Arab leaders,” and specifically mentions Baha al-Din al-Taba’, a Syrian scout commander brought to Palestine by the mufti for the purposes of organizing the local scout movement and providing it with military training (Arab Bureau information, 4.3.35, CZA S/25 – 22224; see below). In other words, this may be an undercount, or it may simply presume that all of the area scouts were effectively captured by the mufti, which, without available supporting evidence, seems presumptuous.

though inconclusive in terms of Palestine as a whole, suggest that scouts were indeed a very prominent and visible feature in many communities at this time, and importantly, likely represented the most systematically organized element of Arab society.

The rapid boom in recruitment and growth in membership witnessed by independent scouts were fueled by the sizable demographic they targeted. Unlike the official scouts, which were typically attached to schools and made up of students, among the independent groups the age range was broader and tended to be older, between 20 and 30, though it also included younger members. As a site for mobilization, independent scouts provided an ample and widely popular framework for the organization of youth, and it was to the various troops' advantage to be inclusive in membership.⁴⁷

As the scout phenomenon proliferated the colonial administration took note of their public presence. Beginning in 1933 police commentary on the annual Nabi Musa procession from the Jericho area to Jerusalem became increasingly concerned with the large number of scouts in attendance and their impact on the event. In 1934, before the ebullition of the 1933 demonstrations had finally petered out, youth reportedly desired to use the festival for political ends, but the AE weighed against the motion. Youth were the largest group represented at Nabi Musa that year, as also at the smaller Nabi Salah festival and the second Arab Fair (promoting Arab-made products). This was true again

⁴⁷ Tibawi, "Educational Policy and Arab Nationalism," p. 22; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 2.5.34, monthly summary of intelligence (April), PRO – FO 371/17881; H. Bowman, Director of Education, 23.5.35 memo, cited in Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, ft. 49, p. 261; and various documents at: ISA (23) 4850 – 38m, discussing proposed legislation to regulate youth groups. In his memorandum, Bowman places the age of the "Rovers" he discusses at 18-25, while the RAF perceived the broader range above.

for Nabi Musa in 1935, which was heavily attended by sports clubs and scout troops, many of whom came bearing long staves and knives.⁴⁸

As discussed in chapter 1, even before the scouts became the most populous element of Nabi Musa, youth were seen as a constituency through which to organize shows of force by different political interests and factions. Scouts were quickly absorbed into this dynamic, and the organization of scouts became a measure of political influence. Probably for this reason the mufti, al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, signaled his approval of scouting in 1931, before the upsurge in scout organization, during an event at a scout camp in Jerusalem. He opened his remarks there with an apt and foreboding quote from the Qur'an: "And prepare your strength against them as best you can" (8:60) – which suited both the scouts' focus on developing bodily strength and the official scouts' motto, "be prepared."⁴⁹ Jennifer Dueck, a historian whose work has explored scouting in Lebanon and Syria under the French Mandate, writes that the mufti saw no trouble in reframing the original Protestant milieu of the official Baden Powell scouts through the use of Islamic discourse, a practice similarly occurring elsewhere.⁵⁰ In August 1933 an institution close to the mufti, the club at Rawdat al-Ma'arif school in Jerusalem, began work to establish local Islamic scouts on the model of those in Lebanon, to which they planned to affiliate.⁵¹ From available evidence, Islamic scouting

⁴⁸ CID, 15.4.33, periodical appreciation summary 12/33, PRO – FO 371/16926; CID, 3.4.34 and 26.4.34, periodical appreciation summaries 6 and 7/34, PRO – FO 371/17878; CID, 20.4.35, periodical appreciation summary 8/35, PRO – FO 371/18957; Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 171.

⁴⁹ Dueck, "A Muslim Jamboree," p. 492.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ CID, 30.8.33, periodical appreciation summary 22/33, PRO – FO 371/16926.

in Palestine never attained the popularity that it had in Lebanon, and remained a minority trend.⁵²

The independent scouting movement was known first and foremost for its nationalist ardor. This caused the administration great consternation and worry. Shortly after Hitler's rise to power in Germany the police fretted that the youth wing of the Palestinian national movement might choose to imitate or align with fascist and Nazi youth organizations and their parent regimes.⁵³ As popular Arab sentiment turned further against the British after 1929 some youth did take inspiration from the developments in Italy and Germany, and some symbolic aspects of their youth movements, such as their stylized salutes, were on occasion imitated by Palestinian scouts.⁵⁴ But while some in Palestine saw certain dimensions of Europe's national socialist regimes as laudable or worthy of emulation,⁵⁵ youth and scouts in Palestine did not prove as susceptible to fascism as the British authorities and Zionists feared, and did not adopt fascist forms of popular organization and mobilization.⁵⁶

⁵² This owed in no small measure to the sectarian aspect of inter-Arab political conflict in Lebanon, which was reflected in local scout organization. See Dueck, "A Muslim Jamboree." Shai Lachman contends that the independent boy scouts in Palestine had a "Muslim-communal character" in the 1930s but provides no corroborating evidence or citations ("Arab Rebellion and Terrorism," p. 55). His suggestion is countered by Arnon-Ohana, who shows to the contrary that the umbrella Palestinian Arab Scouting Association sought to include Christian scouts as well as Muslims and successfully resisted efforts to have itself delimited as a Muslim communal institution (*Herev mi-bayit*, p. 189).

⁵³ CID, 22.9.33, periodical appreciation summary 23/33, PRO – FO 371/16926; CID, 28.8.34, periodical appreciation summary 12/34, PRO – FO 371/17878; CID, 5.8.35, periodical appreciation summary 12/35, PRO – FO 371/18957.

⁵⁴ Najib, 8.7.35, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁵⁵ CID, 22.9.33, periodical appreciation summary 23/33, PRO – FO 371/16926.

⁵⁶ The subject of alleged Palestinian affinities for Nazism and fascism has been a hobby-horse of Zionist scholars within the literature on Palestinian society during the Mandate. For examples concerning youth, who have been singled out as favoring these regimes and their politics, see: Lachman, "Arab Rebellion and Terrorism," p. 52, 74 and Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 181-82. Typically, such studies mention that youth were inspired by Nazism and fascism, but adduce little or no evidence to demonstrate this claim and provide no explanation of the manners and extent to which such models actually informed political

The mainstay of scout activity was not support for foreign regimes or ideologies, but promoting local nationalist discipline. As Porath notes, “Scout troops were instrumental in forcing the shopkeepers and merchants to take part in nationalist strikes or [sic] as the vanguard in nationalist processions, a role which would be extensively played by them during the general strike of 1936.”⁵⁷ Scout enforcement of nationalist actions and public displays doubtless often occurred at the behest of the elite leadership,⁵⁸ and as such illustrated the obedience and deference of many scouts to the national movement’s premier organs. Yet their role in enforcing compliance with the dictates of the movement, which necessitated pressuring merchants and elders, eventually emboldened them to take more assertive positions within national politics, including with the leadership, as occurred during the 1936 general strike.⁵⁹ As an organizational vehicle designed to inculcate obedience to authority, scouting had the paradoxical effect of serving such authorities (elders and elites) in the short-run, while creating a new dynamic of youthful assertiveness over time. The task of socio-political regulation, under nationalist auspices, appears pivotal to this transformation. Scouts

practice. In Lachman’s article, his two examples (delivered in a single sentence) are Jamal al-Husayni’s effort to organize fascist-modeled youth squads (*al-futuwwah*) and the Defense Party’s aspiration to create a competing “Blackshirt” organization (p. 74), yet he neglects to mention that the former never met with any significant organizational success and the latter never even got off the ground. If there was any serious substance behind the charges of Nazi and fascist sympathy and emulation, it is hard to believe that scholars such as Lachman wouldn’t have explored the matter further and illustrated its depth and extent. As well, the CID certainly would have been treating the subject, yet only three periodical reports in three years do so, and in brief (see ft. 53 above).

⁵⁷ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 123.

⁵⁸ Tibawi off-handedly remarks that the “Arab national bodies had always maintained their own scouts who were employed during emergencies for various purposes including the enforcement of political strikes or economic boycotts” (“Educational Policy and Arab Nationalism,” p. 22). This seems to be a fair assessment regarding the role generally assigned to youth, but strictly speaking, it isn’t accurate regarding scouts per se, large numbers of whom were not independently organized until the 1930s. As noted above, Tibawi is not particularly interested in the independent scouts, and his discussion begs for some clarity and, one wishes, further detail on the matter.

⁵⁹ This subject is taken up in chapter 7.

charged with maintaining discipline reprised the regulatory role within Palestinian society that youth first played during the anti-Jewish boycott campaign of 1929-30. Just as it had done in that earlier campaign, far from limiting the social and political purview of youthful activists, this role seems to have been critical in the early 1930s in stimulating youth ambitions to exercise wider influence, in the name of serving the national struggle.

Presented with the rapid growth of scouting, the nationalist militancy of many scout troops, and their potential for causing disorder, the administration considered promulgating legislation specifically designed to constrain and regulate this segment of Palestinian youth. In late 1933 a draft of the “Juvenile Societies Ordinance” was circulated, gaining concurrence and input from the attorney general, the Director of Education, the CID, and some of the District Commissioners. Its main features included granting the High Commissioner the power to unilaterally dissolve any “juvenile society,” giving the police the authority to enter the headquarters or meeting places of such associations (with permission from the resident District Commissioner), and regulating the use and display of political symbols such as uniforms, badges and flags. Further, all “juvenile societies” and their branches were to be registered, and adults (including parents or guardians of minors) were to be rendered legally responsible for the conduct of the associations. The ordinance was discussed in May 1934 by the state’s executive council, but it was deemed more trouble than it was worth, as the prospects of stirring a media backlash and drawing more unwanted attention to the subject were thought to be great. Making specific reference to scouts in the Jerusalem vicinity, the

head of the CID brought the idea up again the following year, with the support of the Director of Education, but this second push met no more success than had the first.⁶⁰

The state judged that its powers were already sufficient regarding disturbances of the peace, and no special legislation to treat scouts and youth societies was necessary.⁶¹ Though it was not passed, the draft ordinance sheds light on the state's view of the youth trend between 1933 and 1935. Many within the administration felt the need for increased surveillance and vetting of youth activity, both through the formal registration process and proposed police and state powers. Visual symbols of collective and nationalist organization were targeted. Overtly political insignia and paraphernalia, such as uniforms and flags, were not seen as something that required outright banning, but whose legitimate use would be controlled by the state and restricted to only those who passed through the state's registration and screening. Perhaps most importantly, youth in a "juvenile society" were not regarded as responsible for their own conduct. This was more than a simple consideration of legal distinctions between minors and adults.⁶² Rather it was a further indication of the highly vertical conception of Arab society that informed the colonial administration's assessments of its political activity and shaped state responses. Just as the state seldom acknowledged the agency and growing autonomy of popular social classes, always imagining them to be tethered to the will of elites and therefore subject to "manipulation," youth were presumed to be acting on the

⁶⁰ Correspondence at ISA (23) 4850 – 38m; Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 171 and ft. 49.

⁶¹ This evaluation was made following what was seen as the highly satisfactory performance of state forces, including Arab police, during the suppression of the 1933 demonstrations.

⁶² The head of the CID noted during the first round of correspondence on the proposed bill that the Ottoman Law of Societies, the relevant legal statute, did not make provision for handling persons under 20 years of age, and thus the state had no legal tools for treating them, other than the penal code.

orders of social superiors. This misrecognition of new forms of popular agency, including among youth, has in turn helped to sideline these groups in the historical accounting of the period. It also led the state to continue to view elites as the interlocutors and empowered representatives of Arab society, and to pursue lines of approach to the national movement tailored to their foci (in the form of representative government and the legislative council), while large segments of society, including its new youth, moved further away from such reformist aims and agendas.

Tactical innovation: direct action against Jewish immigration

Throughout the first half of 1934, while the appeals for the 1933 trials wound to a close, youth remained set on developing and pursuing a course for the national struggle based in action. Although interest in street demonstrations had not found a broad enough basis to continue such a course, youth retained prominence within national circles. The CID ventured in June and July that they could play a major role in the reorganization and rejuvenation of the movement.⁶³ After bitter criticism of the elite leadership and its strategic stasis, and with general encouragement for youth from elements of the press,⁶⁴ the Youth Congress again took the initiative.

Like the preceding year, the YC remained concerned with the swell of immigration, which showed no signs of letting up. Given the government's support for facilitating the entry of an enlarged number of immigrants, it was not seen by Arabs as a

⁶³ CID, 15.6.34 and 14.7.34, periodical appreciation summaries 9 and 10/34, PRO – FO 371/17878.

⁶⁴ CID, 26.4.34, periodical appreciation summary 7/34, PRO – FO 371/17878; Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 108-09.

credible enforcer of its own caps (calculated on a periodic basis ostensibly according to the country's "economic absorptive capacity"). Despite the immense furor that the spike in immigration had caused in 1933, and in spite of the High Commissioner's secret decision amidst the Arab strike in early November to set a final cut-off date for immigrants without permits to receive a general amnesty, the colonial state did not take serious steps thereafter to curb the well-known flow of illegal immigrants entering the country. The administration was aware that the volume of illegal entries was considerable, but it did not have adequate measures in place along the country's borders to capture or deter those seeking to clandestinely immigrate and settle in Palestine. The government's lax handling of the matter stirred the YC to respond by attempting to organize its own independent patrols against unlawful immigration.

Many of the illegal entries were coming by sea, landing at night in locations proximate to Jewish colonies or coastal cities where Jews lived. In July the YC resolved to create its own mechanisms for interdiction of illegal Jewish immigrants. The initiative began at its earliest with visits by prominent local activists Salim 'Abd al-Rahman and Farid Fakhr al-Din with Arab Bedouin in the areas of their respective hometowns, Tulkarm and Beisan, to recruit them to watch for boat landings of immigrants. The length of the coastline, and as ever, the lack of funds to support any extensive activity, were immediate obstacles to organizing patrols, and RAF intelligence

cast doubt on the longevity of the venture almost from its start, owing to the “arduous” quality of the necessary work.⁶⁵

The Youth Congress publicized its plan to patrol the coasts and, according to the CID, presented an exaggerated view of the extent of its activities. On the night of 15 August 1934 a small scout troop from Tulkarm, numbering ten individuals, headed to patrol the coast near the colony of Netanya, but not before taking the provocative step of marching through the town under an Arab banner. The scouts were effectively chased out of the colony and established an encampment not far off. That night, after having announced their presence and rattled the local Zionists, they were attacked by a group roughly three times their size. Most of the scouts had gone to sleep, leaving lookouts to carry out their task of minding the shoreline. The Zionist counter patrol first ambushed and bound the lookouts, and then proceeded to beat the sleeping scouts. In the altercation one of the Arab scouts was badly stabbed.⁶⁶

The colonial state wasted no time in responding. On 16 August it issued an official communiqué to the public that obliquely referred to the incident while putting the onus for it on the Arabs. The substance of the statement claimed that the government was in the process of assembling “new measures for securing the frontiers... against all illegal immigration” and emphasized that only the state had the right to regulate, detain or deter illegal entrants into the country. Without specifying the Arab scouts and the Youth Congress, the statement held that “far from assisting the police in their task

⁶⁵ CID, 6.8.34, periodical appreciation summary 11/34, PRO – FO 371/17878; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 1.8.34, monthly summary of intelligence (July), PRO – FO 371/17882.

⁶⁶ CID, 28.8.34, periodical appreciation summary 12/34, PRO – FO 371/17878; Arab Executive to the High Commissioner, 17.8.34, PRO – FO 371/17876.

[independent patrols] are a positive hindrance and embarrassment” because of their tendency to cause “breaches of the peace.” Nowhere were the events in question described, nor was the assault on the scouts condemned. Rather, the administration explicitly forbade independent action against unlawful immigration and threatened both those undertaking such activity with prosecution under the Prevention of Crimes Ordinance and the press with suspensions if its coverage was deemed objectionable.⁶⁷

The popular response to the incident “exalted the action of the Arab scouts” and precipitated harsh invective towards the elite leadership, who “in contrast with the young men, did not themselves take action, but rather were satisfied with presenting complaints and memos to the authorities.” The press was awash with expressions of national solidarity with the youth involved and the affair consumed the attention of urban circles. Lydda lodged a protest with the High Commissioner and Tulkarm conducted a strike and sent a delegation to the District Commissioner.⁶⁸

Capitalizing on the uproar, Jamal al-Husayni and Imil al-Ghuri, a young activist of the *majlisi* camp, published a call in *al-Jami‘a al-‘Arabiyya* on 19 August 1934, three days after the government’s communiqué, to flout the official prohibition and organize widespread, continuous patrols. They charged, not without reason, that the government’s inaction towards illicit Jewish immigration emboldened the Zionists to use violence to combat the potential threat of the Arab patrols. In response, they called for youth throughout the country to volunteer for one week stints on patrols and announced the formation of a committee to manage the deployments and to secure sustenance for

⁶⁷ PRO – FO 371/17876.

⁶⁸ Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 226.

those participating. They also directly addressed the YC and the Abu ‘Ubayda scout troop from Tulkarm, stating that the new patrols they were calling for were not meant to replace the original patrols, but as a complement to them. For publishing the statement and another article on the subject, *al-Jami‘a al-‘Arabiyya* was suspended for one month.⁶⁹

Nevertheless Jamal Effendi and Imil al-Ghuri continued their preparations and by early September claimed to have on the order of 150 youth ready to begin patrols. They were further preparing a conference for scouts on the subject and readying a second public statement on the issue, but were stopped in their tracks when the Youth Congress objected to their efforts as piling on to serve their own interests. The YC had responded to the government’s official communiqué by stating that it would halt the patrols as soon as the government demonstrated its resolve to eliminate illicit immigration. The incident on 15 August was seen as serious by the administration, the CID, and RAF intelligence, and the last held that “obviously the situation was such that if it could not be openly shown that the Government were taking energetic and new steps to tighten up the existing control... a serious condition of unrest in the country might at once ensue.”⁷⁰

Shaken into action, the authorities quickly erected a program for interdiction that put a premium on making government action visible to the public. The centerpiece of the plan consisted of using airplanes, particularly at night, to conduct overflights of the

⁶⁹ A translation of the statement is available at: PRO – FO 371/17876; Officer Administering the Government [OAG; the Acting High Commissioner] to Colonial Secretary, 10.9.34, PRO – FO 371/17876.

⁷⁰ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 10.9.34, PRO – FO 371/17876; CID, 28.8.34, periodical appreciation summary 12/34, PRO – FO 371/17878; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 21.9.34, resume of operations (August), PRO – Air 5/1247.

littoral. The RAF and the TJFF (Trans-Jordan Frontier Force) were inducted into operations, the latter being allotted temporary powers as immigration officers, and somewhere between 50 and 100 additional police were pulled into coastal and border patrols.⁷¹

On 1 September the government issued a new communiqué, announcing the formation of what was termed a “marine preventive force” and a special land force of police dedicated to border patrol (separate from the TJFF). The rapid response by the administration gave the YC cover to “climb[] down,” as the Acting High Commissioner put it, and halt the original patrols, which it did through its own statement proclaiming that the state’s actions and effectiveness would be watched, and thanking youth, scouts, and the press for their concern for the nation’s well-being. Having the initiator of the patrols back out and after being criticized as seeking advantage from the situation, Jamal al-Husayni and Imil al-Ghuri also ceased their efforts to bolster the short-lived campaign.⁷²

There is little question that, as the RAF observed, the dispute over leadership of the patrols contributed to their quick demise, despite the interest shown by the group which Jamal Effendi and al-Ghuri had attracted, and by other youth in Nablus and Tulkarm.⁷³ The CID observed before the patrols were terminated that the “Arab Young

⁷¹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 21.9.34, resume of operations (August), PRO – Air 5/1247; CID, 28.8.34, periodical appreciation summary 12/34, PRO – FO 371/17878; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 1.9.34, monthly summary of intelligence (August), PRO – FO 371/17882.

⁷² Official communiqué, 1.9.34, PRO – FO 371/17876; OAG to Colonial Secretary, 10.9.34, PRO – FO 371/17876. The two were also warned directly by the state about their conduct, which may also have contributed to their decision to scrap their plans.

⁷³ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 3.10.34, monthly summary of intelligence (September), PRO – FO 371/17882; CID, 20.9.34, periodical appreciation summary 13/34, PRO – FO 371/17878.

Men movement” was a potent force, but lacked coherent and centralized leadership.⁷⁴ The YC secretariat was itself reportedly divided over continuing the patrols.⁷⁵ The bonds for good conduct accepted by Ya‘qub al-Ghusayn and Jamal al-Husayni (among others) after the close of the appeals process for the 1933 demonstrations trials doubtless weakened their public standing and may have contributed to the latter’s desire to glom onto the YC effort to efface the appearance of capitulation.⁷⁶ Sporadic patrols followed in the months after the initial bid and into 1935, and some did in fact prevent boatloads of would-be immigrants from coming ashore, but on the whole the endeavor never attained a consistent or well-organized form.⁷⁷

In the estimation of Bayan al-Hut the failure of the patrols scheme owed not to infighting amongst activists over youth constituencies and public standing, but to more fundamental problems, namely a lack of arms requisite to carry out the task of preventing illegal landings and to an unwillingness to challenge the government.⁷⁸ Having just helped precipitate the first direct confrontations between the national movement and the colonial state, it is likely that members of the Youth Congress secretariat who succeeded in scuttling the enterprise were either anxious to avoid imprisonment and legal suppression or more broadly concerned for the YC and the movement since the bloodshed in 1933 was seen by some as a costly tactical misstep.

⁷⁴ CID, 28.8.34, periodical appreciation summary 12/34, PRO – FO 371/17878.

⁷⁵ CID, 20.9.34, periodical appreciation summary 13/34, PRO – FO 371/17878.

⁷⁶ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 10.9.34, PRO – FO 371/17876.

⁷⁷ Ibid; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 122; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 261. At Khalisa, near Huleh in the north, a scout troop was composed in February 1935 whose activities were to include beach patrols (Arab Bureau information, 22.2.35, CZA S/25 – 22224). Jamal al-Husayni himself raised the idea again in mid-1935, opining that youth should restart the initiative (Arab Bureau information, 21.5.35, CZA S/25 – 22224).

⁷⁸ *Al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 261.

Still, as quickly as it was abandoned, the YC's move to imitate functions of the state represented an important innovation in the field of youth activism whose larger significance has not been recognized in any existing scholarship.

Sociologist Doug McAdam has written about the process and import of tactical innovation within social movements. For a movement to survive, he writes, it must either convert its energies into institutionalized power or continue to develop and deploy “noninstitutional forms of protest.” Without success in the former realm, the temporality of the movement's struggle is dependent on both the pace of tactical innovation and the rate at which opposition forces are capable of neutralizing particular tactics or the advantage conferred by their use. A view of the ensuing process of “*tactical interaction*” between movement and opposition forces allows for analysis to surpass discussion of the individual parties and their respective “characteristics or resources” by focusing on the relational dynamic of their contest.⁷⁹

In the case of the Youth Congress's immigration patrols, the innovation was clearly seen as a threat by both Zionists and the state, which acted with haste to squelch the initiative. The Zionists' quick use of extra-legal violence enflamed the situation and in turn helped prompt the state to jettison its blind-eye approach to illegal immigration and to seek to contain the situation and prevent wider inter-communal conflict. The government also acted to prevent the threatened erosion of its authority, as it made quite clear in its communiqué of 16 August 1934. The appearance of Arab scouts taking up the role of the state in upholding the law could not be tolerated, and thus it was the Arab

⁷⁹ Doug McAdam, “Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency,” *American Sociological Review* v. 48, n. 6 (Dec 1983), p. 736. Italics in the original.

activists and not the violent Zionist response which received censure and invited recourse to the hated Prevention of Crimes Ordinance.

At first blush, the patrols incident looks like a fiasco and an unremarkable moment for the Palestinians and the youth trend. Indeed, the motion was suppressed almost before it began. But such an evaluation misses the fact that although youth hastily backed away from the initiative, their tactical innovation not only drew a quick response, but racked up a qualified success by triggering a revamp of policy on illegal immigration virtually overnight – one that continued representations and protestations by leaders and the press over months had not been able to bring about. Though this outcome was not widely seen by Palestinians as a true success, the partial gain on immigration should not be totally discounted simply because it was far from a solution to Palestinian concerns.

According to the Officer Administering the Government, the affair also led to the revival in the press of attention to immigration and was seen as portending future “agitation.”⁸⁰ Though this did not immediately materialize, the immigration patrols idea represented an early incarnation of an inclination, which grew after the 1933 demonstrations, to push back against state policy through the development of tactics which centered on the construction, or perhaps more exactly, the temporary performance of independent indigenous authority and sovereignty. The contrast between the activism of youth and the passivity of elites drawn in the press and in displays of public sympathy for the scouts was indicative of the popular mood, which supported the search for new

⁸⁰ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 10.9.34, PRO – FO 371/17876.

tactics and new leadership. Thus despite the quick demise of the youth motion for immigration patrols, the effort generally brought them increasing public regard and underlined the growing importance attributed to action, not diplomacy, within national circles. The tactical interaction set off by the patrols in turn signaled the value and potential gains to be found, as well as the risks, in pushing the national movement further towards popular campaigning and activist-oriented policy.

Land campaigns and the limits of civil resistance

Like the question of forging a popular approach to the immigration crisis, opposition to Zionist land acquisition and settlement became a site of tactical experimentation by youth organizers. As the crisis enveloping Arab agriculture and land tenure deepened in the early 1930s, activists moved episodically from pronouncements and stentorian rhetoric condemning land transfers towards grassroots campaigning in affected areas. Such efforts have gone all but unnoticed within the literature on both the national movement and the land regime, perhaps because they achieved little tangible success. With a few recent exceptions,⁸¹ most treatments of Arab efforts against land transfers have focused on the land purchasing ventures of the SMC and the National Fund, which were rapidly outmatched by capital deficits,⁸² or noted the legal battles

⁸¹ Viz: Cohen, *Army of Shadows*; Munir Fakher Eldin, "Communities of Owners: Land Law, Governance, and Politics in Palestine, 1882-1948," Ph.D. dissertation (New York University, 2008).

⁸² Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 95-96; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 293-94; Sela, "The 'Wailing Wall' riots," p. 78. Although the National Fund was instrumental in saving lands in Wadi Qabbani (in the Tulkarm subdistrict), Porath counts its only subsequent purchase as 1000 dunams in Gaza in 1933, which it parceled into smaller lots and sold to peasants. The Wadi Qabbani transaction, in which it acquired rights of purchase from a seller that it then sold to an Arab buyer, gave the impression that the Fund could be used as a legitimate intermediary for landlords looking to sell real estate, who soon flooded the Fund with similar offers for which it was woefully undercapitalized to handle (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 94).

waged by lawyers and others to block sales.⁸³ Porath focuses in particular on the SMC, tracing the growth of its engagement from purchases of shares in *musha'* (collectively owned) plots in the early 1930s to its later administration of a public campaign of Islamic injunction and sanction, spurred by the mufti, that operated through a network of preachers.⁸⁴ Yet the SMC's more well-known campaign followed the initiative of youth activists and peasants.

As in the endeavor to organize scout patrols against illegal immigration, the move towards popular campaigning around local land struggles and against transfers followed governmental inaction or disinterest in Arab claims and concerns, and represented an effort in part to supplement, if not surpass, the legal realm and formal pleas put forward to the government.⁸⁵ During the period when land tours became a new mode of activism, sales by peasants and small-holders to Jews, which had grown significantly in volume since the late 1920s, received increasing attention in national discourse and the press.⁸⁶ Along with key events such as the takeover of Wadi al-Hawarith by Jewish settlers (discussed in chapter 2), popular campaigning raised the profile of land transfers as an issue of critical importance to the well-being of the *fellahin*

⁸³ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 71-73.

⁸⁴ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 94-98.

⁸⁵ Avraham Sela perceptively argues that Arab activists turned towards the issue of land sales after being locked out of immigration policy. Where immigration remained under government control, land sales presented an arena in which they could potentially exercise a greater role and achieve some gains, by directing their energies inward at sellers and brokers ("The Wailing Wall Riots," p. 77).

⁸⁶ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 83-84. The statistics which Porath draws on (from Granott) are partial and broken into aggregate periods. Peasant sales as a percentage of these figures grew from 1.6 percent of total Zionist purchases from 1923-27 to 18.3 percent from 1928-32, to 22.5 percent from 1933-36 (though in the final period, despite the increase in proportion of sales compared to large non-Palestinian and Palestinian landowners, total volume dropped – from 16,940 dunams between 1928 and 1932 to 9265 dunams in the subsequent period). See chapters 5 and 6 on the political economy of the peasantry and land sales in the first half of the 1930s.

and indeed to the continued existence of rural Arab society. The countryside and its ways of life held great importance in Palestinian national discourse, and rural society and its representative figure, the hardscrabble peasant, were romanticized as irreplaceable sites of the nation's cultural identity.⁸⁷ The initiative of activist youth and the potency of these embattled symbols stirred the interest of Arab politicians and the wider Arab community.

The land campaigns cohered around two central axes. The first regarded efforts to halt outright sales of privately held land, by both peasants and notables. Areas that were rife with sales or rumored to be prone to selling, such as the Tulkarm subdistrict or the Latrun salient, were visited by youth activists who lectured and spread literature on the danger of land sales to the nation, and occasionally pressured sellers or brokers to terminate their activities.

The second axis pertained to struggles against the colonial state opening new blocks of what it deemed to be state land to Jewish settlement.⁸⁸ These lands were home to poor *fellahin*, often Bedouin, who had enjoyed various usufruct rights according to the Ottoman land code, and their transfer to Jewish colonists eroded traditional Arab tenancy rights and fostered peasant dispossession. Although the terrain of these struggles was distinct from the first type of land campaign because of the direct role of the state, many of the same tactics (touring, exhortation, and support of local efforts) were deployed.

⁸⁷ Swedenburg, "The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier"; Martina Reiker, "Constructing Palestinian Subalternity in the Galilee: Reflections on Representations of the Palestinian Peasantry," *Inscriptions* v. 6, 1992, no pagination (http://www2.ucsc.edu/culturalstudies/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol_6/Reiker.html). See also chapter 4.

⁸⁸ Some detail on the dubious British understanding of *miri* land as state land is provided in chapter 5.

The genesis of a core element of the land campaigns, tours to affected areas, dates to sometime around the founding of the Youth Congress in January 1932. In February of that year, YC executive committee members Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman and ‘Abdullah al-Samara toured against Jewish ownership and purchases in the Tulkarm subdistrict.⁸⁹ Later in the year, “a certain radicalization in the countryside in the Tulkarm area took place,” according to Raya Adler, which she concludes owed to the involvement of nationalist activists from the town in the conflict over ownership at Wadi al-Hawarith.⁹⁰ Though there is little material with which to pin these developments on the two highly active young nationalists and their associates, the Jewish colonists’ representative in Wadi al-Hawarith named Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman and al-Samara as sources for potential unrest.⁹¹ The idea of pursuing local-level work, such as that in the Tulkarm subdistrict, may have also gained ground during the effort to rehabilitate the National Fund, which set the first YC president, Rasim al-Khalidi, and Fuad Saba, a financial officer for the AE, traveling throughout the country.

A more concerted push to use tours as a means to exhort Arabs against land sales and intensify opposition on the ground began in 1933. That year, the struggle over Wadi al-Hawarith climaxed. As noted in chapter 2, youth and the Youth Congress (along with Istiqlalists and communists) were involved in the continuing contest, and played a role into the summer in backing and advocating local resistance. The removal of the Arabs from the area took on grave symbolic importance, encapsulating Arab fears of collective

⁸⁹ Arab Bureau information, 8.2.32, CZA J/1 – 205/1. The informant behind this set of reports, Husni ‘Abd al-‘Ali, was from the neighboring village of ‘Atil. See chapter 10 for his history during the revolt.

⁹⁰ Raya Adler, “The Tenants of Wadi Hawarith,” p. 207.

⁹¹ Ibid.

displacement while lending land struggles a palpable and existential urgency. Already in late spring, however, prior to the final months of activism around Wadi al-Hawarith, the CID reported that “Arab agitation against the sale of lands is going on quietly but systematically.” Gaza, for instance, was visited by several youth tours in May and June, one of which was organized by the YC.⁹²

An example of what a successful tour could look like is captured in a Zionist intelligence report on the village of Balad al-Shaykh, near Haifa. Beginning around 1925, members of the village, particularly those who were hard up, agreed to let some lands to Jewish colonists who had approached them. The report is unclear on the timing, but some years later unnamed youth activists from Haifa (perhaps from the YMMA or the YC) visited the village and urged it to abide by national lines, including avoiding social and economic contacts with Jews. After determined work by the Haifa youth, some Arab residents went to their Jewish tenants and asked for the leases to be cancelled. Local village youth subsequently visited Haifa repeatedly, leading, according to the informant (denoted only by the Hebrew letters ‘*ayn* and ‘*vav*), to the establishment of a secret paramilitary society, headed by local scout leader ‘Atif Nurallah.⁹³

At times, youth were beckoned by members of the public to exert pressure on large landowners who were in the market to dispose of their lands. Akram Zu‘aytir relates in his diaries that in September 1932 he was beseeched in an article published in *al-Jami‘a al-‘Arabiyya*, signed by “a peasant of Kafr Saba,” to head a youth delegation

⁹² CID, 19.5.33, 2.6.33, periodical appreciation summaries 15 and 16/33, PRO – FO 371/16926.

⁹³ Northern diary, #2 (13.2.35, ‘Ayn-vav), CZA S/25 – 22231. The report notes that the rent on the leases were profitably raised a number of times, suggesting the passage of at least several years before the arrival of the youth activists. Subsequently, the mufti also pressured members of the village to convert land to *waqf*.

to an absentee landlord selling village lands. The landowner, Muhammad Effendi Tahir al-Salah, of Nablus, stood on Zu‘aytir’s account to sell 900 dunams of land in Kafr Saba (Tulkarm subdistrict), though he reputedly had £P 20,000 in the bank and large revenue streams from his plantations. Moved by the plea, Zu‘aytir complied and traveled with a retinue of youth to Jaffa, where al-Salah had taken up residence. In Jaffa, Zu‘aytir gathered some nationalist notables before proceeding with his entourage to seek out al-Salah. Faced with concerted pressure, the visitors succeeded in convincing Muhammad Effendi, after some discussion, to swear an oath that he would not dispose of the lands.⁹⁴

Few sources offer any insight into the extent to which such visits and tours by nationalist youth, whether invited or spontaneous, met with success. Certainly they don’t appear to have been able to restrain the rash of small-holder sales that took off in the late 1920s and grew in the 1930s.⁹⁵ At the time of Zu‘aytir’s visit to Jaffa, he fumes in his diary that Tulkarm was brimming with *simasra* (land brokers) and also mentions Haifa, Jaffa, Beersheba, and Gaza as areas where selling was under way.⁹⁶ He rages that sons of mayors and members of the SMC were known to be engaged in sales or brokering, and yet, “Until now, not a single broker has been boycotted.”⁹⁷ Despite being branded as “traitors” by various nationalists, newspapers, and organizations, land

⁹⁴ Akram Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 432-33.

⁹⁵ See chapters 5 and 6.

⁹⁶ It should come as no coincidence that these same cities and towns (save Haifa) are noted by RAF intelligence as the destinations of a spate of land tours undertaken by youth in April 1934 (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 2.5.34, monthly summary of intelligence (April), PRO – FO 371/17881).

⁹⁷ Akram Zu‘aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 426-27. According to Cohen, Zu‘aytir’s reference was to Salameh the brother of Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman. Cohen also notes that both men, along with their brother in law and their father, who was mayor of Tulkarm, were involved in land sales in the 1920s. Salim Effendi subsequently underwent a nationalist transformation, unlike his brother (*Army of Shadows*, p. 68-70).

brokers and sellers carried on their activities largely without real fear of retribution.⁹⁸

The difficulty of working through moral suasion, or even through intimidation, may in turn have helped build interest in underground paramilitary activity as the ultimate means to beat back Zionist encroachment, as in the case of Balad al-Shaykh above.

Both colonial forces in Palestine, Zionism and the British, viewed the tours with suspicion or hostility. After the immigration uproar in late 1933 and the relative quiet during the trials of Youth Congress and other leaders which followed it, the CID commented in May 1934 that youth activists were conducting tours “ostensibly” against land sales. It isn’t spelled out what exact doubt the Deputy Inspector General (the head of the department) sought to convey, but it seems that the CID considered that the tours could be a cover for other forms of political activity and “agitation.”⁹⁹

A Zionist evaluation of the Youth Congress penned sometime after its second convention in mid-1935 acidly intimated that the tours displayed the failure of youth vision because they did not offer the peasantry real solutions or question the class order of Palestinian society. As the analyst put it: “The youth come to the peasant, demand that he follow a nationalist course and attempt to influence him lest he sell his land, but at the same time they don’t do anything for him which would lighten the pressure put upon him by the *effendi* and the heavy burden of usury [*harabit hakatzutza*] under which he kneels.”¹⁰⁰ Though it is offered in the context of a fanciful discourse in which “*effendis*” are depicted as Zionism’s true opponents (without which there would be no

⁹⁸ See Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 47-48; 68-71.

⁹⁹ CID, 26.5.34, periodical appreciation summary 8/34, PRO – FO 371/17878.

¹⁰⁰ The Arab youth front – where to?, n.d. [1935], CZA S/25 – 22231. The report appears to be authored by Aharon Haim Cohen, but only his first two initials are appended to it.

real national conflict), this critique offers a description of the land tours in practice and a sense of their limitations. The ethical project of protecting what were seen as national lands ran up against the declining political economy of smallholding and the crushing debt saddling the *fellahin*. The conservative approach to the land question of both the *a'yan* and middle class intellectuals was replicated by youth activists, who, animated by an idealist sensibility, believed that affirmations of national loyalty and not social and land reform were what was required to stem land sales. The exorbitant rates of interest that Arab moneylenders exacted from the peasantry ultimately obviated the success of the ethical-exhortational approach to the problem of land sales and hamstrung the normative powers of both the nationalist and religious registers used in the youth land tours and the SMC's land campaign which followed.

Tours and visits were not the only type of land activism in which youth engaged; they also became involved in the growing resistance of peasants to the steady transfer of lands, and following the lead of those facing eviction, backed the use of violence against the state and against colonization. The struggle by the al-Zubaydat Arabs on Mt. Carmel in the Haifa area is exemplary of this facet of land campaigning.

At al-Harithiya (known in English as Hartiya), where customary lands had been sold against the wishes of the Zubaydat, residents battled with the police during eviction proceedings in January 1935. In the altercation sling-wielding inhabitants injured 12 of the 43 officers present while one member of the tribe was killed by police gunfire.¹⁰¹ The slaying of the Zubaydat member engendered great resentment and unease among

¹⁰¹ CID, 5.2.35, periodical appreciation summary 4/35, PRO – FO 371/18957; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 179.

Arabs and the resistance of the locals sparked calls for support. Youth and scouts meeting in early February at the *al-Difa'* offices in Jaffa called for revenge and proposed to hold weekly meetings to coordinate efforts with the residents.¹⁰² Ya'qub al-Ghusayn, Sa'id al-Khalil, 'Atif Nurallah, and Dr. Rushdi Tamimi (all of the YC executive), along with Subhi al-Khadra, Fuad 'Atallah (a Haifa-based lawyer), and the well-known local religious and nationalist activist, Ahmad al-Imam, organized support, including financial subventions, for the Zubaydat.¹⁰³ On one occasion Nurallah, 'Atallah, Tamimi, and al-Imam brought them grain and urged that only resistance could save their lands, to which the residents responded by promising not to allow Jews to plough.¹⁰⁴ Allegations reached Zionist intelligence that Arab activists were responsible for the local residents' intransigence.¹⁰⁵ As Kayyali points out less tendentiously, the significance of events at al-Harithiya was that peasant resistance to eviction was stiffening such that court orders "could no longer be effected without the efforts of large numbers of Police."¹⁰⁶ Further, as Zionist intelligence was also aware, the dispute at al-Harithiya stoked the population's anger at the Arab leadership because of its inaction.¹⁰⁷

Following the killing of the Zubaydat resident, the YC sent Salim 'Abd al-Rahman, Imil al-Ghuri and Sa'id al-Khalil on a tour to the major northern cities of Haifa,

¹⁰² Arab Bureau information (report by Zimroni), 7.2.35, CZA S/25 – 22224.

¹⁰³ Arab Bureau information, 13.2.35, CZA – S/25 – 22224; Northern diary, #2 (14.2.35 'Ayn-vav), CZA S/25 – 22231.

¹⁰⁴ Northern diary, #2 (14.2.35 'Ayn-vav), CZA S/25 – 22231.

¹⁰⁵ After another incident where some 80 residents again stoned police attempting to carry out an eviction order, Halim Basta, an Arab police detective involved in investigations of subversive activity (who was later targeted by Arab activists), alleged to the JA's Arab Bureau that 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi and Fuad 'Atallah had secretly ordered the Zubaydat to resist their expulsion. See Northern diary, #2 (15.2.35 'Ayn-vav), CZA S/25 – 22231. Basta's name appears as a corruption, "Hilmi B," in the report.

¹⁰⁶ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 179.

¹⁰⁷ Arab Bureau information, 13.2.35, CZA S/25 - 22224.

Acre, Beisan, Tulkarm, and Nablus. In each area, they coordinated meetings with local youth groups who agreed to work among peasant tenants to ensure that any evictions would be resisted to the point of bloodshed. Ya‘qub al-Ghusayn was said to give charitably to this cause, both to local shaykhs and to youth organizations.¹⁰⁸

The fight against the transfer of the Huleh concession from Arab to Jewish hands offers an example of the second type of land campaign. The Huleh valley in the upper Galilee, in Palestine’s far northern reaches, along with the Beisan lands, were considered by Sir John Hope Simpson, special investigator on land and immigration issues for the colonial administration, and Abraham Granovsky, a senior official at the JNF, to be the most valuable state-held lands. The former Ottoman rulers had also recognized the potential which the Huleh area held for development, and for this reason in 1914 had awarded a concession contract to two Beirut-based merchants for draining local swamps and converting marshlands into arable terrain. The concession covered roughly one-third of the valley’s lands, amounting to almost 57,000 dunams, and was transferred in 1918 to Salim Bey Salam and his Syro-Ottoman Agricultural Company.¹⁰⁹

The tangled story of the concession, whose terms remained unfulfilled throughout World War I, grew much more complex under the British, who wrestled with recognition of the Ottoman era contract, Zionist pressures for its transfer into their possession, and their own productivist vision of land reclamation, development, and economic growth. After years of protracted negotiations concerning the original

¹⁰⁸ Arab Bureau information, 7.2.35, CZA S/25 – 22224.

¹⁰⁹ W.P.N. Tyler, “The Huleh Lands Issue in Mandatory Palestine, 1920-34,” *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 27, n. 3 (July 1991), p. 343, 345-47.

contract's legality, project feasibility, possible sale of the concession, future disposition of local lands, and capture of rents, the concession was reinstated effective 1 January 1929. As W.P.N. Tyler observes, Salim Bey's reassertion of the concessionary rights was quite possibly motivated foremost by a desire for short term income (in the form of rents), since he lacked the large sums of capital necessary for the stipulated reclamation work. After several more years and with little accomplished in the way of draining the area's marshes, Salim Bey agreed in 1933, with the colonial administration's tacit approval, to the sale of the concession to the JNF. Following the government's official authorization about a year later, Zionists took possession of the concession area in November 1934. However, more significant than the contractual transfer of the concession was the state's acceptance in principle of Zionist aspirations to buy the remaining two-thirds of the valley (over 110,000 dunams), where an estimated 2000 Arab families lived in at least 19 villages.¹¹⁰

Fears of Zionist plans to take control of the Huleh concession and the valley stoked great opposition in many Arab quarters, including Safad and its environs. Many landlords in Safad owned land in the Huleh valley, the southwestern-most bound of which lies some 7 km northeast of the city, and ties between the city and hinterland were intimate, as elsewhere in Palestine.¹¹¹ The AE was first apprised of negotiations between Salim Bey and Zionist parties in mid-1931, and took a decision to verify the

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 346-365. The land was transferred to the JNF through the Palestine Land Development Company (PLDC), a subsidiary. 'Izzat Darwaza regarded the Huleh transfer as a type of forced sale, as the expenditures necessary for executing the drainage scheme agreed to in the concession were high, whereas the term of the agreement was not long enough to recoup the capital invested, thus leading to a net loss for Salim Bey's company (*Hawla al-haraka*, p. 282).

¹¹¹ On Safad's regional connections to Huleh and southern Syria, see 'Abbasi, *Safad fi 'ahd al-intidab*, p. 90.

existence of the talks and to gather information on them, but little seems to have followed from this.¹¹² Two years later in mid-1933 the High Commissioner reported to London that Arab politicians had started a rumor that land which the government sought to buy in Huleh for the resettlement of Arabs displaced by Jewish colonization was actually a purchase on behalf of further colonization.¹¹³ By 1934 opposition to sale of the Huleh concession took a more concrete form as the Youth Congress chapter at Safad took the lead in organizing against Jewish settlement in Huleh. In April of that year it convened a meeting with representatives from Safad and 21 villages in the subdistrict, including 6 villages in the Huleh valley. At the meeting, the attendees, who were mostly notables, religious figures, and *mukhtars* (government-approved village chiefs), discussed the Huleh concession along with other concerns including immigration and land sales, and drafted a pointed communiqué to the colonial authorities which threatened violent resistance to British policy. Kamil al-Husayn, the head of the YC Safad branch, was instrumental in building support for a more proactive and restive stance among area village leaders, who were greatly perturbed by land sales and the issue of the concession.¹¹⁴

In spite of the national movement's opposition at the local and national levels to the transfer of the concession, and the portent of more militant Arab activism, the administration remained tone deaf to smoldering Arab sentiment. In December 1934, just after the hand-over of official title to the JNF, the High Commissioner met with

¹¹² AE minutes, 22.6.31, ISA (65) 985-4p.

¹¹³ Tyler, "The Huleh Lands Issue," p. 362 and ft. 111, p. 372.

¹¹⁴ 'Abbasi, *Safad fi 'ahd al-intidab*, p. 212-13. The six villages from the Huleh valley represented at the meeting were Khalisa, Qaytiyya, 'Abbisiyya, Mansura, al-Salihiyya, and al-Dawwara.

leaders of the AE and informed them of his utmost confidence in the future of the Huleh lands under the new concessionaires and claimed that the deal would improve the “economic position of local Arabs.” The administration was so assured of its developmentalist logic, the absolute virtue of draining the marshes north of Lake Huleh (which would open large tracts of fertile land to cultivation and decrease the incidence of malaria), and of the set-asides for Arabs that had been included in the transfer, that it published a version of transcript as an official communiqué to the public.¹¹⁵ The government expected little would come from the efforts of Kamil al-Husayn and others, and its internal correspondence notes that area *mukhtars* appeared acquiescent to the transfer.¹¹⁶

The assumption of the concession by the JNF sparked further resistance, including armed attacks. One Zionist intelligence survey of Palestinian armed activity credits concern over Huleh and immigration for the resumption of guerilla-style operations in the north in 1935 by the charismatic shaykh ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam and his associates.¹¹⁷ In the Huleh area itself these attacks were alleged to have been organized and backed by Subhi al-Khadra, who hailed from Safad, and one Kamil Effendi, who was allegedly responsible for the famous assault a decade earlier on the Jewish colony of Tel Hai.¹¹⁸ Among some popular leaders the potential for the situation at Huleh to

¹¹⁵ Official communiqué, 1.12.34, ISA (2) 566 – 4m. Of the total concession area, 15,000 dunams were reserved for Arab cultivators under the transfer agreement.

¹¹⁶ Assistant district commissioner to DC-Northern, 3.12.34, ISA (27) 4993 – 15m.

¹¹⁷ Events of November in the north, 1.12.35, CZA S/25 – 22231. Al-Qassam and his network are treated in chapter 6.

¹¹⁸ Arab Bureau information, 14.11.34, CZA S/25 – 22225. In a subsequent report, a local informant named Yigal conjectured (wildly) that al-Khadra must have the government’s blessing for his subversion, because he couldn’t see how such resistance as was present could be organized without it.

provide a means of igniting a wider wave of violent resistance, such as occurred in 1929, was also debated. Al-Khadra came to the conclusion that Huleh, and other flashpoints such as a land transfer dispute at nearby Jabal Kan'an that had turned violent, should be approached in such a fashion; some of his colleagues, including 'Ajaj Nuwayhid, Shukri Qutina, and Nabih al-'Azma were more cautious and warned that new "disturbances" could cause further economic injury to Arabs who were already battered by contemporary conditions.¹¹⁹

The struggle over the Huleh lands caught the attention of many other elements of the national movement, which responded with a variety of initiatives. A host of meetings were conducted in early 1935 in Safad, Khalisa, Huleh valley villages, and Jerusalem.¹²⁰ At a series of meetings in Khalisa it was decided to create a new scout troop that would conduct independent immigration patrols and act against land sales in the locale.¹²¹ The troop was connected to the Youth Congress, and within days it had been tasked by the mufti, whose interest in the land affairs of the north had grown appreciably, with preparing a report on the local situation.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Arab Bureau information, 19.11.34 and 2.12.34, CZA S/25 – 22225. The contention at Jabal Kan'an had erupted by May 1934, and many of the same figures, Subhi al-Khadra and Kamil al-Husayn included, were pegged at the forefront of organizing, along with the Safad YMMA (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 1.6.34, monthly summary of intelligence (May), PRO – FO 371/17882).

¹²⁰ A meeting in Jerusalem attended by the mufti, al-Khadra, Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, Kamil al-Husayn and others is noted in: Northern diary, #2 (21.2.35, Kamil al-Irani), CZA S/25 – 22231. Others are touched on above. After one such gathering in February at Kamil al-Husayn's house in Khalisa, two men, Sa'id al-Hawrani and 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nahawi (the latter a lawyer from Safad), set out to area villages to collect signatures in order to protest the transfer of the concession (Northern diary, #2 (21.2.35, from Yasod Hama'alah), CZA S/25 – 22231).

¹²¹ Arab Bureau information, 22.2.35 and 26.2.35, CZA S/25 – 22224.

¹²² Ibid. Youth Congress figures attending one of the first meetings included Isma'il al-Hajj Khalil, 'Abd al-Raziq Matar, and Yusuf al-Tabari (Northern diary, #2 (23.2.35, Ahmad S.), CZA S/25 – 22231).

The mufti was involved in several of the organizing meetings for Huleh campaigning, including the largest of its kind, held at Khalisa on 14 March 1935. As with previous meetings in the town, it was held at Kamil al-Husayn's home, but on this occasion delegations from across the country as well as Lebanon and Syria took part. Figures associated with the Youth Congress, the Istiqlal party, and the *majlisi* faction were present, including 'Izzat Darwaza, Ya'qub al-Ghusayn, 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi, Imil al-Ghuri, and Ahmad Hilmi 'Abd al-Baqi, along with prominent figures from Safad, such as As'ad Qaddura, 'Ali Rida al-Nahawi, and Subhi al-Khadra. The proceedings yielded two results aimed at retaining Huleh lands in Arab hands: the establishment of an agricultural company and the formation of a local committee dedicated to resolving issues and disputes between *fellahin* and landowners.¹²³

The creation of a committee to mediate disputes, though responding as discussed earlier in this chapter to a common enough impulse and need, was indicative of a yawning and troublesome divide between lords and peasant tenants in Huleh. The former concession holder, Salim Bey al-Salam, was greatly resented by many tenant farmers, and after reinstatement of his contractual rights in 1929 they rejected his claim to control fishing rights in lake Huleh and its tributaries and occasionally went on rent strike.¹²⁴ The sour relations between Salim Bey and many residents eased the hand-over to the JNF in 1934. In two tours to area villages with representatives from the Palestine Land Development Company, Lewis Andrews, then Assistant District Commissioner for the Galilee, reported that the transfer was going smoothly, thanks to the peasants'

¹²³ 'Abbasi, *Safad fi 'ahd al-intidab*, p. 213-14.

¹²⁴ Tyler, "The Huleh Lands Issue," p. 365.

agreeable attitude: “The villagers were surprisingly friendly, and stated quite freely that if the new Concessionaires treat them properly they are only too willing to co-operate with them. With good-will on both sides I believe there will be less friction in the Huleh basin under the present regime than there was in the days of the Ex-Concessionaires.”¹²⁵ Another indication of the festering tensions between extractive notables and overburdened *fellahin*, and of the frustrations facing efforts to fight land transfers, came during one of al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni’s excursions in the area. In February, preceding the large meeting at Khalisa, he visited Safad during a land tour and, intermingled with affirmations of the value of standing fast against adversity, wound up admonishing his audience for their ill-treatment of the tenants in Huleh, which he attributed with causing the sale of lands in the area.¹²⁶

Huleh was not an isolated case as far as the fraying relations between large landowners and peasants were concerned. Similar strain and distress in the fabric of the rural social order was evident elsewhere. In late 1934 the mufti and Ahmad Hilmi Pasha urged the YC to set up a meeting between landlords, tenants, and peasants in Beisan, on the model of a meeting that had recently been held at Beersheba. They saw regular meetings between the layers of rural society as a vital means of reducing the tensions wracking the Arab land regime.¹²⁷ While such initiatives may or may not have served their purpose, they came too little too late. The socio-economic transformation of

¹²⁵ ADC to DC-Northern, 1.12.34 and 3.12.34 (with a monthly report on the Huleh concession), ISA (27) 4993 – 15m. Quote from the monthly report.

¹²⁶ CID, 9.3.35, periodical appreciation summary 7/35, PRO – FO 371/18957. From the CID’s report the specific nature of the ill-treatment is unclear, though the tenants in question are referred to as “landowners,” thus the reference could be to rates paid for produce, harvest purchase arrangements (such as forward contracts), large-holders renting lands to smallholders, or some other issue.

¹²⁷ Arab Bureau information, 19.11.34, CZA S/25 – 22225.

Palestinian society, precipitated by a variety of Mandatory policies concerning trade, tariffs, and credit provision as well as the regulation of the land regime – coupled with the abiding Zionist interest in land acquisition (even at inflated prices) – was far too systemic to be palliated by such measures.¹²⁸

The land campaign at Huleh persisted throughout 1935 and continued to garner support and interest from outside the valley. The Youth Congress and local figures such as Kamil al-Husayn remained at the forefront of the struggle over the fate of the region's lands, though the pace of activities seems to have decreased considerably around summer 1935.¹²⁹ Much like the other land campaigns briefly surveyed here, the outcomes of the fight over the concession and subsequent popular organizing at Huleh were disconcerting and perplexing for nationalist activists. Setting aside their chagrin, several observations arise from a consideration of the campaigns, not only in terms of the lands in question, but as a form of political practice.

The flow of land sales, though decreased in overall volume, did not cease during the period of the campaigns. This was so despite a concerted push in the press against brokers and transfers, despite popular nationalist organizing by youth, and despite the religious campaigning of the SMC and the licensing of a variety of Islamic sanctions against the alienation of lands. The continuation of sales and transfers during this period in the face of widening opposition and heightened attention was not simply a defeat, and should not be understood, as it sometimes has been, as demonstrating the purported

¹²⁸ See chapter 5 for further detail.

¹²⁹ For notes on continued activities and planning, see Arab Bureau information, 26.7.35, CZA S/25 – 22224; Arab Bureau information, 19.11.35, CZA S/25 – 22231.

weakness of Palestinian nationalism.¹³⁰ Rather, the campaigns brought about a tactical interaction between Arab activists, the state and the Zionist movement in which the poor returns of popular organizing, overmatched as campaigners were by the forces arrayed against them, spurred tactical escalation. Where peasants and Bedouin resisted eviction or fought the colonial administration opening state domains to Zionist settlement, activist youth often did not flinch in supporting them and backing physical resistance. While fleeting, these episodes suggested to some in the national movement (including the press and elites) the eventuality or necessity of using violence and taking up arms. As the existential fear of displacement was materialized dunam by dunam through land contests where Arabs were ultimately dispossessed and evicted, and with government generally in support of the reallocation (through both the market and the state) of Arab lands to Jewish hands as part of the building of the national home, the campaigns appear to have intensified support for the deployment of more militant methods and ultimately, of force.

The desire to arrest the advance and growth of Zionist colonization through practices of internal social regulation, protest to authorities, and supporting physical and violent resistance to eviction orders marked a departure from the normative discourse which preceded it. The framework of popular campaigning sprang from perceptions of opportunity as well as urgent need, and represented an attempt to erect a corporeal defense of “national lands” that could accompany legal, diplomatic, and market-based tactics. But unlike those tactics it sought to override the operation of the market and it

¹³⁰ Porath, *Emergence*, p. 306; Stein, *The Land Question* (e.g., p. 67-70; 180), and “One Hundred Years,” p. 72, 75; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 47.

exceeded the boundaries of the law at points of direct resistance. Through their ensemble of activities the land campaigns pushed back at the existing conditions configuring the land market, seeking to create a supervening force through which to alter those conditions and bar transfers. By doing so, the campaigns exhibited the same impulse to popular sovereignty that the immigration patrols had described. Campaigners strove through direct action to refigure land as a domain of national prerogative and sovereignty where claims concerning Arab rights would be cardinal and in force. Their efforts were devoted to the protection and the performance of Arab rights and, in instances where locals resisted the state, they supported the grassroots efforts of others, peasants and Bedouin, to embody or defend the same sovereign precedence for indigenous rights which they sought to enact.

The dissolution of the AE and political realignments after 1933

The breath of life which the anti-immigration demonstrations afforded to the formal leadership in late 1933 passed as quickly as it came. The AE returned to being an anemic presence within Palestinian politics, as it had been prior to the 1933 mobilization. The organization's death knell sounded shortly afterwards when its octogenarian president, Musa Kazim al-Husayni, who had led the Executive since its formation in 1920 and had been injured during the 1933 Jaffa demonstration, died in March 1934. Through his long tenure at the reins of the national movement, Musa Kazim Pasha had managed to hold the competing Jerusalemite factions and their respective allies together within one organization, though by the 1930s their cooperation

was largely only for show. With the passing of Musa Kazim, the *majlisi* and *mu'arada* factions deadlocked on running the organization and consequently voted to replace it through the creation of political parties, in effect formally devolving the AE into familial factions.¹³¹

Taking the dimmest view of these events, Shahada Musa contends that the composition of new parties by elites in 1934 and 1935 represented the dissolution of the so-called “traditional leadership” (*al-qiyada al-taqlidiyya*).¹³² Most accounts are more circumspect in their judgments, preferring to discuss the new formations’ programs and organizational structures and consider that their leadership roles were resumed through the new mechanism of parties. Here I will take up Musa’s suggestion by examining in brief the interest of the National Defense Party (DP) and the Palestine Arab Party (PAP), which were the two new organs of real consequence, in developing horizontal constituencies.

The Defense Party was led by the Nashashibis and found backing among many mayors throughout the country, high ranking government employees, and large landowners.¹³³ Following on the aristocratic bent of its founders and many of its leading lights, the DP was opposed to the increasing militancy and confrontational character of the national movement, and in place of the movement’s “negative” orientation (symbolized for elites in the formal approval of non-cooperation) it favored a “positive”

¹³¹ This decision was ostensibly taken to augment the capacities of the moribund leadership institutions.

¹³² *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 142. Unfortunately Musa does not elaborate on this idea, but mentions it in passing.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 77.

policy of cooperation with the government.¹³⁴ The PAP had a somewhat wider base than the DP. Its ranks were full not only of notables but peasants as well, along with professionals, intellectuals, and some factory owners.¹³⁵ Aligned to the Husayni faction, the PAP was the more politically strident of the two larger parties. It raised the standard of Palestinian independence within Arab unity and rejected the Mandate and the Jewish National Home.¹³⁶ In service to these aims and in keeping with the *majlisi* camp's tendency to push the envelope without exceeding it, the party pursued a course of agitation short of violence.¹³⁷

In spite of their underlying factional and familial claims to legitimacy and leadership, and of the patronage systems which solidified the high standing of the al-Husayni and al-Nashashibi families, both the DP and the PAP turned to horizontal constituencies to build their organizations. This was evident first in the DP's efforts to organize Arab laborers and subsequently in the PAP's interest in laborers and youth. It was also apparent in the parties' adoption of branch structures along the lines of those used most effectively by the YMMA and the YC.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 67. To this end it was willing to accept "less than full independence," opposed the 'independence within Arab unity' formulation of the late AE, and advocated the creation of a legislative council and the encouragement of Arab businesses as components of a positive national agenda (ibid). Congruent with its agreeable stance towards maintaining British rule, the DP was wary of upheaval, and criticized youth and the Youth Congress as "irresponsible" elements (Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 111). The party spurned the Jewish National Home policy, but the extent of its opposition to Zionism is somewhat debated (ibid; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 68-70).

¹³⁵ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 77.

¹³⁶ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 77.

¹³⁷ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 111-12.

¹³⁸ The MCA network (composed of branches) might also be seen as a forebear, but the parties' interests in horizontal constituencies and the youth organizations' recent success in extending their reach through the use of a branch structure weigh more heavily towards the youth organizations as model. Unlike the YMMA and the YC, the MCA branches were also not mass-based.

In July 1934, several months before the founding of the Defense Party in December, Fakhri Nashashibi, Raghib Bey's nephew and lieutenant, organized the Arab Workers Society (AWS) at Jerusalem, opening a branch shortly thereafter in Bayt Dajan outside Jaffa, and another in Jaffa itself. At the time, Arab workers faced a newly invigorated campaign by the Histadrut for Hebrew labor in the cities. Fakhri Effendi's astute response in organizing the AWS was to invert the Histadrut's tactics, and aggressively picket against Arab employers of Jewish laborers and contractors. *Filastin*, which was affiliated to the Opposition and lavished attention on the AWS, credited his organization with erecting "the first Arab picket." When the DP was formed the AWS gave it a base beyond circles of wealthy elites, though Fakhri Nashashibi's interest in organizing workers soon lapsed in mid-1935. Courting workers was an innovation for the Opposition, whose previous disdain for laborers was amply summarized by Jaffa's deputy mayor when he opined that to heed their demands would make "workers lords over us." The demarche was thus indicative that horizontal constituencies, even those for which elites had scorn, had come to occupy a vital place in the political realm and could not be ignored.¹³⁹

The PAP was also interested in labor organizing and amassed support from labor organizations.¹⁴⁰ From the outset, one of its primary goals was to establish scouting and workers' organizations throughout the country.¹⁴¹ However, in recognition of the profile of youth within the national movement, and in contrast to the DP's interest in workers,

¹³⁹ On the AWS: Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 222-25; Mark LeVine, *Overthrowing Geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and the Struggle for Palestine, 1880-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 94. On the AWS actions as pickets, see Lockman. The quote is a paraphrase from LeVine.

¹⁴⁰ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 111; Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 77.

¹⁴¹ Najib, 23.3.35, CZA S/25 – 3875.

the PAP, headed by Jamal al-Husayni, gave pride of place to youth and scout organizing. The party's vision on this count was influenced by fascist models of militarized youth and by Zionist youth and militia organs. Its ambition, according to the CID, was to create a paramilitary body of youth that could serve as a strike force.¹⁴² Imil al-Ghuri, who served as secretary general of the party, shared the responsibility for this venture with Jamal Effendi and several other figures, including Kamil al-Dajani and Jamal al-Qasim of the Youth Congress, and Ibrahim Darwish.¹⁴³ As with many other youth organizations and particularly scouts, the PAP set out criteria for membership that sought to fill the organization's ranks with "pure hearted" young men: youth who were not educated in government schools and who did not follow fashion or go dancing, as well as being zealous nationalists.¹⁴⁴ By late September, the *firq al-shabab* (Youth Troops), as they were then called, reportedly had seven units throughout the country.¹⁴⁵

The odd juxtaposition of models which the PAP's leadership took as examples for their youth enterprise was evident at the party's founding of its Tulkarm branch, also in September 1935. There Jamal al-Husayni assailed the Balfour declaration and Zionism and chided Arab youth who patronized Jewish stores and places of amusement, while, as he had it, Jewish youth boycotted Arab labor and products. Arab youth, he continued, could take a lesson from their Zionist peers, who familiarized themselves with areas of the country through tours, trained in physical fitness, organized sports

¹⁴² CID, 5.8.35, periodical appreciation summary 12/35, PRO – FO 371/18957.

¹⁴³ Ibid; Arab Bureau information, 15.7.35, CZA S/25 – 22231.

¹⁴⁴ Arab Bureau information, 15.7.35, CZA S/25 – 22231.

¹⁴⁵ Arab Bureau information, 26.9.35, CZA S/25 – 22231.

teams and matches, and practiced marksmanship.¹⁴⁶ At the same meeting, he announced that the Nazis were a source of inspiration for the PAP youth force, which had briefly been called the Nazi Scouts in honor of this influence, before the more Islamic name *al-Futuwwah* (referring to mediaeval Muslim “chivalrous societies”) was later settled on.¹⁴⁷ The alleged association between the PAP and Nazism was subsequently cemented by Jamal Effendi during a speech he gave in February 1936 at Rawdat al-Ma‘arif for the debut of the *Futuwwah*, during which he ranged over a comment attributed to Adolf Hitler in which the German dictator noted that his adherents had grown from six to 600 to 60 million; al-Husayni asked his audience to imagine whether they too could be the core of a wave that would sweep Palestine and rescue the nation from “annihilation.”¹⁴⁸

As discussed above, the occasional admiration shown by Palestinians for the Nazis, perhaps especially in *majlisi* circles, was based more in a simplistic geopolitical reading that followed the slogan, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” than any deeper affiliation with the German regime. Indeed, the CID seemed to acknowledge the weakness of the feared linkage between Palestinians interested in paramilitary activity and their would-be European sources of inspiration when it referred “*for want of a better name*” to armed groups forming in Palestine in late 1935 as “Fascist-Nazi.”¹⁴⁹ In the case of the PAP’s youth wing, probably as pro-German a force as existed in Palestine at the time, it should be considered that for all of the terrible rhetorical bluster that

¹⁴⁶ Arab Bureau information, 17.9.35, CZA S/25 – 22231.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 76.

¹⁴⁸ CID, 18.2.36, periodical appreciation summary 2/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

¹⁴⁹ CID, 16.11.35, periodical appreciation summary 17/35, PRO – FO 371/18957 (emphasis added).

accompanied it, its links to the German regime were insubstantial and inconsequential,¹⁵⁰ and its operational influences derived, as suggested above, more closely from the example of local Zionist youth mobilization. In the event, the *Futuwwah* were a marginal body within the Palestinian political scene.

In sketching the key constituencies targeted by the two most substantial parties to emerge after the AE's break-up, it is clear that the terrain of politics had shifted quite significantly. Both parties competed for elite backing, and in the PAP's case, it cornered a block of the middle class intelligentsia too. But neither could project wider influence without engaging the new horizontally-based constituencies whose presence and weight within the national movement and its politics had grown steadily since 1929. While the figures of the notable leadership did not exit from the scene, Musa is right in his contention about the disappearance of the traditional model of notable politics in so far as the elites were forced to reformulate their political will through the building blocks of the new, horizontally-organized mass political field.

The irony of elite recognition of the arrival of mass politics was that it occurred when their influence was at a low ebb. The CID reported in late 1934 that: "The Arabs in general, and particularly the young men, no longer have any confidence in the political leaders of any party [faction]. They publicly accuse the leaders of inactivity, self-interest, corruption, etc., and will neither finance them nor support their political

¹⁵⁰ By way of contrast RAF intelligence noted that in July 1934 400 youth traveled from Beirut to Italy in black shirt uniforms (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 1.8.34, monthly summary of intelligence (July), PRO – FO 371/17882). Nothing of the sort happened in Palestine, though scholars have tried to tie the *majlis* to the Nazi regime (e.g. Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 76).

institutions.”¹⁵¹ Half a year later in mid-1935, after the founding of the DP, the PAP, and the Reform Party (a small party centered around Jerusalem’s new mayor, Husayn Fakhri al-Khalidi), it again assessed that “independent” opinion “deprecates” the proliferation of parties, seeing in them vehicles for personal and familial advancement.¹⁵²

Notwithstanding the unpopularity of elites, the creation of new political parties, and particularly the PAP, had a sizable impact on the Youth Congress, which struggled after the collapse of the 1933 demonstrations to actualize a new direction for the national movement. Its tactical experimentation in this regard, aped by others (not coincidentally from the *majlisi* faction), has been reviewed above. The lifeblood of the YC, as ever, remained its power to attract and organize nationalist youth into its own branches and into affiliated scout troops. It continued this activity throughout the period after the 1933 demonstrations, up until the inception of the general strike in 1936, adding new scout troops in 1935 at Huleh, Umm Khalid (near Netanya and Tulkarm), Abu Kishk (in the Jaffa/Tel Aviv region), and al-Tira (in the Haifa subdistrict).¹⁵³ It displayed its influence among scouts in two large reviews, the first at the Nabi Salah festival in Ramle in April 1934, and the second at Nabi Rubin in Jaffa in September 1935, the latter of which showcased 12 troops from across the country.¹⁵⁴ By early 1935 however, with the YC’s immigration and land ventures empty-handed, the organization fell into crisis and

¹⁵¹ CID, 5.12.34, periodical appreciation summary 17/34, PRO – FO 371/17878.

¹⁵² CID, 27.6.35, periodical appreciation summary 11/35, PRO – FO 371/18957.

¹⁵³ Najib, 12.9.35, CZA S/25 – 3875. Although unspecified the Huleh troop is probably the group formed at Khalisa, noted above.

¹⁵⁴ al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 261, 877.

became divided between those who wanted to amalgamate with the *majlisi* camp and those who favored remaining independent of the Jerusalemite factions.

After a tour of northern cities, a Zionist informant named Taysir Dawji reported in February 1935 on conversations he had with Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman and ‘Abdullah al-Samara. Salim Effendi opined, according to the report, that the Youth Congress needed to garner the support of the nation for its program (which it would ask for at a second YC convention) and without it, he considered that it should join forces with the *majlisiyyin*. ‘Abdullah Effendi had even less patience for the Youth Congress, arguing that it had done nothing that merited its existence as a separate organization, and suggesting that it should be folded into the *majlisi* camp forthwith. The Husaynis’ influence was strong at the YC central office in Jaffa, and as the association prepared for holding a second conference, it was speculated that dissension over ties to the *majlisis* could spoil the event.¹⁵⁵

It was against this background that Jamal al-Husayni approached Ya‘qub al-Ghusayn and urged him to merge the YC into the PAP. Reports from a variety of sources beginning in mid-1934, including those of the CID and an Arab informant to the Jewish Agency who was a Youth Congress and PAP member (the aforementioned Khalil al-Khuri), cast Ya‘qub al-Ghusayn as an acolyte of Jamal al-Husayni.¹⁵⁶ As discussed in chapter 2, the image of Ya‘qub Effendi as a servant of the *majlisis* has been exaggerated.

¹⁵⁵ Arab Bureau information, 10.2.35 and 13.2.35, CZA S/25 – 22224. The reliability of Taysir Dawji (also called “Gad” by the Arab Bureau) on these matters is perhaps open to question, as he subsequently erroneously reported that the Husaynis and Ya‘qub al-Ghusayn had reached an agreement about forming the PAP (which was unnamed at the time) (Arab Bureau information, 26.2.35, CZA S/25 – 22224).

¹⁵⁶ CID, 15.6.34, periodical appreciation summary 9/34, PRO – FO 371/17878; Najib, 9.3.35, CZA S/25 – 3875.

The YC relationship to the *majlisi* camp remained tangled. During the land campaigns in late 1934 and 1935 the two forces collaborated (as seen in the Huleh case), while during the immigration patrols episode, Ya‘qub Effendi (and/or the YC executive) greatly resented the efforts of Jamal Effendi and Imil al-Ghuri, himself a YC executive member, to hatch their own parallel operation. Additionally, the Husaynis, Jamal included, had also been the motive force which shut down the 1933 demonstrations. While it is likely indicative of Jamal Effendi’s diminutive assumptions about the YC (or youth organizing more generally) that he conceived that Ya‘qub al-Ghusayn could simply elect to merge their organizations, or that he would sway the YC membership in such a direction, Ya‘qub Effendi refused the *majlisi* entreaties, confounding all of the reports and speculations that he was a vassal of the Husaynis.¹⁵⁷

The *majlisis* were not easy to quit, however, and sought paths of joint action which would at once strengthen their own hand and presumably augment their influence or standing within the YC. For instance, in an April 1935 CID report the organization of scouts and sports clubs by the YC is noted, to which is added the observation that “the Husseini leaders [are] endeavor[ing] to cooperate for mutual benefits.”¹⁵⁸ Contrary to the standard narratives which privilege and fetishize the familial factions, always imaging their leaders to be the central protagonists in national affairs, it could be more fairly said that the PAP followed the YC’s playbook, at least in terms of structure and constituency, rather than the other way around.

¹⁵⁷ Najib, 23.3.35, CZA S/25 – 3875.

¹⁵⁸ CID, 20.4.35, periodical appreciation summary 8/35, PRO – FO 371/18957.

The PAP's emulation of the YC, and, one suspects, the mufti's high standing among many nationalists, did however, pay off. Many members of the YC became members of the PAP. Kamil al-Dajani, shaykh Muhammad 'Ali al-Ja'bari, Rashad al-Khatib, Shahada Hasuna, and Khalid al-Farakh, members of the YC executive, joined the PAP's bureau, while Imil al-Ghuri became the PAP's secretary general.¹⁵⁹ Salim 'Abd al-Rahman, 'Abdullah al-Samara, Farid Fakhr al-Din, and Saliba 'Arida were among the other members of the YC executive to join the PAP.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, after the PAP's formation members of the YC appear to have warmed to points of the diplomatic agenda charted by the former, as is discernable in their agreement on the goal of establishing a joint PAP-YC information office in London.¹⁶¹

While the Youth Congress maintained its independence from the PAP, its inability to forge a tactical breakthrough in the national struggle or demonstrate tangible political and economic victories was on display at its second convention, held at Haifa on 10 May 1935. Many of the same subjects from the first assembly in January 1932

¹⁵⁹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 75; Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 378. I have no list of the figures associated with the second executive (seated in September 1932) so comparison here is with a list of the first YC executive (provided by Zu'aytir), with the exception of Shahada Hasuna, who appears as an active member in CZA S/25 – 3875.

¹⁶⁰ 'Arida is named, along with 'Abd al-Rahman and al-Samara as *majlisi* allies within the YC in a report from Khalil al-Khuri (Najib, 11.5.35, CZA S/25 – 3875). Fakhr al-Din appears, along with Jamal al-Qasim, Sidqi al-Tabari, and, according to *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*, Dr. Rushdi al-Tamimi, in a list of party members compiled by al-Hut (*al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 884-85). All were members of the first YC executive (as per the above footnote).

¹⁶¹ Arab Bureau information, n.d. [approx. June 1935], CZA S/25 – 22224. The PAP's agenda immediately after its establishment resuscitated the diplomatic focus of the *majlisi* camp, and sought to build support for the Palestinians in Britain and in "the East" through delegations and creation of the information office mentioned above (CID, 20.4.35, periodical appreciation summary 8/35, PRO – FO 371/18957). At the first meeting of its executive in late March 1935, the body affirmed this direction by making its first action the drafting of a letter to the British nation (Arab Bureau information, 31.3.35, CZA S/25 – 22224). The Husaynis were rumored shortly thereafter in early May to be disposed to send another delegation to London, this time with Jamal Effendi as its head. The impetus behind this move was to lobby for the legislative council, then the subject of behind-the-scenes deliberations (Arab Bureau information, 5.5.35, CZA S/25 – 22224).

were treated again at Haifa, yet after over three years of work, the indirection of the movement and within the Youth Congress was conspicuous in the lack of positive developments or actionable strategy. The brevity of the event itself could be seen as testament to this reality: where the first congress covered approximately seven subjects in three days of sessions, the second tackled, by one count, 15 issues in a single day, generating a prodigious 32 resolutions.¹⁶² Several of the resolutions made demands of the government to improve educational facilities for Arabs and to grant them autonomy on the model of the Jewish educational system. Others approved the continuation of land tours and called for a £P 60,000 company to be created for purposes of matching peasants selling land with Arab buyers. Members also took an oath along the lines of the pact which formed the basis for the first assembly in 1932 (see chapter 2) and a telegram was sent by the conference to the High Commissioner denouncing the Mandate and rejecting responsibility for unrest that flowed from its existence.¹⁶³

The weakness of these measures shone through in a number of statements made by the organization's officials. The secretary, Sa'id al-Khalil, cited Musa Kazim Pasha as proffering in 1931 that the future lay with the youth, and then went on to count among the YC's successes the 1933 demonstrations and the independent immigration patrols, with little else to add. Ya'qub al-Ghusayn chastised the national movement for its disorganization and infighting, but in a sign of frustration, he also laid into "the nation"

¹⁶² The Arab youth front – where to?, n.d. [1935], CZA S/25 – 22231. From the discussion in chapter 2 of the first congress I'm counting the subjects as: the National Fund, the promotion of Palestinian goods, the boycott of foreign goods, education, Arab prisoners, work with cultivators, and constitutional development.

¹⁶³ Congress of the Organization of Arab Youth, 15.5.35, CZA S/25 – 22224; on land tours: CID, 5.8.35, periodical appreciation summary 12/35, PRO – FO 371/18957.

for its purported lassitude, “distraction” (Hebrew: *hashat ha-de’a*) from economic projects, and “satisfaction” with issues of minor political significance. In another telling comment, he also critiqued the absence of proper propaganda that could articulate Arab concerns to the colonial administration. The political retreat that was manifest in the YC president’s interest in refining the bankrupt politics of petition was complemented and completed by the convention’s threat to hold demonstrations if no changes were forthcoming from the state on immigration and land sales issues. As al-Hut notes, the second YC thus produced a tactical regression and a return to “traditional” ineffective forms of protest.¹⁶⁴

Filastin and *al-Difa’* both sharply lambasted the convention and at least one attendee, ‘Abd al-Mutalib Fada, was ejected for disparaging the proceedings as little more than talk.¹⁶⁵ The Arab Bureau of the Jewish Agency wrote a report after the Haifa gathering that savaged the YC as an organization that arrived during a time of “great public awakening” and showed promise, only to disappoint those who had put hope in it. According to its view, the YC’s downfall was attributable to its membership’s elite pedigree and their aspirations to follow in their fathers’ footsteps as the new *effendis*, possessed of respect and dominant over the peasantry.¹⁶⁶ This depiction, while noting a class blockage evident in the association’s approach to preserving Arab lands (as discussed in the lands section above), holds some truth, but, as seen in the examination here of the expansion of the youth field from 1933 on, also exaggerates the upper class

¹⁶⁴ Ibid; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 262.

¹⁶⁵ Congress of the Organization of Arab Youth, 15.5.35, CZA S/25 – 22224.

¹⁶⁶ The Arab youth front – where to?, n.d. [1935], CZA S/25 – 22231.

leaning of the organization and projects upon it a fantasy of ruthless class aspiration. More sympathetically, al-Hut analogizes the organization at the time of the second conference with the intelligentsia (*al-‘aqliya*), who took many positions beyond those which they were capable of bringing to fruition. The YC’s portfolio of concerns included all of the “responsibilities of government itself” without a budget with which to act. The lapse into petition politics, faced with a lack of capacities for implementing its ambitious agenda, owed to imitation of its venerable predecessor and “teacher,” the AE.¹⁶⁷ Regardless of exactly what mix of factors brought the YC to its denouement in mid-1935, its time as a seat of innovation had largely passed, and new youth groupings were subsequently to upstage it at the forefront of national activism.

In the months surrounding the second YC assembly British and Zionist analysts concluded that the organization was a satellite of the Husaynis. The CID discerned in April 1935, a month after the PAP’s founding, that many YC members supported the party, and months later in October estimated that the majority of the YC belonged to the PAP.¹⁶⁸ Zionist evaluations were less cautious and saw the YC as a tool of the Husayni family and the mufti.¹⁶⁹ Although the YC had refused to merge with the PAP, it was presumed that the organization, or at least a majority of its members, were *majlisi* loyalists. As the debates surged later that year over the potential establishment of a legislative council and how to respond to the discovery in October of a large shipment of arms at Jaffa bound for the Haganah, these assumptions were proven erroneous. Ya‘qub

¹⁶⁷ al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 262

¹⁶⁸ CID, 20.4.35 and 30.10.35, periodical appreciation summaries 8 and 15/35, PRO – FO 371/18957. It is unclear whether by the last it is meant the executive, or the YC as a whole.

¹⁶⁹ Arab Bureau information, 17.7.35, CZA S/25 – 22224.

al-Ghusayn was reported to be “wavering” in his disposition, but thought to be leaning towards the Opposition.¹⁷⁰ This perception caused the *majlisi* camp to begin preparations for creating a new youth association, and in late November they invited Akram Zu‘aytir to head the new body. Zu‘aytir considered the offer but declined it, and the new *majlisi* youth organ never appears to have gotten off the drawing board.¹⁷¹ Although the YC was influenced by the PAP, it remained its own organization and retained its autonomy in decision-making and political program, as events late in 1935 again underscored.¹⁷²

Aside from the PAP’s organization of the *Futuwwah* and its courting of the YC, the *majlisi* faction also invested itself in claiming a share of the scouting phenomenon, and focused particularly on founding and uniting Islamic scout troops. Alongside the Supreme Muslim Council’s entry into popular organizing during its land campaign, beginning in late 1934, efforts were exerted to mimic the land tours of the YC and other youth through a separate corps of Islamic scouts. The al-Aqsa Scouts, as they were called on at least one occasion, was a project of al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni. The SMC hired a Syrian scout leader, Baha al-Din al-Taba‘, to come to Palestine and take charge of organizing the al-Aqsa Scouts, and to unify scouts throughout the country under *majlisi* control. In January 1935 with the SMC’s land campaign in full swing, a conference of the new scout body was held at Jerusalem and attended by around 100

¹⁷⁰ CID, 30.10.35, periodical appreciation summary 15/35, PRO – FO 371/18957.

¹⁷¹ Arab Bureau information, 20.11.35, CZA S/25 – 22231.

¹⁷² These events, including the legislative council issue and the arms smuggling controversy, are discussed in more depth in chapter 7.

participants.¹⁷³ Those in attendance were to be sent to villages to propagandize against land sales. It is perhaps for this reason, and related activities run by al-Taba‘ and the SMC, that some accounts have treated land tours as something inspired or controlled by the mufti.¹⁷⁴

As part of the SMC’s design, Baha al-Din attempted to court existing scout troops, but this appears to have had limited success. He invited the Abu ‘Ubayda troop from Tulkarm, one of the largest and most renown scouting outfits in Palestine, to Nabi Musa in 1935, along with other Islamic troops. Abu ‘Ubayda accepted the invitation and sent a delegation including its top officials (head, vice president and secretary).¹⁷⁵ However, any hope of coaxing or convincing them to fold their famous troop into Baha al-Din’s league was rebuffed, and in July the Abu ‘Ubayda troop affiliated to the YC during a well-attended ceremony featuring Tulkarm’s mayor, horsemen from nearby Umm Khalid, and much pageantry.¹⁷⁶ Both the high-profile handover to the YC and the competing interest of the mufti and Baha al-Din in Abu ‘Ubayda serve as clear illustrations of the status and attention that scouts had come to enjoy in Palestinian society. The mufti was quite conscious of this and continued to try to bring more scouts under his authority, but his efforts did not yield the *majlisi* camp a dominant role among youth.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Arab Bureau information, 28.1.35, CZA S/25 – 22224.

¹⁷⁴ The Arab youth front – where to?, n.d. [1935], CZA S/25 – 22231; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*

¹⁷⁵ Najib, 16.4.35, CZA S/25 – 3875.

¹⁷⁶ Najib, 8.7.35, CZA S/25 – 3875.

¹⁷⁷ A report from Taysir Dawji to the Arab Bureau at the JA a week after the Abu ‘Ubayda troop joined the YC stated that while the mufti was interested in having the country’s scouts united behind the PAP, the other parties were opposed to this and sought to have the scouts remain unaffiliated and nonpartisan within

The formation of political parties after the demise of the AE consolidated the transition underway within Palestinian politics from vertical to horizontal modes of mobilization. While the YMMA, the Youth Congress, and the Istiqlal Party had all previously tapped into the emergent dynamics of Palestinian society and directed themselves towards the organization of youth, the creation of the Defense Party and the Palestinian Arab Party and their targeting of labor and youth constituencies confirmed that the notable dominance of old had been overshadowed by mass politics. The notables sought to preserve and reinscribe their old role as self-appointed stewards for the public through the organization of parties based in popular constituencies. Their efforts varied in determination and met with uneven results.

The Youth Congress, the premier youth organization, was significantly affected by the establishment of new organizations competing for the same constituency and lost a good bit of its previously esteemed vitality during the same period. Although it remained an independent forum, by mid-1935 elements of its leadership had begun to drift towards the very same discredited diplomatic model of politics that the Youth Congress had from its inception opposed.

Paramilitary activity

The final component of youth activism before the Great Revolt, their place in clandestine paramilitary organization, has already been alluded to above. Most accounts of paramilitary activity in Palestine prior to the revolt focus on Shaykh ‘Izz al-Din al-

Palestinian politics. It also noted that some scouts were equally disinterested in coming under Baha al-Din’s command (Arab Bureau information, 16.7.35, CZA S/25 – 22224).

Qassam and his group, undoubtedly the most significant force of its kind. Al-Qassam and his followers will be discussed in relation to the changing politics of peasants and the collapse of the rural social order in the next chapter. Here I wish to highlight the centrality of youth to underground paramilitary organization such as it existed before April 1936, and to further consider this development as a manifestation of the interest in popular sovereignty that has been discussed in this chapter.

After a flirtation with paramilitary organization in 1921 before the ratification of the Mandate, serious efforts were not exerted in this direction for roughly a decade.¹⁷⁸ Interest in armed confrontation surged with the events of 1929 and remained high among some youth in the aftermath, as noted in chapter 1. Other than support for the short-lived guerilla band of Ahmad Tafish, which operated in late 1929 and early 1930 in the area of Safad and Acre, this exuberance for militant struggle had little immediate outlet.¹⁷⁹ According to Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, this changed in 1930 during the annual YMMA congress, when a secret decision was taken to train a number of youth in the use of arms and to surreptitiously spread the call for arming the population.¹⁸⁰ With no detail on the fruits of this secret resolution and nothing on the subject in the records of the British and the Jewish Agency used for this research, it is difficult to judge whether the decision was executed.

¹⁷⁸ See Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 104-06.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 155-56; Lachman, "Arab rebellion and terrorism," p. 56. Lachman notes that aside from succor provided by local peasants and villages in their area of activity, the YMMA and Subhi al-Khadra also aided Tafish's band.

¹⁸⁰ Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, *al-Difa 'an Haifa wa-qadiyyat Filastin: mudhakkirat Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, 1891-1953* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 2005), p. 151.

A similar, secret decision appears to have been taken in July 1931 at the Nablus conference on the armories controversy.¹⁸¹ In this case, although a provision to coordinate weapons procurement and storage through a special committee was left unimplemented, “a web of secret contacts began to evolve for the purpose of carrying out clandestine activities.”¹⁸² As related by ‘Izzat Darwaza, a party to this covert circle, the conference produced a number of secret armed groups (*jam‘iyyat sirriyya jihadiyya*) which were active and “performed well” before the revolt.¹⁸³ Darwaza is cagey about these events, but evidence of the “web” of contacts and their intention to create a paramilitary body was collected in April 1932 by the Jewish Agency. At a meeting in the house of Ishaq Darwish, a close ally of the mufti, the focus of the attendees, many of whom played prominent roles at the 1931 arming conference, was on creating an underground fighting force to be headed by Subhi al-Khadra, with Ibrahim Darwish as deputy. The meeting featured a veritable who’s who of YMMA activists and YC members representing Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarm, Haifa, Beisan, Hebron, Jaffa, and Gaza: Akram Zu‘aytir, Jamal al-Qasim, Dr. Sidqi Milhis, Fahmi al-‘Abbushi, Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman, Ahmad al-Imam, Hani Abu Muslih, Farid Fakhr al-Din, Rashad al-Khatib, Kamil al-Dajani, and Rushdi and ‘Adil al-Shawa.¹⁸⁴ It is again difficult to judge from the scant documentation whether this grouping was connected in any material manner to the series of attacks on isolated Jews and settlements in the north, generally attributed to *Ikhwan al-Qassam* (the brotherhood of al-Qassam), that began to accumulate after the

¹⁸¹ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 337, 341; Lachman, “Arab rebellion and terrorism,” p. 56-57.

¹⁸² Lachman, “Arab rebellion and terrorism,” p. 56-57.

¹⁸³ *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 76.

¹⁸⁴ From the diary of Aharon Haim Cohen, 8.4.32, CZA J/1 – 205/1. Also present were two contacts in Jordan, ‘Adil ‘Azma and Isma‘il Haqi.

MacDonald letter, though some of the names above feature in Jewish Agency intelligence reports on such activity.¹⁸⁵

Another armed group was created in 1931 under the guidance of ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, the son of Musa Kazim Pasha. Known as *al-Jihad al-muqaddas* (Sacred struggle), it was dormant until the 1933 demonstrations and the decline of the AE jolted it into activity. Of its 17 original members, nine went on to roles in the revolt, and three of these had been scout commanders. Beginning in 1934 it assembled a substantial underground network, which spread from its original core in Jerusalem and Ramallah. It opened seven training facilities and, by the account of Imil al-Ghuri, a member of the organization’s higher committee, organized some 400 youth in 63 cells in 1934. The mufti was apprised of the organization’s existence in July 1934 but opined that though he supported their cause, the time for armed struggle had not arrived.¹⁸⁶ The organization was active in the Jerusalem region prior to the revolt.¹⁸⁷

The question of arming and preparation of underground forces became ever-present in the year prior to the revolt: “clandestine activities spread in 1935 to many

¹⁸⁵ Events of November in the north, 1.12.35, CZA S/25 – 22231. This survey names several persons from the April 1932 meeting (Subhi al-Khadra, Hani Abu Muslih, Farid Fakhr al-Din, Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman) along with a number of other figures (Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, Mu‘in al-Madi, Tahir Qaraman, and Shaykh al-Muzaffar) as conduits for a fund managed by the mufti (drawn from donations in America for the Druze rebellion in Syria in 1925) to be used for clandestine anti-Jewish attacks. Al-Khadra and al-Hajj Ibrahim appear in numerous other JA reports, allegedly in connection with all manner of incidents. Al-Hajj Ibrahim says nothing about any secret fund or ties to armed activity during this time, with the exception of noting that al-Qassam’s group emerged from the YMMA (*al-Difa’ ‘an Haifa*, p. 151) – though his memoir is light on detail for this period and moves briskly through the 1930s (p. 151-71).

¹⁸⁶ Beyond this, the extent of the mufti’s involvement is murky. Again on the sole account of al-Ghuri, who became one of the mufti’s “yes-men” (Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, p. 66) and whose memoir was intent on bolstering his image, the mufti supposedly took charge of *al-Jihad al-muqaddas* a year later (Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 132; Lachman, “Arab rebellion and terrorism,” p. 58). Kayyali also relies on al-Ghuri but says nothing of the mufti assuming control of the organization (*Palestine*, p. 179-80).

¹⁸⁷ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 131-32; Lachman, “Arab rebellion and terrorism,” p. 57-58.

other places in the country under the leadership and instigation of all the radical elements... Istiqlalists, Congress of the Youth, Boy-Scout commanders, YMMAs and young radical supporters of Amin al-Husayni.”¹⁸⁸ Youth were at the center of this drive, both as its foot-soldiers and as proponents and organizers, and scouting, predictably, became a focal point. High school students and youth from the Nablus area were taken to the Jordan valley, or Jordan itself, and given military-style training, including in riflery.¹⁸⁹ With funding assistance from the Youth Congress the Abu ‘Ubayda scout troop hired a former police instructor, Farid Abu al-‘Uyun, in July to offer paramilitary training in police techniques and to instill order.¹⁹⁰ The troop also began to admit highwaymen and “known criminals” into its ranks at approximately the same time.¹⁹¹ Al-‘Uyun was subsequently hired by the sizable scout troop at al-Tira (affiliated to the Abu ‘Ubayda group), and a new grouping called the Muhammadiyya scouts, a joint project of the YC and the *majlisi* camp.¹⁹² The Usama scouts at Qalqilya, who Khalil al-Khuri referred to as the most nationalist in the region, also conducted paramilitary drilling.¹⁹³ The YC, which was reported by al-Khuri in September as very intent on scout organizing, reputedly saw its new scout units as soldiers, and indeed one variety of scouts it cultivated were referred to as “*biyada*” (infantry).¹⁹⁴ By the middle of 1935 the *majlisis* were also invested in the preparations for armed conflict. Aside from forming

¹⁸⁸ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 132.

¹⁸⁹ Arab Bureau information, 1.2.35, CZA S/25 – 22224; Akram Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat Akram Zu‘aytir: al-haraka al-wataniyya al-Filastiniyya, 1935-1939* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 1980), p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ Najib, 11.7.35, CZA S/25 – 3875.

¹⁹¹ Ibid; CID, 5.8.35, periodical appreciation summary 12/35, PRO – FO 371/18957.

¹⁹² Najib, 25.9.35, CZA S/25 – 3875. The Muhammadiyya was estimated to have 25 members.

¹⁹³ Najib, 16.9.35, CZA S/25 – 3875.

¹⁹⁴ Najib, 12.9.35, CZA S/25 – 3875. The other division mentioned in this report is *suwari* (formal).

the *Futuwwah*, which was seen by the Husayni faction as the rump of a future army, Baha al-Din al-Taba‘ continued to organize scout troops and ordered those under his charge to conduct propaganda activities in cities and villages calling the population to buy and stockpile arms.¹⁹⁵ Major figures in the YC close to the PAP did likewise.¹⁹⁶ After crisis erupted in October with the discovery in Jaffa of the covert arms shipment headed for the Zionists, the view that scouts were the path to the creation of an army became generalized among Arab political parties.¹⁹⁷

A number of other radical underground groups appeared during 1935. In Qalqilya and Tulkarm members of the Usama and Abu ‘Ubayda scout troops created a revolutionary society that greatly irked the High Commissioner and the colonial state. *Al-Shabab al-tha’ir* (Revolutionary Youth) was an ephemeral group that issued a string of fiery communiqués in which it variously called for the assassination of high government officials, the eradication of “spies” and “traitors,” keeping alive the memory of the three men executed by the state for the 1929 uprising, and instituting a tax strike.¹⁹⁸ The group’s internal rules stipulated that members were to carry firearms and maintain total secrecy about its doings, on pain of death.¹⁹⁹ It succeeded in having its statements carried in the Arabic press, but in June it sent the High Commissioner a letter directly, informing him of the society’s establishment and its aims, after which he

¹⁹⁵ Arab Bureau information, 22.7.35 and 26.7.35, CZA S/25 – 22224.

¹⁹⁶ Arab Bureau information, 26.7.35, CZA S/25 – 22224.

¹⁹⁷ Najib, 24.10.35, CZA S/25 – 3875.

¹⁹⁸ 31.5.35, CZA S/25 – 22231 (translation of a flyer and note); Najib, 26.6.35, CZA S/25 – 3875. The latter dispatch also includes a transcription of a communiqué.

¹⁹⁹ Arab Bureau information, 28.6.35, CZA S/25 – 22224.

angrily issued an order to the police to crush the group.²⁰⁰ Though police were at first unable to turn up leads, the discovery of a printing press in Jaffa used by the group led to its eventual dissolution.²⁰¹ Active members of the group were quite young, with some in their early twenties, and included veteran Istiqlalists Hashim al-Sabi‘ and Hamdi al-Husayni; these had further contacts with Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman, Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, and Imil al-Ghuri.²⁰² While, to quote Khalil al-Khuri, it was little more than a “name without a body,” the militant tone of *al-Shabab al-tha’ir* was indicative of deepening unrest among activist youth.²⁰³

Similar groups appeared around the same time, leading the CID to observe the existence of a “tendency towards secret organizations to promote extremist policy.”²⁰⁴ A review of such revolutionary societies by the JA’s Arab Bureau warned that a continuation of the current situation could lead to “terror and revolution.” It compared the “militaristic spirit” of these clandestine associations with that preceding World War I, and their development was seen as mirroring the geopolitical tensions mounting in Europe at the time. The youth behind these groups were judged to be among the

²⁰⁰ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 100-01; Arab Bureau information, 22.6.35, CZA S/25 – 22231.

²⁰¹ Arab Bureau information, 22.6.35, CZA S/25 – 22231; Lachman, “Arab rebellion and terrorism,” p. 59. This appears to have been accomplished through placing suspects under thorough surveillance as well as by fining and arresting Qalqilya notables (Najib, 20.10.35, CZA S/25 – 3875).

²⁰² Arab Bureau information, 23.7.35, CZA S/25 – 22231; Najib, 28.4.35, CZA S/25 – 3875; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 132. Al-Khuri names other members of the group as Kamil Hilal, Muhammad al-Hajj Nimr al-Sabi‘, Rashid al-Nufil, Yusuf Isma‘il al-Hajj Hamdan, and Amin Ibrahim al-Nus (28.4.35 dispatch, CZA S/25 – 3875).

²⁰³ Najib, 27.9.35, CZA S/25 – 3875. The organization committed no known physical violence.

²⁰⁴ CID, 5.8.35, periodical appreciation summary 12/35, PRO – FO 371/18957. Several other such groups, all of little consequence, are noted in: Arab Bureau information, 25.6.35, CZA S/25 – 22231, and Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 228 (though Matthews misrepresents one such group, Young Palestine, which was pro-khediye front started by Wafdist Egyptians according to a report of the Arab Bureau: 27.6.35, CZA S/25 – 22231).

nation's brightest and rejected the "passivity" and "silence" of the national movement's known leaders, preferring independent action. It was in this context, the report explains, with the prospect of a swift devolution of the colonial order hanging in the balance, that the High Commissioner revived the legislative council proposal.²⁰⁵ The cycle of youth unrest and organizing unleashed by the illicit arms shipment at Jaffa soon dwarfed the effect of the simmering crop of radical groups that appeared earlier in the year, and lent credence to the Jewish Agency's assessment.

The development of underground paramilitary activity prior to 1936 has been narrated as a geographically divided phenomenon, with three main centers: the Jerusalem-Ramallah area (*al-Jihad al-muqaddas*), the region of Tulkarm and Qalqilya (*al-Shabab al-tha'ir*), and Haifa and the north (*Ikhwan al-Qassam*).²⁰⁶ The unifying element underlying these associations was their intimate reliance on youth.²⁰⁷ Though these groups have come to stand as examples of the increasingly severe and radical mood of the national movement on the eve of the revolt, I have endeavored to suggest here that they were part of a larger trend towards paramilitary preparation that gained ground among both elite and non-elite youth organizers. Interest by some youth in such activism dates as far back as 1929, but it wasn't until 1934-35 that it found concrete expression (save for the Qassam network in the north). It was at this time, after the 1933 demonstrations, that some limited organizational capacity for clandestine armed activity began to be developed. With the continued grim outlook for Palestinians, as the Zionist

²⁰⁵ Arab Bureau information, 25.7.35, CZA S/25 – 22224.

²⁰⁶ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 130-39; Lachman, "Arab rebellion and terrorism," p. 57-59.

²⁰⁷ This point is taken up concerning al-Qassam's group in the next chapter.

enterprise seemed to move from strength to strength in the 1930s, the prospect of a future armed confrontation helped to popularize the idea of youth-in-arms beyond the underground groups, primarily through the militarization of parts of the scout movement.

Youth participation in military drilling and clandestine paramilitary bodies suited their penchant for seeking to usurp the functions of a state. The groups and ventures discussed herein of course had no capacity to mimic the military and repressive apparatus of a state. Most paramilitary activity by youth never exceeded drilling (with some limited exceptions), and thus unlike the tactical experiments relating to immigration and land transfers, youth practice in this arena was geared towards a projected future. Nonetheless, the will of youth and other organizers to take steps in this direction offers perhaps the starkest illustration of their determined pursuit of their national aims, including the constitution of a popular Arab sovereignty.

Conclusion:

It is little coincidence that the youth trend bloomed in the early 1930s, attaining a size and stature that made it a formidable presence in the nationalist movement. The issues of everyday life relating to land, labor, education, “national industries” and consumption around which a self-defined block of youth began to coalesce politically in the 1920s grew more fraught and more urgent in the subsequent decade. The desire of Arabs of the younger generation to express themselves culturally, outside the limited sphere of the state’s Anglophone and Christian culture and in opposition to Zionist youth challengers, also grew, and gave rise to charged assertions of identity, geographic

attachment and national belonging. These pressing concerns and the new youth organizations which rose to deal with them created a new model of social activism – based in the emergent category youth – that spread throughout the country after the founding of the YMMA and the events of 1929.

The political and social rise of youth, where it has been recognized in the historical literature at all, has typically been perceived to be restricted to the educated sons of the elite and the middle classes. Porath, for instance, describes the new youth institutions as the fruit of a “radical articulate generation of better educated politicians and activists.”²⁰⁸ Similarly, Matthews refers to “nationalist youth” as an amalgam of “professionals, administrators, journalists and teachers.”²⁰⁹ There is little debate that the founding memberships of both the YMMA the Youth Congress were heavily drawn from the younger generation of elites and the middle classes.²¹⁰ Additionally it could hardly be denied that the sons of several mayors and former mayors, such as Akram Zu‘aytir, Hashim al-Sabi‘, Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman, and ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, were leading personalities within these groups and the youth trend more generally. Yet by 1933 at the latest, the youth trend had become more expansive and more inclusive than such characterizations permit. The numbers alone do not admit the more restrictive view that youth associations were the preserve of the educated, who almost by definition were not from the lower classes. The estimates of *Filastin* and the CID in 1933 and 1934 respectively suggest participation in youth organs on a scale far larger than the limited

²⁰⁸ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 109.

²⁰⁹ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 230. Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 87, also subscribes to this view.

²¹⁰ That being said, these bodies were not entirely elite and well-off. A delegate from al-Tira, Rafiq al-Shaykh Najib Abu Minan, for instance, brought a group of youth that included “illiterates” with him to the YC’s founding conference (Najib, n.d., “Rafiq al-Shaykh Najib,” CZA S/25 – 3875).

number of graduates of state and private schools.²¹¹ The surviving records of a number of different local youth associations and chapters of larger networks examined above, which mostly offer a view of only their administrative committees and not their general memberships, also do not bear out the contention that the youth trend was limited to professionals, the educated and the wealthy. Rather, as the model of social activism in youth associations spread throughout the towns and into the countryside, the organizations' membership rosters began over time to approximate a larger cross-section of their local populations. This was certainly not always the case, but it was so often enough²¹² that the contours of the trend must be considered by 1933-34 to have expanded decisively past its elite and middle class origins.

The youth field was already enjoying a major wave of expansion in 1932 and early 1933 before the demonstrations in the fall gave it a further boost.²¹³ Although the demonstrations and their bloody suppression set off a debate in Palestinian circles over the national movement's tactics and confrontation with the colonial state, their instigation at the hands of youth organizations and groupings redounded favorably on the continued growth of the youth trend. Scout troops in particular multiplied rapidly after 1933. The youth trend's noticeable development made it a constituency which political elites strove variously to capture and control. Moreover, its expansion gave it

²¹¹ By comparison, school enrollment in 1932-33 was 26,691 from a total school-age population of over 215,000 (Rochelle Davis, "Commemorating Education: Recollections of the Arab College in Jerusalem, 1918-1948," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* v. 23, n. 1&2 (2003), ft. 26, p. 201).

²¹² This is again based on the limited sample of sources used here, but considering their geographic spread there is no apparent reason not to see them as more generally representative.

²¹³ For example, as noted in chapter 2, the YMMA added 27 branches throughout 1932 and the first half of 1933 (Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 183).

the manpower to conduct popular campaigns,²¹⁴ and thereby to alter the methods and political practice of the national movement.

At their most basic, individual level of effect, the associations which composed the youth trend in Palestine aimed to refashion, in ways great and small, the subjectivities of their members. They encouraged the cultivation of sober, dedicated, and selfless subjects – young men grounded in the ethics and ideals of Muslim and Christian Arab culture and conscious of their historical bonds to the lands of their ancestors. The romantic nationalist ideals of the Istiqlal party (surveyed in chapter 2) spread infectiously among many youth and animated or informed many of the new youth societies that appeared in this period.²¹⁵ The promotion of mutual aid and local autonomy by many societies also dovetailed with the spread of nationalist identities in communities which suffered under the effects of British economic policies and Zionist expansion. Not every new association was driven by nationalist ardor, but the overall orientation of the trend, like the movement, grew more hostile to British rule and more determined in its anti-colonialism with the years.

After the colonial state's violent assault on the Jaffa demonstration in October 1933 the national movement entered a new phase in its transformation from an elite to a mass formation. The elite wing of the movement disintegrated with the death of its patriarch, Musa Kazim Pasha, and the new political parties which followed, though they

²¹⁴ Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 226.

²¹⁵ Matthews notes that youth were the most receptive constituency for the Istiqlal's anti-colonial discourse (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 230). The romantic ideology of the Istiqlal was mirrored by the equally romantic ethos which surrounded Zionism, with its tropes of "return" to a promised land, returning to nature through the labors of revivifying and colonizing that land, and remaking the Jews of the *galut* (diaspora) into *sabras*, tough-minded, native born, Hebrew-speaking settlers and future sovereigns of the land. On these themes, see for instance: Segev, *One Palestine Complete*, p. 249-69.

were steeped in factionalism, entered into open competition over the new constituencies of mass politics, particularly workers and youth. Youth, in turn, appeared as the single largest constituency and continued to be at the forefront of the national struggle.

With the path of direct confrontation with the state unpopular or in disrepute, elements of the youth trend, especially the Youth Congress, moved somewhat diffusely towards a new tactical orientation. Where open challenge had been repelled at great cost to the Palestinians in lives, the search for new methods of political activism produced experiments that emphasized the popular interest in indigenous sovereignty and, importantly, attempted to embody that interest. The new tactics at points sought to engage the state and push it in the direction desired by the national movement, and at others to shrink its purview by reordering and reclaiming domains within which it was wreaking havoc. The amorphous sub-period of national activism after 1933, which has been all but ignored in the literature, grew organically from the youth trend's abiding concerns with the political and cultural affairs of everyday life.

Despite the lack of scholarly attention, the popular campaigns against immigration and Zionist land acquisition which began under youth initiative had important effects. For one, they bespoke an interest in the practice of sovereignty which not only reconfirmed the national movement's stated aim of independence and challenged the state (whereas elites wobbled when offered a legislative council), but suggested that continued innovation in the means of struggle, and not a return to diplomacy, lay ahead. Further reinforcing this likelihood, youth campaigning drew wide interest from the public and imitators among elites, which demonstrated that youth

forces were still the leading segment of the national movement. With elites in general disarray, youth remained capable of disciplining them in 1934 and 1935, as they had more episodically in 1931 and 1933, leading by example and zeal.²¹⁶ Finally, the dead-ends which the tactics on immigration and land transfers reached gave credence to the idea that direct resistance and armed struggle were the only meaningful methods of opposing the dual colonial order and mushrooming Zionist expansion.

The bleak picture which confronted Palestinians in the early and mid-1930s, and the state of the national struggle, was amply summarized in an exchange of letters in early 1935 between Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim and Akram Zu'aytir. Zu'aytir, then in Iraq, wrote to al-Hajj Ibrahim encouraging the adoption of more militant and revolutionary struggle. Al-Hajj Ibrahim, the Istiqlalist who had helped spearhead the YMMA's impressive growth, responded by despairing of the national movement's condition, including that of its youth wing, and opining that only Iraq and foreign intervention could save Arab Palestine.²¹⁷ Nonetheless, by his own admission al-Hajj Ibrahim contributed to fostering the society from which al-Qassam began to assemble his network of *mujahidin*.

The move by a swath of Palestinian activists and youth towards paramilitary and underground organization after 1929 in some senses serves as the most dramatic

²¹⁶ This aspect of the national movement's internal dynamics has been recognized by some who have attended the development of youth within the movement (Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 210) but missed by others who have variously contended that elites ultimately reimposed themselves (Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 109), or that the decentralized character of the youth trend, and the cultural limits prescribed on youth within the status hierarchy of society, limited their ability to advance an alternative to the elite camps (Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 193).

²¹⁷ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 1-2. Al-Hajj Ibrahim was hardly alone in wishing for foreign intervention, as, in a different light, many considered the war clouds gathering in Europe a potential opportunity. On this point, see various reports from mid-late 1935 in CZA S/25 - 3875.

indicator of the changing temper of the national movement from the 1920s to the 1930s. The escalation of the national struggle in the early 1930s was intimately linked with the declining fortunes of the peasantry. As we now turn to discuss in the following chapters, the rural order and the Arab countryside endured a prolonged crisis and decline under British rule. The partial collapse of the rural social system created the conditions for peasant radicalization, thereby bringing a nationalist insurrection one step closer.

Chapter 4: Peasants, the new notability, and peripheral capitalism in the late Ottoman era

In the early twentieth century Palestine's elite lacked little in the way of human comforts. At Nablus, a bustling center of commerce and part of the olive country's heartland, the homes of the wealthy were packed with copperwares, crystal, and the finest specimens of carpentry. Two Ottoman civil servants dispatched during World War I to survey Beirut province regarded such treasure troves as characteristic of a culture of acquisitiveness that had taken root among Palestine's elite. They considered the dedication to materialism and ostentation to be an "illness" and a "defect" pervading the well-to-do, not just in Nablus, but elsewhere in the urban centers of Palestine. In Haifa they encountered an upper class that viewed its surroundings, as they put it, as something to consume, adding for emphasis that the appetites they witnessed were, to their thinking, voracious and immoderate. They describe the rich families of Jenin as caring for little other than the pursuit of coin and material reward, allowing their town to fester in poverty so long as their own domains were not violated.¹

At the other end of the social pyramid, the rural producing classes were divided between a middling peasantry and an increasing number who were impoverished, destitute, and landless. Many lived in conditions of penury, hardship, and material deprivation. While elites lived in luxury and wanted for little, a defining feature of the second half of the nineteenth century for the peasantry was its progressive loss of control over the fruits of its labors. A range of actors – the central Ottoman government, local

¹ Muhammad Rafiq al-Tamimi and Muhammad Bahjat, *Wilayat Bayrut* (Beirut: Matba'at Iqbal, 1917), v. 1 (*al-qism al-janubi*), respectively: p. 110-11, 248, 224-25.

Ottoman governors and officials, provincial shaykhs and notables, and the producers themselves – fought over the surplus derived from the agrarian production that was the region’s economic mainstay. Increasingly, over the course of the nineteenth century the non-producing claimants were able to wrest larger portions of the surplus from producers, building the great fortunes that were in evidence by the early twentieth century and, conversely, helping to lock a significant segment of the population into squalor. The social world that was remade in the late Ottoman period had profound ramifications for the predicaments of Palestinian society and its national movement under the Mandate.

Thus far we have followed the burgeoning youth wing of the Palestinian national movement. Many of the problems that youth were struggling with in the years from 1929 to 1936 were intimately related to the conditions of the rural majority. Palestinian nationalists of all stripes, from youth on up to the elite politicians, betrayed a striking tendency to attribute the visible and palpable crisis of the rural social order under the Mandate to Zionism and to British colonial policies that were generally geared towards the flowering of the *yishuv* and the settler enterprise. The AE’s official response to the 1930 White Paper, written by the able ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi, is exemplary in this respect.

Over 70 pages long, a large portion of the statement is devoted to land affairs and to the terrible straits of the peasantry under British rule. It variously decries the heavy taxation of the *fellahin*, the calling in of debts to the government, the closure of untitled lands to traditional modes of reclamation (i.e. converting *mawat* lands to *miri*),² the

² See chapter 5.

government's reservation of tracts deemed to be state lands for the *yishuv* (and refusal to do the same for Arab cultivators), and the closure of the Ottoman Agricultural Bank, a source of affordable credit.³ The results were cataclysmic: for the first time in their history peasants were being fully dispossessed, deprived even of access to land as sharecroppers by sales to Zionist interests that demanded their acquisitions be free of tenants. Since the Balfour declaration "tens of thousands" had been separated from their ancestral lands.⁴ At the root of the trouble lay the government's Zionist policy, which necessitated heavy taxation that in turn drove the peasantry into the arms of moneylenders who fleeced and bankrupted them, forcing them to sell their landed properties.⁵

While there is much truth in many of the AE's claims concerning the deleterious effects of government policy on the rural producing classes, the idea that debt, bankruptcy and dispossession were solely or primarily the result of the Jewish National Home and the British administration is rather far from the mark. On the contrary, the dynamic of peasant destitution and alienation from landownership had been growing, by most estimates, since at least the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Its development initially had nothing to do with Zionism and everything to do with shifts in the political economy, the basis of social power, and dominant patterns and strategies of economic accumulation. The struggles of the peasantry against the indebtedness and

³ AE, memorandum on the White Paper (by 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi), n.d. (submitted in December 1930), p. 3, 4, 44, 46, 50-51, PRO – FO 371/15326. The details of many of these issues are explored in chapter 5.

⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

⁵ Ibid., p. 59. Underscoring the weight of debt, the memo urged that "If the Government, therefore, are really anxious to improve the condition of the Fallah, they should settle the debts problem before anything else."

impoverishment that left them at risk of becoming landless, both during the late Ottoman period and under the British, had much to do with momentous changes that transpired in the final decades of Ottoman sovereignty.

Both elites and peasants experienced great transformation in the nineteenth century, which was marked by a set of critical institutional developments, including the commodification of land, Palestine's integration into the world market, and the local emergence of capitalist social relations. For the peasantry, these developments had decidedly mixed results. The structural transformation of the political economy greatly accelerated changes in Palestine's social economy that often left peasants more vulnerable to external events and forces. Class stratification advanced, and while some were able to maintain or better their position many lost ground. The hegemony attained by merchant capital and its substrate, usury capital, fed preexisting tendencies towards debt-based accumulation. Social bonds and ties of solidarity were loosened and as social relations coarsened, peasant insecurity and poverty increased. The power of urban centers, and particularly the coastal cities of Jaffa and Haifa, grew over the countryside. And, as the flipside to the riches amassed by wealthy urban elites, a portion of the lower peasantry (of unknown size – see below) was dispossessed, becoming sharecroppers or landless laborers.

This chapter charts and assesses these transformations. The first section sketches the old regime, surveying the contours of relations between merchants and peasants and the gradual reformation of the elite by merchant capital. In the following sections, the consequences of the Tanzimat era and its successors are examined, including the

establishment of a regime of private property in land and Palestine's integration into the world market. The last portion of the chapter turns to look briefly at the early conflicts over land between Arabs and Zionist settlers that studded the late Ottoman era and their role in stimulating changes in the social meaning and significance of land and in conceptions of Arab collective identity.

Autonomy, unequal exchange and the foundations of the ancien régime

As elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, the areas that later became Palestine enjoyed a great deal of autonomy from the imperial center.⁶ Local forces proved adept at avoiding or limiting taxation, conscription, and provisioning imperial troops, as well as blocking political appointments made at Istanbul. In the push and pull of relations between the center and the periphery, provincial forces benefited from the distance they acquired from imperial extractions and impositions. Local notables and shaykhs who acted as intermediaries for the Porte used a variety of strategies, from outright resistance to all manner of foot-dragging, to bend the Ottoman system to their advantage while retaining the legitimacy conferred by the imperial order. Peasants, in turn, sought to establish their own autonomy from regional strongmen and confederations that had their own designs on surplus extraction.⁷

⁶ Palestine as an administrative entity was created by the British, although Schölch suggests that the Ottomans also attempted to weld its districts into a separate province (*Palestine in Transformation*, p. 289). The notion of Palestine as a geographic entity is much more ambiguous to trace. On this subject Haim Gerber presents one of the most ambitious explorations: *Remembering and Imagining*, p. 42-79. See also: Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity* and Porath, *The Emergence*, p. 31-69. For simplicity's sake I will refer to the areas of the Ottoman Empire that became unified as Palestine by the same name during the Ottoman period as well, without intending to intervene in the debate over the term's genealogy.

⁷ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 21, 19; on peasants: p. 28, 32, 53.

Local identities and the political economy were both shaped by the dynamics of autonomy within the empire. Regions like those in Palestine produced both distinctive attachments to place and powerful commercial networks that drew the surplus of rural areas towards urban centers. Strong regional, village and *hamula* identifications characterized the population and reinforced their investment in maintaining autonomy from the imperial center. As Beshara Doumani has emphasized, these loyalties were intimately tied to the social spaces that grew around trade networks at regional and sub-regional levels, and were essential elements of local politics. They were mobilized in local (village), regional and inter-regional power struggles as well as in resisting invasion or tax collection.⁸

Villages were typically associated with specific plots of land, the disposition of which was integral to local social relations and relations of production. Although prior to the 1858 Land Law private property in land was rare and highly limited within the Ottoman Empire, locals tended to look on and treat the lands they cultivated, the possession (*raqaba*) of which was usually vested with the state (i.e., they were *miri* lands), as their own private holdings. Peasant claims to land were almost as a rule customary and not based in formal legal title, yet peasants typically succeeded in retaining tenancy and in making it heritable. Holdings in land were commonly passed down from fathers to their offspring and *many jurists* came to support the view that peasant tenancies amounted to possession of the lands they planted.⁹ This sense of legal possession was strong enough that not only were the lands heritable, but during the

⁸ Ibid., p. 16-53; Swedenburg, "The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry," p. 469.

⁹ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 156-57.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (prior to the 1858 Land Law), peasants could effectively dispose of their lands by selling the usufruct rights (*tasarruf*) attached to them.¹⁰ Peasant claims on land were also buttressed by corporate forms of identity, as represented by *hamulas*.¹¹

The *hamula*, a unit of community based in extended kin, was a central feature of village life. Usually several *hamulas* existed in each village and the great majority of individuals belonged or affiliated to one or another group. *Hamulas* were flexible formations, not exclusively based in lineal descent, whose memberships could include fictive kin. They existed in significant measure for the “collective defense of members’ interests” and were bound by “principles of collective responsibility for members’ actions.” While they have been understood by outsiders as emanations of a “primitive” tribalism and sources of internecine conflict, they are better understood as socio-cultural units for the collective management and minimization of risk.¹² Though feuds and rivalries between *hamulas* were common, the village normally superseded the *hamula* in terms of loyalties, and village defense was based on inter-*hamula* unity. Regarding land,

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 157. Doumani underscores that these were sales of *rights in land* not, strictly speaking, the land itself, the legal disposition of which, as noted above, usually rested with the state. Sale of the usufruct did, however, alienate the peasant from the land.

¹¹ James Reilly, “The Peasantry of Late Ottoman Palestine” *Journal of Palestine Studies* v. 10, n. 4 (summer 1981), p. 90.

¹² Although British and Zionist writings in particular (and sometimes Arabs as well) have depicted the Arab countryside as mired in perpetual internecine bloodshed, many contests between villages were not due to inveterate tribalism, but to competition over material resources such as water, grazing rights, and land. The “petty wars” which ensued were often conducted through forms of sabotage (uprooting trees, for instance) more than direct confrontations, though these certainly did occur and could be lethal (Reilly, “The Peasantry,” p. 89, 91). Amos Nadan concurs in the view that the *hamula* was a system of risk reduction and management: *The Palestinian Peasant Economy under the Mandate: a Story of Colonial Bungling* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2006), p. 198.

the *hamula* served to bolster continuous utilization of its members' holdings, which was critical for maintaining rights in *miri* lands.

In part because of the rugged country prevailing in many parts of Palestine (especially the hills of the interior) and the difficulty of transportation, in the period before the consolidation of the region's integration into the world market many villages strove for and enjoyed self-sufficiency in good measure and were assertive about protecting local means of livelihood and subsistence.¹³ In spite of their pursuit of autonomy, villages became increasingly interconnected and ultimately subordinate to urban centers and cities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The thickening of ties between town and country owed to the growth of urban-based merchant networks which wove a dense web of economic, social, and cultural bonds between rural peasant producers and urban traders while economically linking villages and peasant households to urban, regional, and transregional markets and market forces. The merchants who built these networks emerged as a group around the mid-eighteenth century as part of a new "middle class" composed of traders, entrepreneurs, and middle peasantry. They vied for command over the rural surplus with the *a'yan*, the shaykhs who collected taxes for the Ottoman state (*shuyukh al-nawahi*, or subdistrict chiefs), and the heads of the powerful urban and rural *hamulas*. Over time the merchants were able to gain the upper hand in this contest. In the nineteenth century the growth of merchant power culminated in the arrival and ascendancy of a new class: the creation of "a different breed of urban

¹³ Reilly, "The Peasantry," p. 89-90; Erik Eliav Freas, "Ottoman Reform, Islam, and Palestine's Peasantry," *Arab Studies Journal* v. 18, n. 1 (spring 2010), p. 207.

notable” whose power derived from merchant networks, merchant capital, and moneylending.¹⁴

The rise of merchant capital and what William Roseberry calls “usurers’ capital” fundamentally reshaped Palestinian society and dramatically altered the nature of social relations between the producing classes and those trading in their produce or otherwise making a claim on the rural surplus.¹⁵ The remaking of the elite and the changing basis of social power were at the heart of these transformations. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the composition of the elite profoundly shifted throughout the Ottoman Empire at the hands of merchants at roughly the same time.¹⁶ In view of this, Albert Hourani’s classic argument concerning the notables, which has long informed understandings of the provincial elite in the period after the mid-eighteenth century, stands revised.¹⁷ While Hourani pointed to the notables’ involvement in trade as a source of wealth, his primary focus was on their position as intermediaries with the Ottoman Porte and not on their role in local political economies.¹⁸ Additionally, ‘Adel Manna’ has critiqued Hourani’s description of the “secular” notability – the primary

¹⁴ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 65-66, 81, 92-93, 166. See in general chapters 2 (p. 54-94) and 4 (p. 131-81). See also ‘Adel Manna’, “Continuity and Change in the Socio-Political Elite in Palestine During the late Ottoman Period,” in Thomas Philipp, ed., *The Syrian Land in the 18th and 19th Century: the Common and the Specific in the Historical Experience* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1992), p. 69-89.

¹⁵ Roseberry suggests a productive interrelation between merchant capital and usurers’ capital (which I will refer to simply as usury capital). See “Peasants as Proletarians,” *Critique of Anthropology* 11 (1978), p. 3-18, and see below for further discussion. The operating definition of usury utilized herein does not pertain strictly to interest-bearing loans. Rather, it refers to terms of contract extended to producers (both credit and commodity purchasing arrangements) wherein the debts and claims against them rapidly become insurmountable, leaving them permanently financially underwater.

¹⁶ One such argument has been made by Fatma Müge Göçek, *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), especially chapter 3: p. 87-116.

¹⁷ Albert Hourani, “Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables” in Richard L. Chambers and William R. Polk, eds., *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 41-68.

¹⁸ Ibid. The note on trade and land as sources of wealth appears on p. 53.

category of the three varieties he lays out (which also include the *‘ulama* and military functionaries) – as vague and imprecise.¹⁹ He shows that during the Tanzimat reforms newly prominent families, empowered by merchant capital, emerged to contend with or displace the preexisting elites. The notability was recast by the entry into its ranks of the powerful and wealthy merchants who were the foremost beneficiaries of expanding trade, administrative centralization and reform, and the privatization of land.²⁰ The new mercantile-based notability contained many families who went on to become leading political and economic figures and men of influence during the British Mandate. In the Gaza region members of the Shawa, Tayyan, al-Bitar, Baydas, and Abu Khadra families joined the elite; around Nablus the list included the patriarchs of the Shak‘a, al-Masri, Hammad, and Zu‘aytir families; and in Jerusalem, the Nashashibis broke into the circle of the notability.²¹

The reformation of the elite transpired over several generations and required the displacement of the structural position of the shaykhs and the diminution of the other elite elements’ socio-political standing and influence. The success of merchant capital in redefining the social hierarchy was evident in the amalgamation of a portion of the shaykhs and other prior notable strata into the mercantile and moneylending fold, which they joined in an effort to maintain their status as well as to tap into the amassing of riches at which merchants were proving increasingly adept.²² The ‘Abd al-Hadi family

¹⁹ Manna‘, “Continuity and Change,” p. 71. Hourani elucidates three types of “secular” notables: *a‘yan*, *aghas*, and *amirs* (“Ottoman Reform,” p. 48-49).

²⁰ Manna‘, “Continuity and Change,” p. 84.

²¹ Ibid., p. 79, 82-83.

²² ‘Adil Manna‘, *Tarikh Filastin fi awakhir al-‘ahd al-‘Uthmani, 1700-1918: qira’a jadida* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1999), p. 207; Freas, “Ottoman Reform,” p. 206-08. See below.

is exemplary in this regard, representing a shaykhly family with strong connections in the Jenin hinterlands that adapted to the changing socio-economic circumstances, with its leading lights urbanizing and incorporating themselves into the bureaucratic and mercantile circles that gained influence by the mid-nineteenth century.²³

Doumani, whose work on the Jabal Nablus region illuminates these manifold transformations in depth, has demonstrated that the construction and reproduction of merchants' trade relations relied as much on what he calls "cultural capital" as it did on economic means.²⁴ In this the merchants stole a page from many of the shaykhs, who prior to the Tanzimat often built their own clientage networks through offering a litany of services: mediating peasant relations with towns and urban centers, acting as commercial guarantors, resolving disputes by applying *'urf* and flexibly interpreting Islamic law, and, in times of need, offering sanctuary to those involved in hostilities.²⁵ Erik Freas has argued that like the merchants who succeeded them, the shaykhs' genuine interest in the welfare of the agricultural producers helped legitimate and strengthen the shaykhly order that predominated in the countryside.²⁶ The merchants took the model

²³ Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 207.

²⁴ Here Doumani to a great extent echoes and elaborates on earlier scholarship which also emphasized the importance of the cultural bonds between lords and peasants, such as that of Swedenburg ("The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry," p. 473-75). Swedenburg's work is, however, more concentrated on deconstructing the notable ideological packaging of their dominance as a type of patron-client relations.

²⁵ Freas, "Ottoman Reform," p. 213-15.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 213. There appear to be any number of exceptions to Freas's central argument that a "relatively more equitable relationship" existed between shaykhly elites and the bulk of the peasantry than what followed between merchant elites and agricultural producers during the Tanzimat and the advance of world market integration (p. 197). Manna' argues, for example, that the peasants of the Galilee gained from the relative absence of shaykhs in the area due to the reign of the consecutive strongmen who ruled at Acre from the mid-eighteenth century *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 173). Many shaykhs were rather rapacious, such as Mas'ud al-Madi (Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation*, p. 182) in the Haifa region and 'Abd al-Rahman al-'Amr and his successors in Jabal al-Khalil (Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 176-77). The escalation of local struggles for power among this stratum that followed the withdrawal of Egyptian occupation forces in 1840 also tended to fall on the shoulders of the peasants, who fought in various

provided by the shaykh-peasant interchange and developed it further and in new directions.

Operating in a decentralized milieu where a premium existed on autonomy from surplus extractions by the state or other external forces, “The most effective way to sustain movement and exchange across space and time... was through multiple layers of negotiation based on commonly held assumptions and on accountability between the actors.” Most fundamentally, merchants needed to build credibility and earn the trust of peasant producers. Many pursued this through the most obvious path: gaining religious affiliation and standing, which they attained via education, marriage into a known religious family, charity, association with a mosque, or membership in a Sufi *tariqa* (order or brotherhood). This is not to suggest that religious avocation or connections were instrumental; rather, an elective affinity appeared between religion and business. Religious standing was a marker for upright conduct and a “medium of communication” between parties, helping to assure individual reputation and rectitude. Also vital to the success of aspiring merchants was the creation and growth of a shared history with peasants, sometimes extending over generations. Shared experience and time created familiarity between merchants and peasants and, properly managed, vouchsafed a record

conflicts, lost their property, and were compelled to finance the campaigns of the competing lords. This was most dramatically the case in Nablus, where a costly civil war beginning in 1853, claiming perhaps 1500 lives, preceded the definitive reassertion of the Ottoman center’s authority in 1859 (Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation*, p. 210-11, 215, 224, 232-33). Nevertheless Freas is not alone in his contentions; with less elaboration, Yazbak argues much the same in terms of substance: Mahmoud Yazbak, “Nablus versus Haifa, 1870-1914: Administrative developments and their Impact on Social Stratification,” in Thomas Philipp and Birgit Schäßler, eds., *The Syrian Land, Processes of Integration and Fragmentation: Bilād al-Shām from the 18th to the 20th Century* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1998), p. 272.

of honesty and honorableness that reinforced the strength and dependability of the social as well as economic ties binding the parties.²⁷

In forming a partnership with a merchant, a peasant not only gained vitally necessary credit, but also a range of other valuable social and economic services. Merchants acted as brokers for their peasant clients, introducing them to contacts, giving assurances and interceding on their behalf with other parties. They provided peasants with accommodations and food during their visits to the local town or city, offered them small scale banking (accepting deposits of produce or savings and keeping accounts of withdrawals against these assets), and of course opened their shops for purchases of necessary goods. These services were paired with social calls by merchants to peasants in their villages, the offering of gifts, and attendance (and bankrolling) of peasant family weddings. As Swedenburg broadly puts it, the social aspect of ties between peasants and lords was “expressed in such terms as ‘honor,’ gift-giving, kinship.” The complex of social interactions and ties that grew between merchants and peasants thus attained a strength and vitality that underwrote and secured their economic relations, while in tandem helping to knit town and hinterland, agricultural producers and urban entrepreneurs, together in a single social formation.²⁸

The nature of relations between peasant producers and their lords has often been discussed as a patron-client system. As a range of authors have pointed out, the concepts of patronage and patron-client relations are immanently ideological, and should be

²⁷ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 65-66, 81.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 81; Swedenburg, “The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry,” p. 474.

approached with caution.²⁹ By posing relations between lords and peasants as a set of ongoing exchanges between patrons and clients, the inequality between parties is obfuscated or masked. In the Palestine case, the notables styled themselves paternalistically as caretakers of the peasantry, presenting themselves as aiding peasants economically and otherwise looking after them. For services rendered they received in turn the loyalty of the agrarian toilers as a just and fitting recompense.³⁰ Peasants were mobilized in armed conflicts between competing lords, especially in the central hill regions where ties between lords and peasants were strongest.³¹ Some performed corvée labor (‘*awna*).³² Perhaps most importantly (and as discussed below), contracting with peasants secured flows of primary commodities that were elemental to merchants’ trade networks and thereby helped to expand the power of urban merchants.

While the claim to patronage must be distinguished for its ideological character, peasants were not passive participants in their relations with merchants and notables, but fought to obtain terms of “fair and just exchange.”³³ Especially before the consolidation

²⁹ Michael Gilsenan, “Against Patron-Client Relations” in John Waterbury and Ernest Gellner, eds., *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London: Center for Mediterranean Studies of the American Universities Field Staff, 1977), p. 167-183; Swedenburg, “The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry,” p. 473-75.

³⁰ Swedenburg, “The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry,” p. 473. Swedenburg stresses that notable paternalism was overlaid with genealogical notions of status that also activated senses of elite entitlement to lordship and property-ownership. Doumani’s subsequent work plays down the genealogical aspect of elite self-fashioning in light of the comparatively recent role of merchant capital in forging a new notability. Based in primary research (as opposed to Swedenburg’s synthetic analysis) he also offers a more complex, detailed, and organic portrait of peasant-lord interactions and, while duly acknowledging the ideological edge of the patron-client rubric, does not object as strenuously to its use (*Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 56-57).

³¹ Salim Tamari, “From the Fruits of their Labour: the Persistence of Sharetenancy in the Palestinian Agrarian Economy” in Kathy Glavanis and Pandeli Glavanis, eds., *The Rural Middle East: Peasant Lives and Modes of Production* (London: Zed, 1990), p. 85.

³² Ibid.

³³ Swedenburg, “The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry,” p. 474; Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 56. Quote from Doumani.

of the new notables' hegemony and the onset of serious peasant indebtedness, both of which took root in the nineteenth century, peasants had options when faced with difficult or disagreeable relations with a lord: they could switch patrons, resist debt payments, relocate to a different area, or even resort to violence.³⁴ While peasants sought the best terms for themselves and their families from lords, ultimately the latter needed to ensure the reproduction of a stable client base and to preempt the potential for disruption. Within limits, peasants were able to turn the merchants' reliance on agricultural produce and labor into a modicum of security for themselves while fashioning an unwritten ethical guarantee of sorts to what James Scott has referred to as the "right to subsistence."³⁵

As should be clear from the preceding discussion, the socio-cultural dimension of merchants' self-marketing to peasants – their preference of establishing themselves as honest and decent business partners capable of offering a range of services, and their concern for peasants and commitment to their subsistence – acted to obscure or deflect the fact that economic interaction between merchants and peasants was based in relations of unequal exchange. At the root of the merchants' networks among peasants was the former's pursuit of economic accumulation through carefully calibrated exploitation of rural producers. The core and anchor of economic relations between *fellah* and *'ayn*, and the key to unequal exchange and its development, was the latter's role as the peasant's source of credit. Before 1858 merchants sought steady supplies of

³⁴ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 56, 81. This represented a continuation of previous peasant tactics of self-preservation (Freas, "Ottoman Reform").

³⁵ "Patronage or Exploitation?" in *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies*, p. 30.

rural produce foremost, and to help secure the desired flows they extended peasants cash advances, loans, and lines of credit (as well as providing seeds, stock, and other factors of production). In the process they used debt as a snare to bind peasants to their operations.³⁶ Over time, credit became a principle avenue for organizing the exploitation of the peasantry and the advancement of capital accumulation.

A common instrument for the provision of credit was the *salam*, or forward-purchase, contract. As Doumani explains:

The underlying principle of a *salam* contract is the immediate advance of money by the first party for the future delivery by the second party of movable collateral – usually foodstuffs – at a reduced price fixed at the time of the agreement. The key provision is that the agreed-upon amount of, say, oil must be delivered to the first party in kind regardless of what the market price of this commodity happens to be at the time of the harvest.

By fixing the price of the commodity in advance, the merchant assured a rate of profit irrespective of fluctuations in the actual market value of the good at harvest time or thereafter. While interest, or more specifically usury (*riba*), was illegal according to Islamic law, *salam* contracts were not, and Hanafi jurisprudence in particular had long recognized them. Merchant accumulation occurred through the manipulation of purchase prices, which were commonly calculated against the duration of the waiting period before receipt of the goods – the longer the wait the lower the unit price and the higher the merchant's return.³⁷ Although the contracts were for advanced purchases, and were not technically loans, their terms were often highly disadvantageous to producers, and the declining position they caused in peasant accounts has led to their perception as

³⁶ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 81, 161; Swedenburg, "The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry," p. 473; Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 196.

³⁷ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 135-37; quote from p. 135.

instruments bearing interest. It is perhaps safer to conclude, however, that the terms of the contracts were often usurious, regardless of what one concludes about the claim they contained interest, in that the debts which peasants took on were, over time, onerous under the common terms and impossible to repay.

Use of *salam* contracts became widespread in the olive country of the interior hills. Their proliferation was facilitated in part by the Ottoman tax calendar, which was keyed to the grain harvest, months ahead of that for olives. For those peasants whose income was more dependent on olive cultivation, this meant that short of holding reserves with which to pay taxes, they often turned to *salam* arrangements. By the middle of the nineteenth century the practice was so ubiquitous that entire villages regularly relied on *salam* contracts to pay their taxes.³⁸

Usury became a defining feature and structuring principle of the changing political economy by sometime in the early nineteenth century. The ramifications of this development were manifold: “the processes of peasant differentiation, urban-rural migration, commoditization of land, and monetization of the rural economy – all increasingly driven by pervasive moneylending practices – came to dominate everyday life.”³⁹ The precedence of usury capital in articulating local social relations and ordering the political economy advanced as merchant networks gained economic hegemony. The

³⁸ Ibid., p. 143, 146-47. Doumani found evidence of village-wide contracts where individual peasants were unaware that their whole village had been made party to such an agreement. While in at least one legal proceeding the practice of contracting at the village level (conducted by shaykhs on the part of the village) without the knowledge of all of the inhabitants was frowned upon, the viability of the contract was still upheld, which testifies to the power of usury capital at this time, even under dubious conditions.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 179. Doumani tailors this description to Jabal Nablus, his field of research, but as returned to below, his conclusions were more widely applicable, extending to zones outside the central highlands.

expansion of commercial agriculture, the transition to a money economy,⁴⁰ and the new administrative and legal framework created through the Tanzimat reforms all benefited the rising class of merchants considerably, eventually allowing them to either intermix with or marginalize rival claimants on the rural surplus and to create a new stratum of mercantile elites.⁴¹

The Tanzimat, the commodification of land, and world market integration

The Tanzimat reforms, initiated in two waves in the middle of the nineteenth century, were intended to augment the Ottoman state's control in the provinces and to curb local autonomy from the center while bolstering state revenues. The reforms included the amplification of Ottoman administrative presence and a more rigorous application of the legal apparatus in the provinces, and although their local effects were multiple and at times contradictory, they generally expanded and reinforced the new power of merchants. The Advisory Councils (*majalis al-shura*) which had been established during the period of the Egyptian occupation of Greater Syria in the 1830s were expanded and given renewed stature. Commercial courts were erected and the local Islamic courts were extended beyond cities and towns to rural areas. Both of these developments served merchants well. The councils, which were used in part to lure local notables into alliance with the Ottoman center, became bases for the expansion of merchant power and influence. Likewise the augmentation of the court system served to

⁴⁰ This was advanced in part by the Ottoman center, which declared in 1840 that all taxes should be collected in cash only, not in kind (M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008), p. 90).

⁴¹ Manna', "Continuity and Change," p. 69-89, especially 84-85, and idem, *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 165-209, especially 205-06; Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 77, 93, 135 and chapter 4: 131-81.

displace the adjudication of disputes involving rural parties from the terrain of customary law (*'urf*) to the Islamic courts, which further advanced the integration of rural areas into the urban sphere.⁴²

The added influence that the Tanzimat brought merchants propelled important shifts in local social relations and hierarchies. As merchants gained access to political offices via the Advisory Councils, and as the armature of the law penetrated deeper into rural society, capital was rendered “less fettered with personal ties.” Merchants and their allies and partners used their seats on the Advisory Councils to shield moneylending practices and the growing indebtedness of the *fellahin* from any unwanted scrutiny by the Porte. At the same time, the augmentation of the legal infrastructure was used to render peasants increasingly visible and subject to the will of wealthy merchants while depriving them of avenues of potential refuge from onerous debt. At the Islamic court at Nablus, by the 1850s the majority of cases between lords and peasants involved *salam* contracts and moneylending arrangements. Although Doumani does not fully explore the point, it stands to reason that merchants’ recourse to courts to prosecute their economic interests against struggling peasants could only have damaged the personalized bonds which they had so carefully constructed, and with them, the fabric of social relations which fortified the growth of merchant power. The fissures which the court records have exposed subsequently grew, as will be returned to below.⁴³

⁴² Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 45, 49, 77, 135, 152, 168, 180.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 77, 149, 152-53. Doumani comments that the new power of money “bod[ed] ill for the weak, the poor, and the unlucky,” but curiously does not elaborate the socio-cultural ramifications of the merchants’ tightening grip on peasants. As discussed herein, the erosion of relations which occurred from the nineteenth century on had critical repercussions for the Mandate period that have not been well apprehended.

The increasing circulation of usury capital and the power it brought the merchants also provided them *entrée* into elite circles of ruling and religious families. In the highlands merchant usurers first broke into the ranks of the lucrative soap producers (in Nablus) and of tax farmers (*multazims*) in the 1830s, and then completed their arrival as the new and dominant element among the notability in the 1850s, by which time they amalgamated with the leading political and religious families.⁴⁴ The consolidation of the new elite came at the expense not only of indebted peasants, but also, as noted above, of the older stratum of subdistrict chiefs (*shuyukh al-nawahi*) and local rural leaders, who were progressively overshadowed by merchant lords and by the Ottoman center's new will, especially after the end of the Crimean War in 1856, to rein in previously troublesome local potentates and bring them under greater state control.⁴⁵

The texture of relations between lords and peasants was further altered by the promulgation of the Ottoman Land Law of 1858. The Land Law has been the subject of wide debate, in part because it has been seen as an attempt by the Ottoman center to retake control of provincial lands in general, and in particular to restrain the power of

⁴⁴ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 135. The move by merchants into soap manufacture lends substance to Roseberry's insightful argument that usury capital, contrary to Marx's analysis of it as a drain on productive forces, serves as the means by which "merchant capital can move beyond the sphere of circulation into production." See "Peasants as Proletarians," *Critique of Anthropology* 11 (1978), especially p. 7-8.

⁴⁵ Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation*, p. 197-98 and the extended discussion to p. 240; Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 170; Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 184-85; Freas, "Ottoman Reform," p. 216-19. The Ottoman center's intent on downgrading if not dispensing with the rural shaykhs was testified to by the replacement of the position of subdistrict chief with those of *muhasil* (tax collector) and *mukhtar* (loosely, mayor or chief), each of which were assigned roles in raising taxes, but under much more modest provisions (Schölch, op. cit., p. 238-39; Doumani, loc. cit. p. 170). The 1864 Law of the Provinces also failed to include the position of *shaykh al-nahiya* among the rankings of government officers (Manna', op. cit., p. 196).

notables in the provinces by distributing legal titles (*kushans*) to smallholding peasants.⁴⁶ It is now fairly accepted that a key motivation in mooted the new land code derived from the empire's perennial interest in increasing its tax revenues.⁴⁷ Under the new law, land ownership was to be registered formally with the state, and the *de facto* practice of private, heritable and saleable landholding would be made *de jure*. The majority of lands throughout the empire, designated by the legal category *miri*, were previously held by the state and leased to cultivators who paid a tithe (known in Arabic as the '*ushr*'); henceforth, as titles were designated and created, the lands in question remained taxable as *miri* but otherwise became private property. The assignment of title would not only make lands and their disposition more legible to the Porte, thereby aiding tax receipts and reducing leakage due to intermediaries' sticky fingers, but was also intended to incentivize production.⁴⁸ A less broad purpose of the law, but one germane to Palestine,

⁴⁶ For various views on these two lines of analysis, see Schölch, "European Penetration and the Economic Development of Palestine, 1856-82" in Roger Owen, ed., *Studies in the Social and Economic History of Palestine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: MacMillan, 1983), p. 21-22; Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 10-11; Muslih, *The Origins*, p. 22; Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 15; Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 159. While most authors agree on the second point (above), Haim Gerber has argued on the contrary that the law was conservative on questions of land rights, basically updating the existing code and adjusting it to certain dynamics already occurring on the ground: *The Social Origins of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder: Lynn Rienner, 1987), p. 68-69, 71. This perspective has been adduced and supported in a number of subsequent studies: Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 191; Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), p. 83.

⁴⁷ Schölch, "European Penetration," p. 21-22; Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk-Sluglett, "The Application of the 1858 Land Code in Greater Syria: Some Preliminary Observations" in Tarif Khalidi, ed., *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1984), p. 414; Gerber, *The Social Origins*, p. 72; Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 15; Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 153; Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 191. Gerber underplays this element, but admits it.

⁴⁸ Schölch, "European Penetration," p. 21-22; Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 11; Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 159; Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 191.

was to eradicate and “settle” (through parcellation) collectively held lands, known in Greater Syria as *musha*’.⁴⁹

Among the most contentious aspects concerning the law in Palestine is its place in cementing the rise of large landed estates, built on the lands of *fellahin* formerly held under customary title. While the extent of the law’s role in prompting the construction of large landed estates has been disputed,⁵⁰ there is no question that it created the conditions for such to occur, and that its provisions empowered the formation of unprecedented stratification in land-holding and ownership. Against the heritage of consideration for customary claims, article 23 of the Land Law declared that actual occupation of lands was irrelevant to questions of ownership; what mattered was juridical possession.⁵¹ Duration of tenancy was irrelevant to a proper claim to ownership.⁵² If a tenant in possession of lands did not register them, they were open and liable to be legally claimed by others. The emphasis on the legal mechanism for ownership, and its displacement of customary practice and claims, set the stage for large scale acquisitions by well-placed individuals and families.⁵³

⁴⁹ Schölch, “European Penetration,” p. 21; Gerber, *The Social Origins*, p. 77. Khalidi is more reserved in judgment, but implies this (*Palestinian Identity*, p. 95).

⁵⁰ Sluglett and Farouk-Sluglett, “The Application of the 1858 Land Code,” p. 413-14; Gerber, *The Social Origins*, p. 72, 82; Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 159. Sluglett and Farouk-Sluglett, along with Doumani, argue that large estates were already in existence in Greater Syria by the time of the land law’s enactment, whereas Gerber argues that the 1858 code was instrumental to the creation of massive estates, both in the empire at large and in Palestine specifically. Manna’ (*Tarikh Filastin*, p. 223) agrees with Gerber’s view.

⁵¹ Gerber, *The Social Origins*, p. 71.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Although it has often been assumed that notables on the Advisory Councils abused their positions of authority as supervisors of the registration process,⁵³ Gerber’s examination of records for the Jerusalem district found no evidence substantiating this claim, and revealed instead that virtually all of the new registrations were by smallholders (Gerber, *The Social Origins*, p. 77). Similarly he adduces examples refuting the equally widespread idea (c.f. Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 11; Muslih, *The Origins*, p. 22; Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 15; Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 159; Khalidi, *Palestinian*

Although merchants had not previously been interested in accumulating land, the 1858 law soon initiated a frenzy of consolidation and peasant dispossession.⁵⁴ The effects of the law varied by region within Palestine, and its implementation occurred over decades, fundamentally transforming land tenure in vast areas of the country. The most dramatic changes occurred in the lowland plains, which were less heavily populated than the hill regions and more given to *musha* ' holdings. As Khalidi notes, in these areas customary title was disregarded and vast stretches were acquired and registered by urban elites, rural shaykhs, and tax collectors.⁵⁵ Where peasants worked the lands in question, they typically remained, but became tenants instead of (customary) owners. Large estates were amassed in the areas of Marj Ibn ' Amir,⁵⁶ the Eastern Galilee, and the coastal plain, all of which were fertile regions that had been less inhabited in part because of Bedouin raiding.⁵⁷ With the land law's passage and the transfer of titles to wealthy merchants, many Bedouin found the tables increasingly

Identity, p. 95) that peasants, fearing conscription and taxation, registered their lands in the names of local elites or of dead relatives. (Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 167, doesn't quite say this, but suggests that some peasants didn't register their own lands). Looking at the village of 'Arrabeh (in the Jenin subdistrict), where the 'Abd al-Hadi family were preeminent, and Qaryat al-'Inab (west of Jerusalem), where the clan of Abu Ghosh were dominant, lands were not registered *en masse* in the names of these powerful leading families, as might be expected were elite manipulation of registration widespread (Gerber, *The Social Origins*, p. 81-82). In his examination of the registration process in parts of Transjordan, Rogan agrees with Gerber that there is no evidence for the popular contention concerning peasant unwillingness to seek titles in their own names (*Frontiers of the State*, p. 82-83 and 83-92). Gerber concludes, logically enough, that peasants have been underestimated, and that their common depiction as cowed by elites, ignorant of the law, and fearful of the state is erroneous (op.cit., p. 82). Nonetheless, the opportunity to acquire land as a commodity did present the wealthy with new opportunities which they readily took at the expense of villages and peasants.

⁵⁴ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 161. Swedenburg handily refers to the law as inducing a "massive land grab" ("The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry," p. 471).

⁵⁵ Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 94-95. Rogan notes the same disregard for customary title and disavowal of its assertion in areas of Transjordan: *Frontiers of the State*, p. 85-86.

⁵⁶ This area is also commonly known in English by its Greek name, the plain of Esdraelon, or otherwise as the Jezreel valley. In Hebrew it is called 'Emeq Yizra'el.

⁵⁷ Owen, *The Middle East*, p. 267; Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 94-95; Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 192. Schölch ("European Penetration," p. 22-23) argues that large holdings developed along the same lines in the central hill country as well.

turned, however, and instead of putting the squeeze on local residents and travelers, they became subject to exactions themselves, in the form of rents owed to new, urban absentee landlords.⁵⁸ Others joined in the expansion of cultivation, seeking new opportunities in the increasing commercialization of agriculture.⁵⁹ Many of the leading families of the Mandate era profited handsomely by the 1858 law: the Husaynis, al-Nashashibis, al-Dajanis, al-‘Alamis, ‘Abd al-Hadis, Tuqan, al-Sa‘id, and al-Shawa, for instance, all accumulated estates. In some cases the holdings they amassed were enormous. The ‘Abd al-Hadis, by way of example, took possession of some 200,000 dunams in the Jenin area.⁶⁰

The wealthy found two other primary methods of acquiring new lands in addition to filing directly for title on cultivated lands. Soon after the law’s enactment the Ottoman center took the unprecedented step of selling large plots of land which were uncultivated, or deemed to be uncultivated, throughout the country, particularly in the North. Large purchasers were thus able to take possession of sizable or even immense plots and reclaim them, or to engage in speculation, with relative ease. A famous case is that of Sursuq purchases in the Marj Ibn ‘Amir, where in two transactions in 1869 and 1872, lands belonging to 22 villages, including Nazareth, were sold to a group of Beirut-

⁵⁸ Gerber, *The Social Origins*, p. 79. For those Bedouin not taking advantage of the new impetus to agricultural expansion the reversal of fortunes is another emblematic indication of the political-economic ascendancy of the cities over the hinterlands.

⁵⁹ Owen, *The Middle East*, p. 174-75, 264-65; Haim Gerber, “Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Palestine: The Role of Foreign Trade,” *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 18, n. 3 (July 1982), p. 261. Owen notes that this was especially the case in the regions around Gaza, where Gerber adds that a steady export business was conducted in barley, amounting to upwards of 40,000 tons annually. Rogan has discussed Bedouin sedentarization in more depth in the Transjordanian case (*Frontiers of the State*, especially p. 88-90), illustrating that the registration process stimulated plantation agriculture and the use of the titles as financial assets, even by poorer Bedouin, among other outcomes.

⁶⁰ Manna‘, *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 192.

based investors, chief among them the Sursuq family.⁶¹ The lands, totaling an estimated 230,000 dunams and situated in a vast steppe home to some of Palestine's most fertile tracts, were reputedly auctioned for a song, to the tune of £20,000. Indicative of the trouble that such massive transfers could cause, a group of Nazarenes protested the sale and succeeded in having some of the lands initially alienated in 1869 returned to them. Nevertheless the Sursuqs soon became the newest lords of the Marj Ibn 'Amir, and were credited by contemporary observers with bringing the meadows of the plain under the plow. The Sursuq family also obtained the tax-farming rights (*iltizam*) to the area, a factor which may have helped them eventually acquire lands to entire villages that were later infamously sold, along with the steppe, to Zionists. As the Sursuq case demonstrates, the Ottoman center's interest in boosting its revenues by auctioning uncultivated lands (or those without title), and subsequently collecting the tithe on reclaimed plots, acted to facilitate elite land acquisition with little regard for the consequences for peasant tenure.⁶²

Large holdings were also accumulated by elites as peasants sought to escape the pressures of tax and debt. Some sales occurred as the result of major macroeconomic

⁶¹ Fellow investors included Salim al-Khuri, members of the Twayni and Farah families, and initially, Habib Bustros (Schölch, "European Penetration," p. 24). Lebanese moguls found opportunities awaiting them in Palestine in the Galilee and the north owing to their peculiar historical circumstances, whereby the local notables had been thinned out by the Janissaries and the rule of Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar (1775-1804), therein providing *entrée* to outside investors after the legal transformation of the land regime was begun. See Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 173-74 and idem., "Rereading the 1834 Revolt against Muhammad 'Ali in Palestine and Rethinking Ottoman Rule" in Camille Mansour and Leila Fawaz, eds., *Transformed Landscapes: Essays on Palestine and the Middle East in Honor of Walid Khalidi* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2009), p. 89.

⁶² Schölch, "European Penetration," p. 22, 24; Gerber, *The Social Origins*, p. 79-80. Gerber goes so far as to argue that the reclamation of uncultivated lands sold by the state was the primary route by which land consolidation occurred in Palestine. Given the scale of peasant land alienation which occurred, and the great deal of ambiguity which shrouds the law's implementation (testified to by the wide debates which it has spawned in the literature), there is some cause to doubt this contention.

and imperial factors, such as a succession of poor harvests in the late 1870s and the stresses of the Russo-Ottoman war (1877-78).⁶³ More endemically the peasantry continued to struggle with the twin burdens of surplus appropriation by the state and local financiers. For some individuals and villages these exactions weighed so heavily that they opted to trade away titles to land, personally and collectively, in order to have their debts, including tax arrears, cleared.⁶⁴ In other individual cases, where peasants were dependent upon credit for both their consumption needs and their operating budget, they lost their lands in collateral forfeitures.⁶⁵ Though it has sometimes been discounted, the trend towards peasant land alienation on account of indebtedness grew as the “entire urban political and legal apparatus” – the Advisory Councils, the Islamic courts, muftis, governors, and tax collectors – all fell under the hegemony of usury capital.⁶⁶

The law’s repercussions differed in the hill country. In some regions that have been examined in depth, such as the environs of Jerusalem, alienation of peasant lands was less prevalent.⁶⁷ In other areas, such as Jabal Nablus, myriad forms of sharecropping sprang up,⁶⁸ indicating that smallholders had lost their lands, probably

⁶³ Schölch, “European Penetration,” p. 22.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 22. An instructive case is that of German investor Melville Bergheim, who in 1872 acquired lands from 153 peasants in the village of Abu Shusha, near Ramle, by paying off the villagers tax arrears (p. 25). The uneasy relations with local peasants that followed are returned to below.

⁶⁵ Tamari, “From the Fruits,” p. 80.

⁶⁶ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 162.

⁶⁷ Gerber, *The Social Origins*, p. 77; Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 94. Khalidi relies here on Haim Gerber’s work.

⁶⁸ These are treated in Sarah Graham-Brown, “The Political Economy of Jabal Nablus, 1920-1948” in *Studies in the Economic and Social History of Palestine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* and Tamari, “From the Fruits.” The latter provides a useful table charting the different types of arrangements on p. 82.

through collateral forfeiture.⁶⁹ Although it remains unclear, it appears that the 1858 Land Law may have been the primary stimulus behind the emergence of the complex array of sharecropping arrangements that became an enduring feature of the political economy in the highlands.⁷⁰ While the fact that many or most peasants who lost their hold over the lands they inhabited and worked were not removed from them may have palliated the blow and helped to contain potential insurrection, the rise of new forms of dependency, like sharecropping, often meant that peasants were even more likely than before to be trapped in penury and subject to the will and domination of lords.⁷¹ Indeed this has left many scholars to contend that Palestinian peasants were reduced to the status of “serfs” (*aqnan*) serving a “semi-feudal class.”⁷² As I will presently argue, this is a category mistake, as what was taking root in the Levant was not a variant of feudalism, but of peripheral capitalism.

Throughout the Levant peasants struggled mightily against the erosion of their position, fighting to maintain themselves on the land, preserve their livelihoods, and

⁶⁹ Gad G. Gilbar, “Economic and Social Consequences of the Opening of New Markets: The Case of Nablus, 1870-1914,” in *The Syrian Land, Processes of Integration*, p. 289.

⁷⁰ As Gerber notes, the Land Law had little to say about landlord-tenant relationships because it was previously a rare phenomenon (*The Social Origins*, p. 71). Manna’ argues outright that sharecropping was a product of the code’s implementation (*Tarikh Filastin*, p. 223).

⁷¹ The exception to this general rule was the arrangement known as *sharikat mugharasa*, a form of joint farming primarily appearing in orchards and areas of tree cultivation, whereby peasants providing labor and stock developed unused lands belonging to a lord, and in return received a portion of the reclaimed lands (Tamari, “From the Fruits,” p. 80). Although as Tamari stresses, historically sharecropping served a number of functions economically, not least of which was to protect peasant access to lands – which itself undoubtedly took on even greater significance under the British Mandate – its rise as an institution in the late Ottoman period cannot but be regarded as a serious erosion of peasant control over both the means and relations of production.

⁷² These terms are those of ‘Adel Manna’ (*Tarikh Filastin*, p. 223), who is in no way unique in making such an argument. Schölch takes on the feudalism debate with nuance, though his discussion concentrates on the shaykhly order prior to the Tanzimat (*Palestine in Transformation*, p. 171-79).

avoid conversion into wage-laborers.⁷³ In Palestine they turned variously to the central government and to the courts, and in the process their efforts shed light on new dynamics of class formation from below. Already in the middle of the nineteenth century peasants in the highlands petitioned Ottoman authorities for relief after merchants utilized the resources at their disposal, including the Advisory Councils and the deployment of cavalry, to collect on peasant debts.⁷⁴ At court and in their representations to the center (intended to bypass the new Tanzimat institutions that had been captured by the moneyed classes), they invoked modern notions of citizenship and tax-payers' rights and objected to the untrammelled power of capital. As Doumani argues, "a nascent class consciousness could be detected in peasant petitions and lawsuits against their own traditional leaders, not to mention against the urban merchants."⁷⁵ Their increased propensity towards self-representation, and their self-identification as distinct from the wealthier classes which they saw as bent on their oppression, underline this novel development.⁷⁶

⁷³ Insight into the depths of these struggles is provided by Linda Schilcher, who shows that peasants in the Hawran went to great lengths, resorting to insurrection and the establishment of a commune (*'ammiyya*), to maintain links to the land (even as sharecroppers) and to avoid being turned into a landless laborer. See "Violence in Rural Syria in the 1880s and 1890s: State Centralization, Rural Integration, and the World Market" in John Waterbury and Farhad Kazemi, eds., *Peasants and Politics in the Middle East* (Miami, FL: Florida International University Press, 1991), p. 62-65.

⁷⁴ Examples are discussed in Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 172-78.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁷⁶ Writing on the peasantry of France in the same era, Marx emphasized the importance of the question of self-representation to the transformation of rural producers into a self-conscious class: "In so far as there is merely a local interconnexion among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organization among them, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented." Karl Marx, "Peasantry as a Class" in Teodor Shanin, ed., *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (Britain: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 230-31.

The Ottoman state was drawn into the tangle of escalating tensions caused by deepening peasant indebtedness from both ends: by peasants seeking refuge from debt peonage and by provincial elites who saw themselves as extensions of the state and contended that the peasants' resistance to debt bondage impugned imperial authority.⁷⁷ During the ongoing tug of war peasant invocations of justice and propriety typically *fell by the wayside in imperial calculations*. The Ottoman center periodically reminded local notables of their duties, such as protecting and expanding the landed area under cultivation, and warned them against driving peasants into flight, levying illegal taxes, and cheating peasants out of fair prices for their goods.⁷⁸ It also officially tried to block debt-based land seizures by creditors through several orders and measures in the 1870s, but as Gad Gilbar puts it, "market forces overpowered government orders" and peasants themselves remained at the mercy of moneylenders for credit in an increasingly monetized economy.⁷⁹ Moreover, the center's hands were largely tied by the notables' purchase on the Tanzimat institutions and beyond scolding them for their more egregious conduct, it demonstrated little will to tackle the problems caused by the spread of usury capital and to answer peasant cries for redress.⁸⁰

The scale of the Land Law's effects on peasant control of their means and relations of production is both difficult to track with precision and hard, ultimately, to overestimate. The devaluation of customary possession in favor of legal possession guaranteed by formal, registered title was, as suggested above, little short of devastating,

⁷⁷ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 177-78.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 175.

⁷⁹ Gilbar, "Economic and Social Consequences," p. 289.

⁸⁰ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 178.

both for many peasants and, over the long-term, for the rural-based social order. As the law was brought into implementation, peasants in vast areas of the country were dispossessed of lands they regarded as their own. Estimates of the extent and pace of peasant land alienation vary widely and should be approached with caution. Some contemporaneous observers regarded the dispossession and proletarianization of the peasantry as beginning in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.⁸¹ Others suggested the process was advancing much more rapidly. One cited by Schölch believed that at the outset of the twentieth century a mere 20 percent of lands in the Galilee remained in peasant hands under formal title, while in the hill country some 50 percent was thought to still be held by primary producers.⁸² There is evidence of dramatic change by the World War I era, at least in some locales, although a more precise and detailed look at the scale of alienation before this period has yet to be undertaken.

Bahjat and al-Tamimi's well-known travelogue throughout Beirut province (including portions of Palestine) provides a wealth of data and perspective on the social life of the towns and villages it surveys and on the transformation of the social order, but their tour was conducted during World War I, when the area suffered immense strains from escalating Ottoman demands on men, money and all manner of material resources, as well as weak harvests and epidemics of plague diseases (typhoid and malaria chief among them). They paint many striking portraits of the class order in Palestinian society and of the decay of bonds between the wealthy and the impoverished, whom they

⁸¹ Owen cites an author for the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1891 to this effect: *The Middle East*, p. 270. Certainly the aforementioned strictures against collateral forfeiture indicate that the process was underway, to some extent, in the 1870s.

⁸² Schölch, "European Penetration," p. 23-24. Schölch's source – a single volume – dates to 1907.

describe as the majority. In Tulkarm, for instance, a modest town on the edge of the coastal plain region, the majority of its 2000-3000 inhabitants, many of whom were peasants or former peasants, were destitute wage-laborers said to own little but the clothes on their backs. A middle class existed above them, living comfortably with assets worth £T 1000-5000 and often its members were more educated than the wealthy, who imitated the ways of the Nabulsi elite, enjoyed annual incomes equal to the net worth of the middle strata, and had accumulated £T 20-40,000 in assets.⁸³ The two travelers recorded that they saw much the same elsewhere, describing the districts they visited, save for Haifa, as “tantamount to a fount of poverty,” mixed in, as the Tulkarm description makes clear, with islands of wealthy and middle class elements.⁸⁴ Some areas they visited did not fit this schema, such as the village of al-Jadideh in the Galilee, a mostly Christian village from which a good deal of the population had emigrated to North America, Brazil, Mexico, and elsewhere. Perhaps in consequence, its lower classes, consisting of tradespeople and petty shop owners, constituted approximately 30 percent of the population, with the rest of the Christians enjoying higher standards of living.⁸⁵ For the most part, however, the depiction of wretched masses to which they repeatedly call attention prevailed in many locations, although the wartime circumstances and the nature of their inquiry obscure the reconstruction of a longer view of land alienation and proletarianization.

⁸³ Muhammad Rafiq al-Tamimi and Muhammad Bahjat, *Wilayat Bayrut* (Beirut: Matba‘at Iqbal, 1917), v. 1 (*al-qism al-janubi*), p. 186-88. Owen suggests that the Ottoman lira (£T) held a value of approximately £ .9 sterling in the nineteenth century (Owen, *The Middle East*, p. xiii), though he does not seem to account for fluctuations.

⁸⁴ The quote and the comparison between Haifa and elsewhere appear on al-Tamimi and Bahjat, *Wilayat Bayrut*, v. 1, p. 228.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 328, 330-32. The village was by their estimate over 90 percent Christian.

Abraham Granott, longtime managing director of the JNF during the Mandate period and a student of the land regime in Palestine from the late Ottoman era forward, compiled statistics showing that by the early twentieth century some 144 families owned approximately 3,130,000 dunams, and if the circle was widened to the next 100 landed families, that their total ownership equalled that of the rest of the population.⁸⁶ However, some 2,000,000 dunams of the first 144 families' possessions were in the south, concentrated around Gaza and Beersheba. Additionally this 3.13 million figure also subsumed imperial lands held in the name of the Sultan (as *mudawwara* or *jiftlik*, which were governed similarly to *miri*). The concentration of ownership in the south meant, as Owen rightly points out, that if the figures were accurate it was “unlikely that much of the hill country had, as yet, been incorporated into large estates.”⁸⁷ And in fact this surmise could be extended to much of the territory in Palestine north of Jaffa and Beersheba. Adding further cause to the view that mass dispossession took time to gather steam, Granott logically enough underscored the role of debt as a means of divesting peasants of land, but two analysts from the Mandate period suggested that this avenue really accelerated under the British, though they acknowledge that it began in the late Ottoman era.⁸⁸ What can tentatively be concluded from the preceding is that the Land Law helped to propel class stratification to new heights and dimensions in Palestine, though the dispossession of the peasantry, which was advanced in some zones by the

⁸⁶ Owen, *The Middle East*, p. 268; Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 30.

⁸⁷ Owen, *The Middle East*, p. 268.

⁸⁸ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 28; George Hakim and M.Y. el-Hussayni, “Monetary and Banking System” in Said B. Himadeh, ed., *Economic Organization of Palestine* (Beirut: American Press [A.U.B.], 1938), p. 497. Granott also emphasized that peasants were lax about registering for titles to their lands, taking comfort in the continuation of their usufructory rights without understanding the full nature of the 1858 shift.

World War I era, appears to have accumulated over many decades, proceeding more rapidly in some areas and less so in others.

The notables who came to possess great quantities of land, on the other hand, moved towards assuming the role and status of an aristocracy. Many chose to become absentee landlords, moving to urban centers and especially to the coastal cities, while leaving the affairs of their estates in the hands of trusted underlings.⁸⁹ As Manna‘ points out, the new aristocracy progressively separated itself from the producing classes on which its strategies for accumulation depended, holding itself aloof from the masses of society.⁹⁰ This sharpening sense of class distinction, embodied in the physical withdrawal of the elite from the countryside and its embrace of the urban sphere (which had often been viewed with suspicion by rural denizens), did not always translate into wide regard. Unlike the older elite, whose preeminence was generated variously through status hierarchy affiliation, government employment, and playing a mediatory role with the Ottoman center, as described by Hourani, newer elites did not have the same ties to the public. Since they didn’t see as much necessity in actively cultivating links to the productive classes and the public, they didn’t always enjoy the same social regard as the old elites had, despite their great fortunes.⁹¹

By the turn of the twentieth century at least three distinct general models of land exploitation emerged within the local political economy beside the shrinking regime of smallholders. The large estates that formed in the plains and the hills were distinguished

⁸⁹ Owen, *The Middle East*, p. 268-69; Manna‘, *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 167, 223. See also Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*.

⁹⁰ Manna‘, *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 223.

⁹¹ Yazbak makes this important point in looking at the changing elite of Haifa, but it stands to reason that this was a general development throughout the region: “Nablus versus Haifa,” p. 276.

form one another by the forms of labor common to the respective zones and, correspondingly, in the quality of relations between notables and peasants. In the central highlands, save for the Jerusalem area, “a resident landlord class with strong patrimonial relations to its peasant base” existed. The growth of sharecropping in these regions, as much as it indicated the diminished status of peasant autonomy, represented a relative conservation of the ideal of reciprocal bonds between lords and *fellahin*. Lords still acted to shield peasants from taxation and afforded them necessary lines of credit, while peasants rendered their due loyalties and services to lords, which by then typically included labor on the notables’ lands as well.⁹²

The familiar fabric of *‘ayn-fellah* relations which was observed in much of the hill country was not in evidence in the estates in the lowlands and coastal regions. Two divergent models of accumulation appeared in these latter areas, one based in the erection of capitalist plantations (*bayyarat*; sing: *bayyara*) and the other, based in speculation in land, was characterized by “the emergence of a pure *rentier* class of absentee landlords.” The *bayyarat*, which arose in Gaza, Jaffa, Lydda, Jericho and other areas, relied on a regime of wage-labor. On these estates workers provided only their labor, while all factors of production and capital investment came from the notable owner. As Salim Tamari observes, the *bayyarat* were “the opposite of a smallholder’s regime,” and in sharp contrast to the hill country, were marked by the “relative absence” of notions of patronage. The reliance on wage-labor and the absence of personalized bonds mediating relations between laborers and lords drew migrant workers from Syria

⁹² Tamari, “From the Fruits,” p. 85.

and Egypt, especially in the coastal areas, as well as Arabs from Palestine. The other mode of accumulation that appeared in the lowlands exemplified the arrival of land as a commodity. The notables holding lands in these areas, when not involved in plantation agriculture, tended to engage in speculation and rentierism, both of which paid handsomely. Speculation was fed by the continually rising land values while rentierism, though not judged as profitable as commerce, moneylending, or soap making, still produced a significant return. As with the *bayyarat*, personal relations or ties did not much enter into the calculus of lords' management of their holdings and any peasants resident on them. Consequently a kind of hollowed-out form of social relations between owners and tenants existed on such estates, with the former operating as *rentiers* collecting land rents and disposing of the estates at their pleasing.⁹³

World economic integration and peripheral capitalism

The wider context for the divergence in models of land and labor organization on large estates pertained to the growing integration of Greater Syria into the world economy. As Alexander Schölch has explored at length, the quarter century following the Land Law witnessed the growth of substantial agricultural exports from Palestine to Egypt, Lebanon, and Europe. The ports of Jaffa, Haifa, and Acre conducted brisk business in shipping wheat, barley, *dura* (sorghum), sesame, olive oil, soap, cotton,

⁹³ Ibid., p. 85, 87; Gilbar, "Economic and Social Consequences," p. 289; Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 193 (the latter two sources on rentierism and speculation). Gilbar cites a single source giving a very impressive rate of return of 15-20 percent on land ownership (i.e. rentierism). This figure seems potentially exaggerated, given that it is higher than the estimates for citrus plantations (see below), which were judged by some observers to have been the most profitable form of enterprise. In truth, however, as the interest rates for moneylending discussed below illustrate, usury at least nominally (if not in terms of actual cash flow) continued to produce the highest rate of annual profit.

oranges, and other fruits and vegetables abroad. Summarizing the broad growth of Palestine's increasingly export-oriented economy prior to 1882, Schölch observes that "Palestine experienced a remarkable economic upswing in the two and a half decades following the Crimean War."⁹⁴ By some measures the expansion of trade was breathtaking. According to incomplete figures and estimates collected by the British consulate the value of exports from Jaffa might have grown as much as 50-fold between 1825 and 1875 before mushrooming a further 160 percent by the eve of World War I.⁹⁵ By another evaluation, Jaffan exports rose from £ 250,000 per annum in the late 1880s to £ 750,000 in 1913-14.⁹⁶ The thickening of trade links to Europe decisively consolidated the primacy of the cities within the political economy and further intensified their hold over the hinterlands.⁹⁷ Moreover, market integration gave further stimulus to two processes critical to the changing development of the social order in Palestine: the development of large estates and the expanding grip of merchant capital, including that of a "commercial bourgeoisie," over agricultural production.⁹⁸

Though Schölch contends that Palestine's boom and its increasing production for export markets did not fuel economic restructuring or significantly alter existing methods of production in manufacturing and agriculture, he understates the importance

⁹⁴ Schölch, "European Penetration," p. 12-13, 55; quote from 55. Cotton, the first commodity to begin to advance the process of Palestine's wider market integration into European and global circuits, fell off in the 1860s and became a marginal crop. It was replaced in certain areas, such as the Jaffa region, by investments in orange plantations (Schölch, "European Penetration," p. 14-15). On the cotton trade, see Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 95-130.

⁹⁵ Gerber, "Modernization," p. 258.

⁹⁶ Owen, *The Middle East*, p. 265.

⁹⁷ Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 167, 171.

⁹⁸ Schölch, "European Penetration," p. 56.

of market integration's effects.⁹⁹ This is perhaps most pertinent and visible in areas of citrus production. Between 1850 and 1880 citrus plantations grew to encompass one-third of the lands in the Jaffa region, while the yield of the fruit grew over almost the same time period by over 75 percent.¹⁰⁰ By 1881 it was regarded as the most lucrative commodity in which to be invested, with net returns of approximately 10 percent per annum, and by 1904 citrus replaced wheat as Palestine's chief export.¹⁰¹ The orange harvest of 1879 in Jaffa was estimated to require 5000 workers to complete picking and packing, a number equal to half the town's population.¹⁰² Though such work was seasonal, the sheer quantum of labor drawn to the plantations, which typically operated on the basis of wage-labor, represented a step in the direction of partial proletarianization among peasants (and other migrant laborers) and towards the institutionalization of agrarian wage work. On the other end of the valorization chain, the profits derived from citrus production and exports appear to have reinforced the interest of wealthy merchants and other notables in the *bayyara* production model, who not only fueled the sector's growth, but reinvested part of the proceeds back into the business in the form of improvements in the production process.¹⁰³ The plantations thus entailed considerable flows of wage-labor (at least some of which was provided by the dispossessed), the dedication of the majority of the produce to exports (i.e. generalized

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 55-56.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 17; Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 195.

¹⁰¹ Schölch, "European Penetration," p. 17-18; Gerber, "Modernization," p. 260; Manna', *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 221.

¹⁰² Schölch, "European Penetration," p. 38, 57.

¹⁰³ Owen, *The Middle East*, p. 179; Gerber, "Modernization," p. 260.

commodity production),¹⁰⁴ the extraction of surplus value through economic means, the steady conversion of lands to private citriculture estates and the expanded reproduction of capital – all of which were directly related to world market integration. Taken together these features made the *bayyarat*, contrary to Schölch's conservative reading, microcosms of capitalist development and rendered citrus production a vital foothold for its expansion into other segments of the economy.¹⁰⁵ It is worth considering and explicating more precisely what kind of capitalism developed at this time in Palestine.

Since the advent of Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory and the interrelated dependency theory school of analysis, capitalism outside of Western Europe has often been seen as marked by morphological distinctions, or specific deficiencies and limitations that prevented it from developing along the lines of the European progenitors. Paul Baran, for instance, argued that industrial development was precluded in the colonized regions of the globe (described as the Third World) through the destruction or diminution of local capital stock and the elimination of indigenous industry or proto-industry through exposure to ruinous competition with the industrial centers of Western Europe. At the same time, by deepening commodity production for market (generalized commodity production) and tying local actors to wider circuits of

¹⁰⁴ An estimated one-sixth of the crop was consumed locally; the rest was exported (Schölch, "European Penetration," p. 17).

¹⁰⁵ Shafir has argued that olive production along with citrus constituted the first two branches of capitalist development within Palestinian agriculture (*Land, Labor and the Origins*, p. 29). The present analysis has been greatly informed by Hamza Alavi's elaboration of the capitalist mode of production, which he deduces to be defined by five characteristics, each distinguished (in the European context) from its feudal predecessor: 1) so-called free labor (without feudal duties but dispossessed); 2) surplus extraction produced through economic means; 3) the formal separation of economic (class) from political (state) power; 4) generalized commodity production; and 5) the extended reproduction of capital. See Hamza Alavi, "The Structure of Peripheral Capitalism" in Hamza Alavi and Teodor Shanin, eds., *Introduction to the Sociology of "Developing Societies"* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982), p. 179.

exchange and consumption, world economic integration diminished local self-sufficiency and strengthened economic as opposed to extra-economic forms of surplus extraction. These dynamics in turn fed peasant dispossession, proletarianization and the concentration of land in fewer hands while making the colonies into producers of primary agricultural products.¹⁰⁶ Hamza Alavi, whose scholarship develops rigorous models distinguishing capitalist, feudal, and what he calls colonial modes of production, largely agrees with Baran. Alavi argues that under the conditions of colonialism two of capitalism's key features, generalized commodity production and the expanded reproduction of capital, encountered critical blockages. Echoing Baran, he posits that "peripheral capitalism... brought about a disarticulated form of generalized commodity production, as contrasted with the *integrated* form in metropolitan capitalism," meaning that capital goods and industry were organically part of capital formation in the metropolitan core countries while this was preempted in the colonial lands. With respect to capital's expanded reproduction, the articulation and subordination of the colonial economy to the imperial center and the siphoning of surplus capital from the colonies to the former combined again to assure that the "productive powers" of the metropole steadily developed while leaving those of the colony to languish without capital improvements in a state of underdevelopment.¹⁰⁷

As James Reilly has suggested, the optic of peripheral capitalism arose from debate over the relative disinterest or neglect by world systems theory and the

¹⁰⁶ This discussion on Paul Baran's *The Political Economy of Growth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1957) is drawn from James Reilly, "Origins of Peripheral Capitalism in the Damascus Area, 1830-1914," Ph.D. dissertation (Georgetown University, 1987), p. 20-21.

¹⁰⁷ Alavi, "The Structure," p. 180-81.

dependency school in the internal social and economic dynamics and structures within the colonial world. Studies of peripheral capitalism strive to examine and analyze both local and global scales and frameworks together, attending to local specificity and agency while maintaining the macroeconomic context of global capitalism's hierarchical and differential development.¹⁰⁸ Reilly's own inquiry into capitalist development in Damascus and its hinterlands between the Egyptian occupation and the First World War utilizes this approach and stresses, in part, the deindustrialization of Syria through the decomposition of its textile industries during its incorporation into the world economy. The spread of capitalist social relations within Palestine did not, however, follow an identical course and it must be observed that the Palestine case does not entirely conform with the template of peripheral capitalism developed by Alavi and others.

Curiously, the textile sector in Palestine, present in Safad, Nazareth, Nablus, Hebron, Majdal, Gaza, and the village of Bayt Jala, by some accounts survived world market integration in far better shape than its more developed northern neighbor. This may have had to do with its production of coarser fabrics and products than Damascus, aimed primarily for local consumption.¹⁰⁹ Palestinian handicraft industries and the artisan sector likewise proved "for various reasons... completely beyond the reach of European competition."¹¹⁰ The destruction of traditional enterprises like the mother-of-pearl mementos made at Bethlehem transpired later, under British rule.¹¹¹ And of course the soap industry, Palestine's leading (light) industrial business, prospered mightily

¹⁰⁸ Reilly, "Origins," p. 23.

¹⁰⁹ Owen, *The Middle East*, p. 266. Nazareth contained some 300 hundred looms in the early twentieth century and Majdal reputedly also boasted many.

¹¹⁰ Gerber, "Modernization," p. 253.

¹¹¹ See chapter 6.

during the Tanzimat era and afterwards, before the British Mandate, with outputs booming over 400 percent between 1860 and 1907.¹¹² Local industry, to the small extent and in the limited forms that it existed, was not uprooted as market relations deepened. On the other hand, as noted directly above, the citrus plantations encouraged some degree of expanded reproduction. Besides the looms of the spinning sector, some of the first industrial machinery in Palestine remarked on by observers consisted of water pumps and irrigation equipment employed in the orchards of Jaffa.¹¹³

So why might peripheral capitalism still be an apt description for Palestine before the fall of the Ottomans? To answer this question we can turn for comparison to Egypt. In a survey of Egyptian agriculture in nineteenth century Roger Owen concludes that “a distinct form of capitalism resulting from the integration of a precapitalist economy into the world capitalist system” arose by the twentieth century. It was a peculiar late-developing version of capitalist relations, externally-driven by the wider world system, which produced property markets in land, wage-labor markets, and expanding commodity production, yet which paradoxically lacked capitalists themselves, i.e. those who would productively invest in improving the means of production.¹¹⁴ In this description lies much of the key to understanding the nature of peripheral capitalist development in Palestine, though unlike Egypt, if Owen’s description is fair, it can’t be said to lack capitalists or expanded reproduction. In fact, as Schölch emphasizes world

¹¹² Gilbar, “Economic and Social Consequences,” p. 284. The now classic exposition of soap industry is Doumani’s masterful *Rediscovering Palestine*, especially chapter 5: p. 182-232. Its afterlife, much akin to the story with handicrafts, is briefly touched on in chapter 6 of this dissertation.

¹¹³ Gerber, “Modernization,” p. 255.

¹¹⁴ Owen, “The Development of Agricultural Production in Nineteenth-Century Egypt: Capitalism of What Type?” in A.L. Udovitch, ed., *The Islamic Middle East, 700-1900* (Darwin Press, 1981), p. 537. Owen follows Abdel-Malek’s description of Egypt as given to “capitalisme retardataire du type coloniale.”

economic integration gave rise to a commercial bourgeoisie in Palestine, one that like the other elements of Owen's description, grew in tandem with external markets and the forces shaping global capitalism. Although we may regard it as a bourgeoisie it retained a very agrarian cast, deriving its income mostly from international commerce (in agricultural commodities), land rents and the land market, tax-farming, and moneylending, and only engaged limitedly, as a whole, in industrial enterprise. The limited industry of Palestine was not in serious competition with Europe, and its elite evinced only tentative interest in broadening its economic base past rent-seeking and mercantilism. Hence not unwarrantedly Shafir regards the Arab bourgeoisie as compradors.¹¹⁵

The crystallization of capitalism in Palestine in the late Ottoman era was, like Egypt and elsewhere in the region, the product of a wider constellation of forces, intimately related to the world market and the dominant capitalist powers of Western Europe. Beyond the preconditions established during the Tanzimat (such as the commodification of land), its development was keyed to, and crucially, subordinate to, those external forces. This is not to say that local actors weren't central to its emergence. The profits that could be made from the export trade encouraged local entrepreneurialism, and the new mercantile elites who were already transforming agriculture and social relations within Palestine found it further in their interest to pursue the deepening of market relations. Yet as Schölch argues, the development of land stratification and landed estates and the dominance of the commercial elite over agrarian

¹¹⁵ Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins*, p. 26.

production were the “preconditions for a peripheralisation of the economy.” The new elite and its accumulation strategy pushed Palestine “along the path towards that predominantly outward orientation of ‘undeveloped’ economies which results in foreign control and in the increased emphasis on the import of luxury goods” in place of broader economic development.¹¹⁶ Like other peripheralized territories, Palestine remained overwhelmingly a producer of primary agricultural products with its earnings subject to the rise and fall of increasingly competitive global commodity flows, while the development of a more diversified economy did not much interest its elite until the Mandate era.

As suggested above, world economic integration and the emergence of capitalist social relations accelerated the processes of social transformation and restructuring that were already underway in Palestine. Their dynamic effects were apparent in the dramatic growth of the population and of urban centers. From the early 1850s to the early 1880s the population increased from some 350,000 to 470,000 persons, a rate and scale of increase unmatched since the reign of Sulayman the Lawgiver.¹¹⁷ The urban population grew at approximately the same rate during the same time period, after which the twelve biggest cities and towns nearly doubled in size between 1880 and 1922, well above the healthy overall rate of growth throughout the country.¹¹⁸ The deepening power of the urban centers could be seen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

¹¹⁶ Schölch, “Economic Penetration,” p. 56.

¹¹⁷ Manna‘, *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 208. Only under Zahir al-‘Umar had any part of Palestine attained comparable demographic expansion, and then only in the Galilee, the area of his authority.

¹¹⁸ Schölch, “Economic Penetration,” p. 57; Owen, *The Middle East*, p. 264; Manna‘, *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 221. The only exception to this was Acre, which had been displaced by Haifa. For details, town by town, on the pre-1882 period see Schölch, “Economic Penetration,” p. 27-54 and idem, *Palestine in Transformation*, p. 118-68.

centuries in their swelling gravitational pull on labor, as they attracted larger flows of peasants from the villages and urbanization deepened.¹¹⁹ The coastal ports of Jaffa and Haifa grew the most rapidly, considerably outpacing the other urban centers, and testifying to the crowning role of external commerce, the former became the economic and cultural center of Palestine before the British conquest.¹²⁰ The conspicuous prosperity and clout of the notable classes who benefited from the expansion of market relations and the export trade was not restricted to the orange regions. Though the lords of the hill country relied on regimes of sharecropping and did not exclusively adopt the wage-form, their access to the world market and command over the local relations of production served them well, and there is little reason to believe that any major distinction in income or relative stature developed between the economic elites of the interior and those of the coast.¹²¹

Contemporaneous witnesses remarked that in spite of the heavy extraction of local potentates, tax-farmers, and the state, the peasantry gained financially from world market integration, either investing their earnings in women's adornments, jewelry or arms, or stowing their cash by burying it.¹²² Purchases of consumer goods as well as imports (which were likely skewed towards the wealthy) indicate that living standards

¹¹⁹ Reilly, "The Peasantry of Late Ottoman Palestine," p. 89.

¹²⁰ Schölch, "Economic Penetration," p. 57; Tamari, "Factionalism," p. 198.

¹²¹ Tamari ("Factionalism," p. 198) and Manna' (*Tarikh Filastin*, p. 206) both emphasize the rise of the coastal-based merchants. Yet in the comparing the upper crust of Nablus with that of Haifa during World War I, Bahjat and al-Tamimi found the soap merchants of the former to be the wealthiest segment of all, with net assets estimated at £T 100-150,000 versus £T 60-100,000 for the richest Christian families at the top of Haifa's social scale (*Wilayat Bayrut*, p. 120, 249-50).

¹²² Schölch, "European Penetration," p. 18-19. Schölch writes that the Ottoman Treasury was the greatest claimant on the dividends of external trade which "devised new ways of siphoning off the agricultural surplus by increases in taxes, special imposts, and monetary and other financial manipulations" (p. 18).

were, at least in some areas, elevated over previous levels.¹²³ The rural population also benefited from the improvement of security throughout the country and the expansion of areas for cultivation and settlement.¹²⁴ Not surprisingly given the shift in the economic center of gravity to the cities, it appears that urban households fared better over the long-term. Bahjat and al-Tamimi found horrible poverty in many rural areas, brought on by debt as well as the terrible circumstances of the Great War and poor harvests. In Nablus, on the other hand, even the most modest homes were not without copperware while Haifa was described as having the look of “paradise” compared to Nablus, Tulkarm, and the far lowlier Jenin.¹²⁵

Nevertheless, on balance increasing integration into the world market was accompanied by what Mike Davis has aptly described in other contexts as “downward mobility” for much of the peasantry.¹²⁶ Spikes in incomes proved short-lived for the most part, as the process of class differentiation continued. A portion of earners became or maintained a middle class status as owner-cultivators of some means. But for an increasing segment of the agricultural population, the gains derived from market expansion appear to eventually have left their hands, appropriated by the elites through the familiar channels of lending, debt, and advance purchase contracts.

¹²³ Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins*, p. 28.

¹²⁴ Manna, *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 209.

¹²⁵ *Wilayat Bayrut*, p. 111, 227. For comparison with rural areas, see their descriptions of the olive village of Salfit (p. 86-99) and the Jamma‘in *nahiya* (p. 102-06), for instance. Jenin struck the authors as ugly and unpleasant as far as the towns and its development was described as “behind” that of its village neighbors. Its people were uniformly poor other than the elite at the top (p. 217-225, especially 220, 223-25).

¹²⁶ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (New York: Verso, 2001), p. 289, and see chapter 9: p. 279-310.

By the turn of the twentieth century usury capital had fractured the landscape of Palestine, alienating and dividing peasants from the aristocracy while providing merchants opportunities to accumulate great wealth and power. Bahjat and al-Tamimi's chronicle catalogues the dissension wracking the social order during World War I. Their findings were an indictment of the regime of unrestrained moneylending which, in the words of a peasant from Dayr Istiya near Nablus, "set brother against brother."¹²⁷ Such sentiments were commonplace in areas of the highlands, where the familial idiom of (broken) fraternity was employed to convey the understanding that the bonds of social solidarity were being sundered and replaced.¹²⁸ In the hinterlands of Jabal Nablus the city had become an image of corruption, its avarice blamed for poisoning relations in the district. The peasants declared themselves "prisoners" of the urban elites who exploited them and benefited from their toils. The Nabulsi notability, for its part, continued to vocalize notions of *noblesse oblige* and even to claim to be doing the indebted and dispossessed peasants a good turn.¹²⁹ This it did while charging annual interest rates of some 60-70 percent.¹³⁰ For its power and riches, the elite of Nablus became the source of emulation for proximate urban zones, such as Tulkarm.¹³¹

While the relations between peasant producers and elites in the environs of Nablus appear to have been particularly charged, it wasn't the only area subject to the

¹²⁷ Al-Tamimi and Bahjat, *Wilayat Bayrut*, p. 103. One peasant from the village expressed his scorn in visceral terms, telling al-Tamimi and Bahjat to "wash after you shake hands with a Nabulsi."

¹²⁸ E.g. in Salfit, *ibid.*, p. 93.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105. These were penalty rates. Initial rates ran around 15 percent for a six month term, delinquency in the repayment of which ratcheted up the rate to the higher figure and likely higher, since 60-70 percent was given as an average annual rate (p. 104-05).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 185-87.

manipulation of *salam* contracts. The practice existed in other regions of modern-day Syria, and the well-known Syrian intellectual Muhammad Kurd ‘Ali opined several years after al-Tamimi and Bahjat’s tour that *salam* contracts had been the undoing of the local peasantry in the nineteenth century.¹³² Elsewhere, such as Haifa, other lending instrumentalities were used to the same effect, creating debt peonage and dispossession while benefiting the international trading class that acted as the agriculturalists’ creditors. Mahmoud Yazbak, who has studied the Islamic court records of Haifa, has noted that they contain hundreds of contracts for loans against landed collateral.¹³³ There is little doubt that similar practices unfolded in other corners of Palestine over the final decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. It is little wonder then that, taking stock of the situation, al-Tamimi and Bahjat commented, not without a note of modernist disdain, as Doumani suggests, that “loans and lending are the path to enslavement in our constitutionalist country.”¹³⁴

Moneylending was not a new feature of the economic life of Palestine, but after the privatization of land began to be institutionalized with the 1858 Land Law, it held newly potent ramifications. The combined effect of the commodification of land and world market integration was to vastly strengthen the upper classes, whose burgeoning fortunes were recirculated in part as usury capital, the valorization of which grew in proportion with the increasingly onerous terms exacted from rural borrowers. This self-

¹³² Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 151.

¹³³ Yazbak, “Nablus versus Haifa,” ft. 29, p. 275. These contracts were of the *bay‘ bi-l-wafa* variety. For an explication of these terms, see Eugene Rogan, “Moneylending and Capital Flows from Nablus, Damascus and Jerusalem to Qada al-Salt in the Last Decades of Ottoman Rule” in *The Syrian Land in the 18th and 19th Century*, p. 243.

¹³⁴ Al-Tamimi and Bahjat, *Wilayat Bayrut*, p. 105; Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 171.

reinforcing circle of mercantile prosperity-usury-peasant destitution did much to reshape social relations in Arab society. The older ethos of clientage, formed by peasant struggles for equity, dignity, and subsistence, began to unravel. Where marketing and surplus-extraction networks had been built on social capital and reciprocal if unequal bonds between producers and elites, money capital increasingly intruded, muting concerns for the producers' livelihoods and injecting new antagonism into sharpening class relations. As the cultural and socioeconomic solidarities that had held together the fabric of local Arab society came unwound, elements of Palestinian society experienced a deep *anomie* and what Ylana Miller calls "a search for social values that would secure the survival of an Arab communal structure." The Arabs were "suspended between cultural unity and social division."¹³⁵ The nascent search for a kind of social code that would ensure the collective integrity of Arab society was spurred from another direction by Zionism and the contests over land and ownership that accompanied its entry to Palestine. The social meaning of land, which had begun to qualitatively change after the 1858 Land Law, was subject to new pressures and stimulus that in turn helped steer the search for values towards nationalism and the emergence of nationalist identity.

Articulating a nationalist ethics of land

It has long been a conceit of nationalist histories that the forging of nationalist precepts and imaginaries is often the work of the more articulate classes of a population.

¹³⁵ *Government and Society*, p. 17. Miller dates this phenomenon to the Mandate period, but indicates elsewhere (p. 168) that the *ancien régime* was fraying prior to this. I have thus reinterpreted her observation somewhat, extending it further backwards in time.

Poets, soldiers, politicians, literary figures, and others all might put their stamp on the new national entity's identity and aid in the discovery, or more commonly "rediscovery" of its "roots." Some such figures may not be from the most educated ranks, but the task of calling forth the nation – providing its intellectual and discursive architecture, elaborating its tropes and its storied history, setting forth its emotive and affective armature – is generally a restricted enterprise. In the peasant-based societies of Egypt and the Levant, this charge was taken up largely by groups of educated middle class intellectuals.¹³⁶ Their work, as recent studies by Michael Gasper on Egypt and Munir Fakher Eldin on Palestine have shown, entailed the parallel project of reforming the local peasantries, raising them from their benighted condition of ignorance, destitution, and "backwardness" while making them into national subjects who collectively exhibited the "cultural traits of modern nationhood."¹³⁷

In Palestine some of this intelligentsia called itself the "men of the *Nahda*," referring to the Arabic literary and cultural revival of the late 19th century in areas of Greater Syria, or the "men of the pen and morality."¹³⁸ I will use the more common term, *effendiyya*. Educated in liberal institutions, the *effendiyya* reflected the intellectual

¹³⁶ The intelligentsias who arrogated to themselves the position of imagining and enunciating the nation and its verities referred to themselves and were known by a number of telling designations: in *bilad al-Sham* they were called the *mutanawwirun* (the enlightened), *mustanirun* (enlightened or educated), or simply *mufakkirun* (intellectuals; thinkers); in Egypt they were the *afandiyya* (loosely, educated gentlemen, with strong connotations of middle or upper class background). See Gelvin, "The Ironic Legacy," p. 13-30, and on Egypt, most recently, Michael Gasper, *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2009). For Palestine, see below. These groups set forth in their respective regions to interpellate and forge the nation as a political community, discursively and socially, but the primary objects of their labor and substance of their putative nationalities, the peasantries, were not always as passive or receptive as they conceived, or as historians later described them to be.

¹³⁷ Fakher Eldin, "Communities of Owners"; Gasper, *The Power of Representation*. Quote from Fakher Eldin, p. 34.

¹³⁸ Fakher Eldin, "Communities of Owners."

spirit of the era, becoming “enthusiasts for the idea of the nation.” They styled themselves as flag-bearers of the national cause and its men of letters. Occasionally they were also dynamic activists and genuinely popular leaders. As beneficiaries of the Tanzimat and world market integration, they viewed themselves as above the *fellahin*, who they took to be “raw material” for the national project. According to this conception, the *fellahin* were bearers of Arab culture and the fundamentals of corporate identity, but they were primitive, given to unruly sentiments, and in need of instruction and direction by the more modern and “patriotic” elements of society – a role that would naturally be fulfilled by the *effendiyya*. As Fakher Eldin succinctly explains, they imagined that the peasantry “had to be taught how to remold their ‘essence’ into the ideal social forms of the modern nation.” The project of nation-building and social reform thus reconceived preexisting forms of rural community and identity to match key aspects of the European liberal ideal for a polity: “popular senses of solidarity and practices of mutual support were de-contextualized and re-imagined into new forms of sociability and collective belonging based on individual membership in (civil) society, of which private property in land is an essential expression and substance.”¹³⁹

Nahda ideology deeply marked Palestinian nationalist discourse throughout the Mandate era and helped fortify the economically liberal approach to land to which the late Ottoman period had given rise. As an *arriviste* class, the *effendiyya* were not only patronizing towards the peasantry, but actively disinterested in arresting the acceleration of social stratification and the concentration in land ownership, let alone in reversing

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 34-35; 111. On *Nahdawi* figures as activists, see the discussion of Jubran Kazma, p. 82-115.

such trends. In effect, the views of this assertive middle class intelligentsia shaped and underwrote the conservative nationalism and ethos that the notables came to adopt, furnishing it, at least in the early years of the Mandate, with a modern political vocabulary and an articulate intellectual class.

Although the *effendiyya* were early explicators of nationalism, and, as such, are well positioned to be seen as its progenitors and its “founding fathers,” Rashid Khalidi has convincingly demonstrated that early resistance by peasants to Zionist colonization had significant impacts on the changing self-identity and self-conception of the Arabs in Palestine. It was the repeated struggles of the lower rural strata that brought intellectuals and elites to recognize that Zionism posed a threat to the corporate existence of the Arabs, or less grandiosely, to understand that it represented a fervent challenge to their presumption that Palestine, as the land they had inhabited for generations, was part of their patrimony.¹⁴⁰ Almost from the outset, Zionist land purchases became a cause of contention among the peasantry. In consequence, the value of land, already transmogrified by the Tanzimat, underwent substantive transformations during the early Mandate and the period immediately preceding it, accruing powerful new national connotations. Events at Petah Tiqva, the first Zionist colony, founded near Jaffa, are illustrative of subsequent dynamics.

¹⁴⁰ Rashid Khalidi, “Palestinian Peasant Resistance to Zionism Before World War I” in Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens, eds. *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (New York: Verso, 1988), p. 207-33. This process transpired and gathered strength over several decades. As Manna’ notes, the small size of the settler movement conduced to the initial opinion that it posed no serious threat to the indigenous society (*Tarikh Filastin*, p. 231). Although this view was quickly challenged,

The land upon which Petah Tiqva was established was obtained after peasants forfeited it as collateral on their debts. The land was sold to Zionist colonists and several years later, in 1886, peasant resistance occasioned Ottoman military intervention and led to the death of one of the colonists. Part of the dispute owed to the fact that the seller had reputedly disposed of more land than was in his possession, but the core of the events appeared to be peasant discontent at their dispossession, and probably no less so considering that it derived from debt-induced forfeiture. When they were offered leases and work on some of the alienated lands the issue was mitigated, but similar controversies, some accompanied by open hostilities, plagued other early colonies in the 1880s and 1890s, including Rehovot, Gedera, Nes Tziona, and Hadera.¹⁴¹

As Schölch points out, contention over land sometimes had as much to do with Arab perceptions and fears of serving European masters as it did with dispossession and eviction. At the village of Abu Shusha, in the Ramle area, Melville Bergheim, a German banker and investor, was able in 1872 to purchase much of the community's lands by paying its tax arrears. After the transfer, years of discord with both Arab notables and peasants ensued, until a member of the Bergheim family was murdered in 1884. Noting similar dissension pertaining to the German Templar colonies and to Yazur, an Arab village upon whose lands a Jewish agricultural school, Miqve Yisrael, was erected, Schölch concludes that foreign colonization was *ab initio* fertile ground for conflict.¹⁴²

Purchases in the Tiberias subdistrict at the turn of the century by the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), a Zionist land company, set the stage for further

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 215.

¹⁴² "European Penetration," p. 25-26.

conflicts. The plot acquired was almost 70,000 dunams in size, some 60,000 of which was obtained through the Sursuq family. Attempts to take possession of the parcels brought resistance from several area villages that would be dispossessed, including al-Shajara, Misha, and Milhamiyya. The JCA official who had contracted the purchases was shot at by local peasants, and, as at Petah Tiqva, Ottoman troops were sent in to quell the villagers' unrest, carting many off to prison. Some years later in 1909, al-Shajara was again the scene of local Arab resistance. The 1909 episode, which involved boundary disputes, was more severe than the earlier 1901-02 trouble, and resulted in attacks on the nearby colony of Sejera that left three dead.¹⁴³

The reception of such incidents was greatly amplified and transformed following the 1908 revolution of the Young Turks (the CUP), which lifted press censorship and reinstated the 1876 Constitution that protected freedom of speech. Soon after the establishment of the first regular Arabic newspapers (i.e. *al-Karmil* in 1908 and *Filastin* in 1911) the nascent Palestinian press began to warn of the dangers of land sales to organs of the Zionist movement, and to suggest that such sales constituted treason.¹⁴⁴ The strident warnings against land sales and Zionism, which became a regular feature of the Arabic press, followed on the heels of another important land conflict at 'Afula.

In 1910 Elias Sursuq disposed of a quantity of land in the Marj Ibn 'Amir to the JNF. The lands sold included those of the village of 'Afula, amounting to some 10,000 dunams. The villagers there promptly resisted their eviction at the hands of the new

¹⁴³ Khalidi, "Palestinian Peasant Resistance," p. 217-19. Now known as Ilaniya, the original name for the settlement (which was sometimes also called Seger) was a corruption of the Arabic name.

¹⁴⁴ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 45. See also the discussions in Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 119-44, and Muslih, *The Origins*, p. 78-87.

owners, and were assisted in their efforts by the *qa'immaqam* (district governor) of Nazareth, Shukri al-‘Asali. Al-‘Asali used his station to block transfer of the title deed to the JNF while sending troops to defend the villagers from the Jewish paramilitary organization, *Hashomer* (the Watchman). Though al-‘Asali was overruled by his superiors, he wrote in the press of the lands’ historical importance to the Arabs, invoking their connection to Salah al-Din’s reconquest of Palestine, and declaring that their alienation to ‘foreigners’ was treason. After their dispossession peasants from ‘Afula continued to harass and attack the colony of Merhavia which arose on their former lands. Zionist settlers responded with force to the repeated attacks, and in 1911 killed an Arab, stoking further tensions. For his part, al-‘Asali continued to pursue the matter of Zionism and local dispossession and, after his election in early 1911 to the Ottoman parliament, raised the case of ‘Afula in the highest imperial circles as exemplary of the threat posed by Zionism.¹⁴⁵

After the 1908 revolution land disputes and attacks by Arab *fellahin* on Zionist colonies multiplied.¹⁴⁶ The Galilee, where 12 of the 15 colonies founded between 1901 and 1912 were built and where Arab peasants were overwhelmingly bereft of formal ownership of land, was the preeminent site for such contention, but Arab-Jewish clashes also occurred in Haifa, Jaffa, and Jerusalem after 1908. As Walter Lacqueur has written, for the Arabs, the aforementioned Zionist purchases in the Tiberias subdistrict gave rise to the “slogan” of the “danger of denationalization.”¹⁴⁷ The stiffening Arab resistance

¹⁴⁵ Khalidi, “Palestinian Peasant Resistance,” p. 220-22.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 218-19; Lacqueur, *A History of Zionism*, p. 221.

¹⁴⁷ Lacqueur, *A History of Zionism*, p. 220-21.

under the Young Turk regime “brought the urban elite to a realization of the full import of Zionism: not only was land being purchased; its Arab cultivators were being dispossessed and replaced by foreigners who had overt political objectives in Palestine.”¹⁴⁸ While it is an exaggeration to claim that this was a universally shared perspective – among any strata of Palestinians – it is clear that the struggles of the *fellahin* against Zionist encroachment did make the threat of future “denationalization” a prominent and growing concern among segments of the middle classes and the elite.

The contest between Arab senses of patrimony and Zionist aspirations to build a new society in Palestine, represented most sharply in peasant resistance to Zionist settlement and dispossession, began to infuse the territory of the region with new symbolic meanings and national connotations for the Arabs. As a correlate of the creeping discursive nationalization of land, its sale to Jews became “the archetypical act of treason.”¹⁴⁹ Press attacks on sales grew more vehement with time. *Filastin*, for instance, branded those who disposed of lands “human devils” and “enemies of the homeland” in 1921.¹⁵⁰ For the first several years following the British occupation, the issue of land sales was raised more so by journalists and Arabic newspapers than by Palestinian politicians, who were, until the ratification of the Mandate in 1922, overwhelmingly preoccupied with mounting a vigorous diplomatic campaign against it and against the Jewish National Home policy. Yet as early as 1921 the national

¹⁴⁸ Khalidi, “Palestinian Peasant Resistance,” p. 223.

¹⁴⁹ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 45. Cohen does not adequately elaborate on the context for this development, which was the colonial state’s wholesale restructuring of land relations and its mandated purpose of supporting close settlement of the land by Jewish colonists. His periodization regarding land becoming a dominant concern of Palestinian nationalism early on under the British is open to question, as some of his own citations suggest.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

movement demanded that the British halt land transfers from Arabs to Jews.¹⁵¹ This position was subsequently supported by resolutions at the fifth and sixth Palestinian Arab Congresses in August 1922 and June 1923.¹⁵²

By the middle of the 1920s, the flow of land transfers began to attract the attention of Muslim jurists and *‘ulama*. The first *fatwa* (legal ruling or finding) forbidding land sales to Jews was issued in 1925 by the mufti of Gaza, Hajj Muhammad Sa‘id al-Husayni, but had little effect.¹⁵³ During the period of rising tensions over the *Haram al-sharif* in 1928-29, the use of an Islamic idiom to combat land transfers was revisited and, owing to the circumstances, found a wider audience. At a conference convened in Jerusalem in November 1928 to organize support for Muslim claims with respect to the *Haram* compound, some 700 persons from Palestine and abroad attended, and under the presidency of al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, issued as part of their resolutions a call to their countrymen against land sales to Jews, and to support Arab land-buying companies. This was followed by a second convention almost a year later in October 1929, after the uprising and bloodshed in August, during which attendees swore an oath

¹⁵¹ Kayyali, *Palestine: a modern history*, p. 93.

¹⁵² Kasmieh, “Economic Aspects,” p. 448. Porath states incorrectly that the Fifth Congress did not pass a resolution against land sales (*The Palestinian National Movement*, p. 91), when in fact it did. The resolution called for “the boycott of Jews in the buying and selling of immovable property [*amwal ghayr al-manqula*]” and was to be carried out after the AE determined how practically to put the ban into effect (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu‘assasat*, p. 164). In general Porath downplays or ignores the national movement’s demands on land transfers before 1929, erroneously depicting the 1920s as a period of apathy on the question (*The Palestinian National Movement*, p. 91). Similarly, Stein also argues that the “land question” did not fully present itself until the 1930s, suggesting that sales by foreign absentee owners in the 1920s did not garner great attention and that land transfers were not a major political concern of the time (*The Land Question*, p. 218-19).

¹⁵³ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 46-47.

that enjoined them to “conserve lands and keep them Arab” and not to sell lands either directly or through intermediation.¹⁵⁴

As noted in chapters 1 through 3, the issues of land sales and peasant dispossession quickly attracted the attention of the youth trend in the late 1920s. Branches of the YMMA actively opposed land sales, first in the press and in literature (handbills) it produced, and then in an early version of later land campaigns, visiting areas of ongoing transfers and warning against the jeopardy they posed to individuals and to society.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, when the Youth Congress was established in January 1932 its charter declared Palestine to be sacred land and roundly condemned land transfers to Jews as treasonous, while the organization became a major organizing center for activist campaigns on the land issue.

As is evident from the sketch above, the meaning and significance of land underwent a fundamental transformation among Palestinians in the late Ottoman era which carried over to and intensified under the period of British rule. Where the marketization of land in the late Ottoman period put a premium on individual ownership, by the turn of the twentieth century new associations were beginning to reconfigure its social and symbolic resonance and to accentuate its collective importance. Peasant resistance to Zionism and eviction, Arabic press attacks on land transfers, the discourse of the *effendiyya*, Islamic condemnations, and the activism and discourse of the two

¹⁵⁴ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 220-21, 224-26 (quote from 226).

¹⁵⁵ Barakat, “Thawrat al-Buraq,” p. 79-80. By mid-1929 the organization’s popular campaigning had caught the attention of the colonial state and the District Commissioner for the South held meetings with Arab elites to ascertain the situation and keep tabs on Arab organizers. Barakat unfortunately does not elaborate on the character of this campaign, however, other than to note its mass dimension and that its popular nature signified a tactical departure on the issue.

premier youth societies all marked land as essential to communal identity and survival. Together they form a genealogy of land's nationalization within Palestinian discourse, and indicated that its importance transcended individual or class perquisites and ownership rights. The nationalization of land's social significance represented a substantive and wide-reaching shift in its cultural meaning. The development of an ethics or normative discourse that imbued land with national value recoded its primary discursive association within Arab Palestinian culture. Where land had been a source of personal or familial honor, it became the baseline of collective, *national* honor.¹⁵⁶ According to this powerful discourse, the country and its lands became sacred ground. The precise symbolic or religious devices employed in creating the normative discourse on land were of less significance than the general character of collective indigenous claims to the country, repeated with increasing frequency over time, and the growing understanding that the struggle over land and dispossession lay at the heart of the conflict with the Zionist movement.

¹⁵⁶ For a general discussion of conceptual links in peasant discourse between land and honor, see: Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 78-79. See also the treatment of Najib Nassar, editor of *al-Karmil*, for a middle class intellectual's changing understandings of the subjects, in: Fakher Eldin, "Communities of Owners," especially p. 124.

Chapter 5:

British rule and the decline of the rural social order

In 1930-31 the Palestine administration began to put together a new scheme for the reform of the Arab peasantry. Drawing on imperial experience in India, the plan called for the creation of rural cooperative societies that would both serve as a means of accessible and non-usurious credit and, more subtly, as instruments for reshaping peasant consciousness and instilling “character” in their members. The cooperatives initiative took three years to move from the drawing board to implementation, during which the colonial authorities squandered whatever possibility may have existed for trying to recuperate their position after the suppression of the 1929 uprising. Beginning in 1930 peasants weathered a string of poor harvests that only let up in 1934. Although in response the administration began to remit a substantial portion of rural taxes in 1930, in 1931 the High Commissioner described the prevailing mood in the countryside as one of “sullen distrust” towards the government.¹ As the Commissioner of Lands reported the same year, agricultural officers seeking to promote their department’s agenda commonly received a chilly reception from the rural population: “they are met with silence or caustic remarks on the futility of Government officers tendering advice to people whose financial situation, the Government must be aware, is such, that they have no means of raising money for their ordinary requirements, or for the payment of taxes.”²

¹ Quoted in Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 70. The issue of taxation is discussed in detail below.

² Memorandum, Commissioner of Lands to Acting Chief Secretary, 12.5.31, PRO – CO 733/207/6.

Given the extent of peasant impoverishment, the cooperative scheme was woefully under-capitalized, and only slowly began to bear some fruit in the years before peasants rose in mass insurrection during the Great Revolt. As a plan for the revivification of the Arab countryside, it can only be regarded as having made a belated and very modest contribution towards alleviating the penurious misery that had spread with increasing speed under the Mandate, while as a project for the colonial improvement of the *fellahin* as individual subjects, it was an abject failure.³ More to the point, its tardiness after successive years of terrible harvests illustrated the colonial state's distance from the concerns and welfare of the country's Arab peasant majority, in spite of the fact that High Commissioner Arthur Wauchope prided himself on supposedly being a "friend of the *fellah*."⁴

Small-scale programs like the cooperatives venture and piecemeal relief from the burden of heavy taxation characterized the British approach in the 1930s to what amounted to a major crisis in the countryside. The most visible sign that the rural social order was undergoing serious decomposition was to be found in the growth of landlessness and agricultural dispossession, which affected some 40 percent or more of the rural population.⁵ Although the question of landlessness in Palestine during the Mandate has spawned much debate, it has largely been circumscribed to arguments over whether Zionist colonization – on a mere fraction of the soil of Palestine – took place at the expense of Arabs who were dispossessed, and whether or not this contributed to the

³ The cooperatives plan is returned to below.

⁴ As will be discussed here, this appellation, which Wauchope never tired of reiterating, is deeply ironic in view of his actual record.

⁵ See below.

Palestinians' plight in 1947-48.⁶ An alternative and broader framework for analyzing the effects of economic change on Palestinian society during the period of British rule puts the development of capitalism and its preconditions front and center. Talal Asad's well-known essay critiquing Abner Cohen's work on border villages in Israel puts forward an early, Marxist-structuralist version of this argument.⁷ It contends, in brief, that the British Mandate served to implant and promote the growth of a capitalist mode of production, represented by Jewish colonization, within the existing indigenous, non-capitalist economy, and to siphon off surplus capital from the Palestinian Arab population and direct it to Zionist interests.⁸ Here I will suggest that both of these approaches to what can be called "the agrarian question" inadequately address the predicaments faced by the peasantry under British rule before 1936.

In this chapter I argue that the study of the landlessness problem during the Mandate requires attention to the cumulative effects of British rule over the peasantry and the countryside. Specifically, this chapter traces how British policies in a variety of fields, including land tenure, taxation, customs and trade, and credit provision, greatly

⁶ See, for instance: Kayyali, *Palestine*; Aryeh Avneri, *The Claim of Dispossession: Jewish Land-Settlement and the Arabs, 1878-1948* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984); Stein, *The Land Question*; Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*.

⁷ Talal Asad, "Anthropological texts and ideological problems: an analysis of Cohen on Arab villages in Israel," *Economy and Society* v. 4, n. 3 (Aug 1975). A more recent and less theoretically invested rendition of this line of argument can be found in Farsoun and Aruri, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, p. 57-93.

⁸ "Anthropological texts," p. 263. Although Asad's argument raises provocative questions and does gesture towards some of the inequities which British rule advanced, its emphases, at least as concerns the countryside, are much misplaced. For instance, his contention that the system enacted under the Rural Property Tax Ordinance (RPT) favored Jewish agriculture by allowing its higher labor costs to be deducted from taxable revenues (through calibration of the tax to net rather than gross incomes) hardly stands as an explanation for increasing Palestinian indebtedness (*ibid.*). By the time the RPT was instituted in 1934, indebtedness and dispossession had already reached voluminous proportions, as will be explored below.

undermined the position of the peasantry and bankrupted a significant segment of the rural Arab population. While this dramatic transformation was already partially underway before the Mandate, as will be shown here British policies critically consolidated and exacerbated its effects.

The specific parameters of the colonial state's economic interventions were often tied to the Mandatory obligation to advance Jewish colonization and promote the Jewish National Home policy, and some of them were worked out in direct consultation with Zionist representatives or as the consequence of their lobbying. Nonetheless, the British approach to the Arab countryside was not solely crafted in service to Zionism, but was also shaped by several other factors. The ethos of strict budgetary conservatism that predominated in the British empire in the interwar period acted as an important general constraint on the formulation of policy, tending to clip the wings of large-scale plans for economic development.⁹ Still, British administrators in Palestine were torn between conflicting conservative and transformative impulses. On one hand, officials were driven by preconceived notions concerning the purported superiority and rationality of "Western" and British forms of economic organization and administration, and contrary presumptions that local socio-economic systems and the behavior of the population at large were suffused with irrationality, disorganization, and dysfunction. Such perceptions underwrote various schemes and efforts to reconfigure the economic sphere, as will be surveyed below. On the other hand, the temptation to intervention was counterbalanced not only by fiscal questions, but by concerns for maintaining social and

⁹ Smith notes that ultimately it was the Ministry of the Treasury in London that maintained fiscal stringency and debarred a variety of development oriented initiatives (*Roots of Separatism*, p. 8).

political stability, especially after the violence of 1929. While seeking to spur and deepen economic growth, the countervailing trend emphasized the need to “control and limit changes in the Arab countryside,” believing that perpetuating the rural social hierarchy would make the regime influential allies, foster quiescence and serve the cause of order.¹⁰ While the tug of war between the competing policy orientations played out over almost two decades (1918-36), havoc was wrought on the rural social order. Ironically, British rule brought about what London and Jerusalem wished most to avoid: the creation of a landless, disaffected class.¹¹

The argument advanced in this chapter has several further ramifications. First, it buttresses the long-standing plaint made by some observers, particularly among Palestinians, that the British doctrine of “dual obligation” was unworkable. Despite the attempts of successive administrations in Palestine and London to reconcile the objectives of the Zionist movement with the interests of the indigenous population, its application did grave injury to Palestinian society while on the whole aiding the Zionist enterprise. By demonstrating the manifest negative consequences of British rule for Arabs in the countryside, this chapter also seeks to put paid to arguments attributing the mounting malaise within Arab society primarily to the Palestinians themselves. Kenneth Stein, for instance, offers a typical rendition of such contentions when he claims that “The reasons for rural economic stagnation or decline were many, and none ultimately

¹⁰ Miller, *Government and Society*, p. 164.

¹¹ Graham-Brown, “The Political Economy of Jabal Nablus,” p. 99-100. See below.

related to Ottoman or British governance or Zionist presence.”¹² As will be shown here, the distressed state of the rural sphere was intimately related to colonial policy and to the advancement of the Zionist project. It should be clear then, that the present findings further serve to illustrate the falsity of the claim made by proponents of Zionism, most especially the Jewish Agency itself, that the advent of Jewish colonization was a net boon to the Arab population, who misguidedly turned their backs on the prospects of prosperous coexistence.¹³

The early Mandate and the “attack” on the land tenure system

When the British occupied Palestine they considered it, like other colonies within the empire, a territory that had been subject to misrule and mismanagement. Unaware of the extensive social transformations of the late Ottoman era, officials in the Palestine administration and in London typically perceived the countryside as a social, cultural, and economic backwater, mired in timeless and stultifying “backwardness.” Although this view stemmed from ignorance of the penetrating social and economic effects of the Tanzimat and the steady incorporation of Greater Syria into the world economy, it also derived from racial conceptions concerning the Arabs, and “Levantines” specifically. As

¹² Stein, “Rural Change and Peasant Destitution: Contributing Causes to the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-39” in *Peasants and Politics in the Modern Middle East*, p. 146. The litany of reasons which Stein adduces is long, but wholly exonerates both the British and the Zionists from having any role in the matter.

¹³ As noted in the introduction, this is a time-worn argument, central to the Zionist movement’s self-image as a progressive force. It served an important ideological function of dispelling concerns that Zionism of necessity did injury to the indigenous Palestinian population, and is still in circulation today both in historical work and regarding the present conflict. A classic rendition of this claim from the period of the current study appears in the Jewish Agency’s testimony and evidence before the Peel Commission, which was accepted without question or caveat by that body, as summarized in the report’s sub-section on “Arab Progress” (especially p. 128-29). For scholarly versions of the contention, see, for instance Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 69-71; Baruch Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory: The Socio-Territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of International Studies, U.C. Berkeley, 1983), p. 49, 145.

noted in the Introduction, the British believed that the Bedouin were the “true” Arabs while the settled majority was seen as dissolute and corrupt and hence lacking the vigor, disposition and capacities necessary for autonomously-driven modern economic development. Emblematic of this view, British officials saw Arab agriculture – the bedrock of the Palestinian economy – as marked by slackness and technological underdevelopment. In turn, as Zeina Ghandour has observed, they further interpreted the state of local agriculture as symptomatic of the purported moral decay in Arab society.¹⁴ The supposed deficiencies of local culture and knowledge were abetted in this view by Ottoman law and the “antiquated” land tenure system, which taken together revealed local Arab society’s “quasi-feudal” nature.¹⁵

Palestine was first put under military administration from 1917-20. The territory had been devastated by the Great War and was in a state of catastrophic disrepair when General Allenby’s forces conquered it. During the war up to a quarter of its population had fled the area, been conscripted, or been evacuated. The Ottoman military had drawn heavily on local human, financial and natural resources. In addition to conscription, locals performed corvée labor, particularly during the Ottoman army’s retreat, moving materiel often with nothing more than their own bodies. The tithe rose to almost three times its pre-war rate, or almost 40 percent, before the final period of Ottoman rule during which peasants were left only with shares calibrated to guarantee their family’s sustenance while the Sultan’s forces claimed everything else. The country’s forests were

¹⁴ Zeina Ghandour, *A Discourse on Domination in Mandate Palestine: Imperialism, Property, and Insurgency* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 44-45.

¹⁵ Peel Commission report, p. 44.

depleted up and converted into fuel for the railroad. Locusts added to the shortages of foodstuffs and inflation hit 400 percent on what remained of marketable produce. As elsewhere in *bilad al-Sham* these conditions produced famine and the spread of plague diseases such as typhoid, malaria, and typhus, which took a horrible toll on the population. After the end of the war, many residents who had left returned and the population rebounded, placing further strains on the beleaguered territory.¹⁶

The military administration generally acted to restore many local institutions which had ceased functioning during the war, including the courts and schools, while repairing wartime damage (such as to roads), fighting disease, and undertaking some limited public works development (such as water provision in the Jerusalem area).¹⁷ Although alterations were made to the organization of both city government and the courts, as an occupation regime the government was prohibited by the Hague Convention of 1907 from interfering with or substantively changing the legal system.¹⁸ As Palestine's first Attorney General, Norman Bentwich, wanly described, this put the Balfour declaration and the Jewish National Home policy temporarily on ice.¹⁹ Although the Mandate wasn't formally conferred until 1922, and was only ratified in 1923, the occupation was seen by the British to have ended in 1920, and with it the prior

¹⁶ Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine*, p. 2; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 55-56.

Comparatively, Palestine seems to have fared better than other regions of Greater Syria, especially Lebanon (Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), p. 21, 23), though this should not be taken to diminish the scale of hardship afflicting the territory. Its population is estimated to have fallen from perhaps 790,000 before the war to a low of 600,000, before returning in 1922 (when the first British census was taken) to 752,000 (Wasserstein, op. cit., ft. 5, p. 2).

¹⁷ Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 86-87.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 86; Bentwich and Bentwich, *Mandate Memories*, p. 23.

¹⁹ Bentwich and Bentwich, *Mandate Memories*, p. 23.

restraints on transforming the local legal order and implementing the Jewish National Home policy.

Against the supposed degeneracy of Arab society, the early regime under the first High Commissioner, Herbert Samuel, envisioned the creation of a new economic order in Palestine that combined efficient and interventionist state management of resources, foremost among which was land, with the virtues of the market and capitalist economy. Their partners in this endeavor, though not universally approved of or well-liked by all British administrators and officials, were the Zionists. As is well known, Zionism was generally seen by the British as a modernizing, energetic force, especially when compared to the putative primitivism of the Arabs.²⁰ Barbara Smith summarized the approach of the early Mandate with admirable clarity:

The European [Jewish] settlers, with their superior education, technological know-how, and capital, would bring material benefits to the ‘natives’ and provide the ‘backward’ Arabs with an example to which to aspire; the injection of Zionist ‘yeast’ would produce a ‘cake’ to be shared with the Palestinian Arabs. As long as it was assumed that the settler movement brought unequivocal gain to the local population, the problem of a dual obligation could virtually be dismissed; the welfare of the non-Jewish population was assured, it could be argued, simply by facilitating the establishment of the Jewish National Home.²¹

With the able and determined Zionists as local vessels of modernity and beneficiaries of colonial rule, the British imagined they could make all boats rise at once: while helping build the Zionist dream the benighted indigenous population would reap the benefits of

²⁰ The Peel Commission, sent to investigate the 1936 general strike and Arab unrest, offered a typical rendition of such ideas, notably contrasting Arab backwardness to Jewish vitality: “...if in 1925 a new era of progress had evidently begun [under the Mandate], the Arabs were still living in the atmosphere of the past, still separated, almost, it might seem, by centuries, from the educated, resourceful, Western-minded section of the Jews now entering the country...” (p. 46).

²¹ *Roots of Separatism*, p. 7.

both British tutelage and Jewish industriousness. The key to the road ahead in an agrarian colony such as Palestine, as the new imperial masters had it, lay in the fruitful exploitation of land.

Somewhat paradoxically for a regime advocating the virtues of private property, the Samuel administration's first priority with regard to the countryside was to take control of as much land as possible. This was to be achieved first and foremost through seizing what colonial officials simplistically and inaccurately considered state domain according to Ottoman law (see below).²² Several priorities motivated this course of action: securing revenues, advancing productivity, and, importantly, serving the aims of the Jewish National Home.²³ As a matter of general policy the British undertook to aid the Zionist quest for land. Under article six of the Mandate covenant, the British regime committed itself to promoting the "close settlement by Jews on the land."²⁴ This would be accomplished in part by using state domain, again as per article six, to reallocate land to Jewish settlers.

The chief executors of the initial British drive to build the territorial base of Zionism were High Commissioner Samuel and Attorney General Norman Bentwich, both of whose dedication to advancing the project of Jewish colonization in Palestine was no secret.²⁵ Together they embarked on a program not only of attempting to open

²² Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 30, 43.

²³ Ibid., p. 30; Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p.

²⁴ The Mandate charter, in *The Israel-Arab Reader*, p. 36.

²⁵ Samuel wrote in his memoirs that his selection was made "With full knowledge on the part of His Majesty's Government of my Zionist sympathies, and no doubt largely because of them" (quoted in Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 78). He also had the distinction of being the first to propose to the Cabinet that Britain conquer Palestine and erect in it a Jewish state, which he did in 1915 while serving as Postmaster

what were deemed state lands to Jewish settlement, but also of facilitating the transfer of private lands via the market. As will be discussed below, this early orientation of the state towards active promotion of Zionist land acquisition was predicated on degrading and denying Arab rights to lands they inhabited, especially those under customary title. This was ostensibly balanced, in the case of the market transactions, by measures safeguarding that transfers of land did not create a landless class. The appointment of officials who regarded themselves as Zionists to critically important state positions, however, helped set the administration's tone and prevent Arab demands from receiving favorable consideration by the state. Indeed, as Stein argues, "There is no doubt that in the 1920s Bentwich's Zionist sympathies neutralized administration opponents to the Jewish national home concept." As concerns land, this meant that the Attorney General acted such that "the Palestine administration neither prohibited land transfers [from Arabs to Jews] nor contemplated prohibitions."²⁶

In the British conception, the commitment to Zionism also dovetailed with the colonial obsession with productivity. From early on the British evinced apprehension over what they saw as low productivity and poor use of lands, including the existence of sizable plots that were perceived to be, or actually were, uncultivated. One month after taking office in 1920 High Commissioner Samuel entrusted a Land Commission (also known as the Land Settlement Commission), led by Albert Abramson, the British governor of the Southern District and later head of the Lands Department, to assess the

General (Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 33). For the most thoroughgoing treatment of Samuel's administration see Huneidi, *A Broken Trust*.

²⁶ Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 46.

status of state lands and determine candidate plots for “close settlement.” Demonstrating the state’s closeness to the Zionist project, Haim Kalvarisky, an agent of the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association (PJCA) and a chief land expert of the Zionist movement, was also seated on the commission.²⁷ While serving as a kind of prospector for Zionist expansion on state-claimed domains, the Land Commission likewise concluded that the local land regime was loaded with inefficiencies, including the underutilization of holdings by Arabs. As a remedy for this supposed problem, it advocated the increased marketization of land, stating that “every encouragement should be given to landowners to sell their excess areas and that there should be no restriction on sales.”²⁸ The unfettered transfer of land, it was assumed, would tend to move underutilized land from “unenterprising” hands to more dynamic owners.²⁹ Unsurprisingly, the indigenous Arabs, perhaps particularly the owners of large estates, were seen as inefficient users of land, while Jewish colonists were lauded as sedulous, modern farmers.³⁰

The emergent foci of state land policy – the acquisition of state domain, support for the Jewish National Home, the expansion of the land market, and improving productivity, utilization and yields – were not well served, in the British view, by the Ottoman land system. Formally the British agreed as part of the framework of the

²⁷ Jeremy Forman and Alexandre Kedar, “Colonialism, Colonization, and Land Law in Mandate Palestine: the Zor al-Zarqa and Barrat Qisarya land disputes in historical perspective,” *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* v. 4, n. 2 (July 2003), p. 512. Faydi al-‘Alami, a former mayor of Jerusalem was the commission’s third member.

²⁸ Quoted in Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 60.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The state’s budgetary strictures led the Land Commission further to endorse Zionist settlement for the capital it would bring to Palestine and the expenditure that would therefore be saved (Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 174).

Mandates to act to preserve the bulk of the legal infrastructure which they inherited from the Ottomans.³¹ Yet, as Martin Bunton points out, colonial administrators made little effort to comprehend the intricacies and logics of the complex system of Ottoman land tenure on its own terms, preferring to “assume a juridical vacuum wherever they thought they could.”³² The prevailing British hostility towards the Ottoman land code was well summarized by Ernest Dowson, a preeminent imperial expert on land, who, when brought in to conduct a review of policy in 1923, argued that the land regime was deserving of nothing less than “a comprehensive attack.”³³ In actuality the “attack” desired by Dowson proved more difficult to mount than anticipated, and faced substantial push-back from the Arab population. Land law was consequently applied and amended under the Mandate less in accordance with a grand colonial overhaul, than in an *ad hoc* fashion as “Ottoman laws and practices inherited in Palestine were translated, studied, reformulated, and institutionalized (or dismissed) in ways that primarily addressed specific problems demanding the immediate attention of colonial officials.”³⁴

The colonial drive to reconfigure the land system was presented by departing Ottoman forces with a situation that was at once a unique opportunity for opponents of the *ancien régime*, and equally a lasting predicament for an administration basing itself in law. In an effort to thwart the British occupiers, Ottoman personnel removed or

³¹ Ibid., p. 32.

³² Ibid., p. 38.

³³ Quoted in Ghandour, *Discourse on Domination*, p. 60.

³⁴ Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 38. In an incisive analysis of the presuppositions of British discourse and practice regarding land, Ghandour concludes that colonial officials, perhaps especially in the 1920s, tended to think that the optimal approach to the land regime would be to treat it as a *tabula rasa* and dismantle or disregard the existing system (*Discourse on Domination*, p. 42-82).

destroyed many of the land registers for the area before their exit.³⁵ Records pertaining to much of the country's lands were thus lost or absent, leaving the ultimate legal disposition of many parcels in the shadows. From the British perspective the absence of records posed a massive, nearly intractable problem of properly evidencing ownership claims, for which written documentation was seen as the *sine qua non*. The missing registers had grave repercussions for Palestine's peasantry, who were consequently often left without what was deemed adequate proof of their rights to usufruct. As the Attorney General saw it the Ottoman saboteurs did the administration and the Zionist movement a great favor, opening the gates to more radical possibilities.³⁶ In the absence of a paper trail, the colonial state soon arrogated to itself wide latitude to determine the disposition of lands throughout the territory.

During the period of the military administration the land registries were temporarily closed, blocking legal recognition of transactions in landed property.³⁷ This move stemmed not only from the disrepair of the land registries, but also out of concern to forestall the growth of a landless class and the social and political disruption that would follow.³⁸ The position of a great portion of the *fellahin* was greatly compromised by wartime conditions, and a rash of land forfeitures and dispossessions were imminent.³⁹ Many landlords were also indebted by the war.⁴⁰ The ban on land

³⁵ Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p. 91; Ghandour, *Discourse on Domination*, p. 57. Ottoman officials in what became Iraq similarly "took all the records they could with them" as they made their exit (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, p. 74).

³⁶ Ghandour, *Discourse on Domination*, p. 57.

³⁷ Smith, *The Roots of Separatism*, p. 91.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. Smith notes that after the war "It was impossible for cultivators to redeem their mortgages, and foreclosure would have meant ruin." In this vein, Kenneth Stein has observed that peasants used

transactions offered momentary respite to the weary population, but when the civil administration took over in 1920, it soon retreated from the concern for peasant tenancy, acting both to curtail what it saw as peasant encroachments on lands claimed by the state and to reopen the land market.

In spite of its great ideological and economic interest in agrarian productivity, after World War I the state tended to see the postwar return to the land of peasants who had fled during the war or been conscripted with a very distrusting eye, presuming that they were deviously taking advantage of the unsettled postwar circumstances to wrongfully enlarge their holdings. As peasants resumed stewardship of their lands, or exercised their rights under the Ottoman land code to bring new lands under cultivation – through provisions which bestowed title on those reclaiming *miri mahlul* (vacated *miri* land) and *mawat* (wastelands or “dead” land) – the British authorities perceived the state to be losing land.⁴¹ In response, by 1921 the High Commissioner articulated the aim for the state of claiming and appropriating as much land for itself as possible, ostensibly to serve the public interest.⁴²

The conflict which the state precipitated with peasants over postwar land dispositions was partially rooted in the colonial misconstrual of *miri* lands as state lands.

As reviewed previously, *miri* lands were held by the Ottoman state under a system in

mortgages during the war to purchase exemptions from conscription (“Legal Protection and Circumvention of Rights for Cultivators in Mandatory Palestine” in Joel S. Migdal, ed., *Palestinian Society and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), p. 238).

⁴⁰ Stein, “Legal Protection,” p. 240.

⁴¹ Smith argues that much land was left fallow during the war because of peasant impoverishment, and that postwar, peasants were not making new acquisitions, but simply reclaiming lands on which they had temporarily been forced to cease cultivation (*The Roots of Separatism*, p. 100). However, where peasants did bring new areas under the till, as surely must have occurred, this would have been perfectly within their rights so long as the lands were uncultivated *miri* or *mawat*.

⁴² Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 43

which they were increasingly equated with and disposed of as private property. Usufruct was conferred on tenants who paid the tithe (‘*ushr*’) so long as the parcels did not lie fallow (without good cause) for three consecutive years.⁴³ The state’s ownership of *miri* lands was often nominal, except in cases of their reversion to the Porte as *mahlul*. The *miri* construct was principally concerned with synchronizing access to land and state revenue generation. The British, operating from a legal tradition that saw *de jure* ownership as paramount, demonstrated little grasp of or interest in the Ottoman tradition’s rather different linkages between usufruct, possession, and incentivization. They instead opted to understand *miri* lands simply as state domain, initially with no firm sense of binding obligation to tenants *in situ*, and to issue legislation which negated peasants’ rights to take possession of new *miri* and *mawat* lands.⁴⁴

The colonial state’s revision of the land code began with a set of laws in 1920 and 1921. The Land Transfer Ordinance (LTO) of 1920⁴⁵ reopened the land market, but did so in a tightly regulated manner. It stipulated that transfers must be approved by the state and that they would only be accepted on transactions of 300 dunams or less in the country and 30 or less in the city, the value of which was not to exceed £P 3000. Initially the ordinance was intended to avert speculation in land, and in addition to the price ceiling, it mandated that transferred properties had to be brought into immediate cultivation or use. In an effort to preserve the social order and prevent landlessness, it

⁴³ *Miri* lands could also be claimed after ten years of undisputed possession and cultivation (Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 36-37).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36, 42-43.

⁴⁵ The sketch here of the 1920 and 1921 LTOs is derived from: Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 99-100.

was also stipulated that owners, and where applicable, tenants, had to have adequate lands for their provision elsewhere, before a plot could be sold.

Despite the uncertainty clouding land rights and ownership, the British viewed the land market as essential to fostering economic growth. The LTO was an attempt to square the circle and resuscitate a functioning market, under conditions that would allow the state to act as adjudicator of proper and agreeable transfers. Importantly, the High Commissioner was an avid advocate of the legislation, seeing it as a vital means through which the state could aid in the enlargement of the territorial base of Zionism. Its promulgation followed his consistent pressure on the Foreign Office, the department then supervising the Mandate in London.⁴⁶ Arab elites did not look on it with favor. They protested that the LTO contravened the freedom to dispose of their private property, while contending that it was intended to hold down market values to aid Zionist purchasers.⁴⁷ The following year, in 1921, the provisions against speculation were dropped,⁴⁸ and the amended ordinance retained only the stipulation that owners and tenants must have access to “sufficient land” for their needs elsewhere. This provision,

⁴⁶ Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine*, p. 91. In five weeks HC Samuel telegraphed seven times to push for the 1920 LTO.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p. 94. It has often been surmised that Arab elites’ resistance to the LTO was hypocritical because they opposed Zionism but wished to cash in on sales to Zionists (e.g. Stein, “One Hundred Years,” p. 71-72). Yet the majority of land transactions throughout the course of the Mandate were intra-Arab sales (Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 3). Hence there was little reason for Arab owners to be happy with administrative limitations placed on the value or disposal of their property. Along with the rest of the population, Arab elites were hit hard by the war and afterwards suffered from the state’s policies. Colonel George Symes, Governor of the Northern District, diagnosed a litany of troubles facing Arab elites in a report in 1922, noting that Arab business was in decline, the prices of goods had fallen, credit was hard to come by, large landowners were in debt, and, in the north, the transit trade in grain with Syria had been wrecked by new customs barriers (Memo by G.S. Symes, 5.2.22, CP 3921, PRO – CAB 24/136).

⁴⁸ Smith notes that the anti-speculation provisions were a failure, as scholars and before them the Shaw Commission and Hope Simpson inquiry revealed (*Roots of Separatism*, p. 94).

repeated in later legislations, proved to be easy to sidestep. Tenants were often simply induced to leave or were ejected from lands before a sale was contracted, obviating the law's intent on preserving peasant tenancy.⁴⁹

In a major departure from the Ottoman tenurial practice and law, the state also took action against what it conceptualized as "squatting." In 1920 and 1921 it passed ordinances barring peasants from reclaiming *mahlul* and *mawat* lands and declared these domains as state holdings.⁵⁰ Any peasants found on such parcels were to be treated as trespassers, and village leaders who failed to inform on peasants so reclaiming lands were also subject to punishment. While no precise numbers are available, *mawat* lands were variously estimated by the authorities to comprise an enormous portion of Palestine, perhaps 2-3 million dunams, or by some projections, even larger sums equating to a third of the country.⁵¹ The radical alterations to the land regime contained in the *mahlul* and *mawat* ordinances would have prevented impoverished (or other) *fellahin* from accessing these vast regions, and from bettering their own position through expanded cultivation, an option which had at least theoretically always been available to them under Ottoman suzerainty.⁵² As it happened, these ordinances rather unsurprisingly drew the ire of Arab elites, who rejected the wholesale meddling of

⁴⁹ Shaw Commission report, p. 115; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 100; Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p. 97. A telling description of this process, and of villages whose populations vanished before transfers from Arabs to Jews, is provided by the Commissioner of Lands, quoted in the Shaw Commission report (p. 115).

⁵⁰ Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 43-45.

⁵¹ Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory*, p. 37; Ghandour, *Discourse on Domination*, p. 63. The arable lands of Palestine were estimated in 1930 by the Director of Lands, probably conservatively, at 8,044,000 dunams (Hope Simpson report, p. 43).

⁵² Forman and Kedar write that "Prior to 1921, *Mawat* had served as an important and legitimate source of auxiliary land for rural agricultural expansion" ("Colonialism, Colonization, and Land Law," p. 514).

British administrators in land affairs as traducing the “sacred rights of citizens.”⁵³ Arab political representatives also took issue with the colonial state’s drive to expropriate uncultivated lands in Arab possession.⁵⁴

While the notion that peasants reclaiming lands were “squatters” engaged in lawless behavior remained part of British discourse, the concerted opposition of Arabs on the ground, combined with elite representations against colonial innovations in land policy, stymied many of the state’s broader aspirations to dispense with key components of the Ottoman land regime. In 1924, the Acting Chief Secretary, Ronald Storrs, remarked that the *mawat* ordinance had only been used once, on a small plot in Haifa. The state’s right to seize continuously uncultivated *miri* land (as *mahlul*) also went untapped by the mid-1920s, as, to paraphrase Lord Allenby, tenants and claimants always appeared out of the woodwork when a plot’s ownership was deemed in question.⁵⁵

The curious case of musha‘

Probably the most notorious and contentious “reform” of the land regime proposed by the British concerned *musha‘* lands, which were collectively held by peasants. Like *mawat* lands, no hard figures exist regarding *musha‘*, though some

⁵³ Quoted in Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 46.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 43-46.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 47-48. Storrs’s claim is debatable, as the state’s ruling that certain lands were *mawat* at Barrat Qisarya, discussed below, proved detrimental to the Arab inhabitants’ claims to rightful tenancy and usufruct. Unclaimed *mawat* land was also reclassified as *miri* after the Land Settlement Ordinance of 1928, indicating that the colonial administration continued to desire to separate this land from the Arab population and curtail its customary rights to reclaim it (Jeremy Forman, “Settlement of Title in the Galilee: Dowson’s Colonial Guiding Principles,” *Israel Studies* v.7, n. 3 (Fall 2002), ft. 13, p. 79).

evaluations indicate a very significant portion of cultivated lands were held collectively. In 1923, for example, *musha* ‘ was estimated by an official commission established for its study to comprise 56 percent of the lands in 753 villages.⁵⁶ *Musha* ‘ lands were collectively-owned plots, subdivided into smaller lots based on shares of ownership, and periodically redistributed every year or two between owners of the shares.⁵⁷ In Palestine the collectivities holding *musha* ‘ were usually not entire villages, but sub-groupings.⁵⁸ The origins of *musha* ‘ in the Levant are unknown, but collective ownership had many advantages for peasants, including distributing taxation, aiding the cultivation of new lands, pooling knowledge of farming techniques and methods, increasing labor efficiency, distributing risk, and decreasing conflict and disputes over inheritance.⁵⁹ Although dissension could arise from disagreement over issues pertaining to *musha* ‘, in general it acted as an instrument for building communal solidarity and spreading an ethic of mutual support. For the Mandatory authorities *musha* ‘ quickly became symbolic of the old regime’s archaism and recalled the commons in Britain, with all of that institution’s negative associations within the discourse of liberal political economy. As Bunton points out, however, *musha* ‘ was not a relic or a specter from capitalism’s early days, but a “self-consciously designed property rights system” – one that was suited to

⁵⁶ Hope Simpson report, p. 24; Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory*, p. 32. Nadan notes the unreliability of such figures by pointing out considerable disparities between separate inquiries (*The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 272).

⁵⁷ There were two general types of *musha* ‘: “open-ended” and “closed” or “fixed.” In the former, shares accrued to eligible male members of a collectivity, such that families or groupings with larger numbers of men received greater portions of land. In the latter form, each sub-unit of the collectivity (usually by household) received an equal portion. For further detail, see Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 262-66.

⁵⁸ Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 265.

⁵⁹ Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 11; Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 275-76.

its historical, legal, political and economic contexts.⁶⁰ Regardless of this, the practice of *musha* ' was perceived with great uniformity by the state and colonial experts as a central impediment blocking the development of the agrarian economy and the spread of more efficient, modern methods and units of farming.⁶¹

Almost from the inception of colonial rule, *musha* ' was targeted for elimination. The collective model of land ownership which it embodied stood at odds with the cardinal value placed on individual landholding in British economic thought, but perhaps even more odious in colonial eyes was the practice of reapportioning lands and subdividing the entirety of the holding into numerous smaller parcels. The rotation of lands was universally deprecated by British officials and consultants like Dowson, who saw it as an abiding disincentive to productive investment. The overarching presumption, shared by British and Zionist observers, was that no holder of a stake in *musha* ' would be willing to contribute capital to improve any of the lands within the holding since the parcel or parcels in which the capital was sunk would soon rotate away from their possession into another stake-holder's hands. This notion has been proven erroneous by researcher Amos Nadan, who found more flexibility in the system than colonial observers ever grasped. Regarding investment in *musha* ' Nadan's interviews with individuals who lived as peasants during the Mandate era revealed two means for

⁶⁰ Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 9, 11.

⁶¹ E.g. Hope Simpson report, p. 24, 105. This assessment, which was popular among Zionists as well as the British, has been reproduced in a variety of the scholarship on land, political economy, and colonial rule in the countryside, most notably among scholars or works that are generally partial to Zionism. Kenneth Stein has almost undoubtedly been the greatest proponent of this view in English-language scholarship. See, for instance: Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 14; Stein, "Rural Change," p. 148; Naomi Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand: British Rule in Palestine, 1917-1948* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1999), p. 103.

increasing capitalization. The planting and cultivation of trees which were collectively held and collectively cared-for was one manner in which productive investment occurred. In other cases, peasants with capital could request a non-rotating plot within the holding, which would still be considered *musha* ' but would not conform to the redistribution schedule. They could then invest on a specific parcel or set of parcels.⁶²

Aside from the presumed disincentive to investment, the subdivision of lots held as *musha* ' was another practice which the British assumed was economically damaging and retrograde. The resulting "over-parcellation" was seen as reducing economies of scale, creating inefficiencies in labor and time (by disaggregating and physically separating an individual's lots), and as a cadastral nightmare, since parcels could be in many long thin strips or irregular shapes.⁶³ Yet parcellation and the shapes it took were commonly keyed to distribute the lands of the holding according to soil type and suitability for different crops, so that each shareholder received a mixture of areas appropriate for both summer and winter crops, while assuring a more even distribution of the lands by quality. As Nadan astutely puts it, "A shareholder was entitled to diverse categories of land."⁶⁴

The quantity and character of colonial misapprehensions concerning the operations and utility of *musha* ' lands mirrors many of the authorities' confusions regarding the land tenure regime in general, and *miri* lands more specifically. In both cases colonial officials, including the most vaunted experts, were woefully ignorant of

⁶² Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 9-10; Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 275.

⁶³ Strickland, the registrar of cooperatives (whose work will be discussed below), wrote of finding *musha* ' parcels that stretched for 2150 meters, but were only 4.5 meters wide (Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 269).

⁶⁴ Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 266.

even the most elementary characteristics and functions of the holding. Very few state officials in fact had any significant grasp of the legal environment or customary practices attendant to either category, yet these critical facets were largely treated with derision.⁶⁵ And in each instance of the colonial state's encounter with indigenous and preexisting land systems it sought to maximize its own control while diminishing the institutions and avenues through which peasants negotiated and improved their circumstances. The blithe disregard for Ottoman law and local practice as concerns the units of the pre-occupation land regime illustrates the radical ambitions that underlay the new colonial regime. As with its grand designs concerning *miri* and *mawat* lands, the state's desire to abolish *musha'* outstripped its capacity and brought unforeseen and unintended consequences.

Dowson, who crafted the system of "land settlement" implemented in Palestine, needed only three days to draw up a blueprint for "rationalizing" the land regime which included the break-up and partition (*ifraz*) of *musha'* lands.⁶⁶ He left little doubt that the abolition of *musha'* in favor of individual rights was a primary goal.⁶⁷ The program that he devised combined the cadastral survey of lands with the registration of formal title, and was intended to create a sound basis for the credit system and the land market.⁶⁸ It also aimed at apprehending the scale and taking greater control of lands claimed by the

⁶⁵ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 76. See Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 261-98 and Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*.

⁶⁶ Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 268.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 267; Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 102. Dowson saw a new land regime as essential in part because he believed that only then could the inequitable tithe system be abolished (Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 267). As we will see, the government only belatedly scrapped the tithe, which was more onerous under the British than it had been under the Ottomans, after the crisis in the rural sphere could no longer be ignored, and after it had greatly damaged the lower strata.

state as public domain, including *mawat* and *mahlul* lands, thereby helping to prevent the peasantry from accessing and utilizing them as per customary practices.⁶⁹

Formerly director general of surveys and a financial advisor to the colonial government in Egypt, Dowson briefly served as Commissioner of the Lands Department in Palestine in 1926 and it was after his appointment that the land settlement scheme got underway.⁷⁰ The primary law designed to aid the state's survey and registration operations, the Land Settlement Ordinance of 1928, gave settlement officers, who were not judges by training, wide powers to settle ownership disputes and to partition *musha* lands if such was regarded as being in the "public interest."⁷¹ A staff was assembled and grew continuously, yet from the scheme's inception in 1927 through 1936, the Lands Department succeeded in completing the process of survey and title settlement, including adjudication of disputes, on only 1,491,877 of the 13,592,306 dunams registered as taxable rural properties, or 11 percent, over the course of a decade of work.⁷²

The process of surveying lands and settling titles was laborious to begin with, but it was slowed further by the growing penchant of peasants and villagers to gum up the works legally through asserting and disputing ownership claims. The arc of "outstanding actions" – contested claims – ascended in the early 1930s from 535 in 1932 to 803 in 1933, to 1139 in 1934 before the process ground to a near halt in 1936 with the

⁶⁹ Ghandour, *Discourse on Domination*, p. 63.

⁷⁰ Peel Commission report, p. 224; Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 267.

⁷¹ Ghandour, *Discourse on Domination*, p. 74-75.

⁷² Peel Commission report, p. 229-30. The rural property tax (discussed below) applied to roughly half of Palestine's land area of over 27 million dunams (Peel Commission report, p. 234), which meant that the survey and settlement work had only covered some 5 percent of the total territory after a decade.

revolt, when the total number of unresolved briefs reached 7,843 by year's end.⁷³

Quoting from the Commissioner of Lands in 1935, the Peel Commission observed that:

“Whereas at first disputed claims were about 10 per cent. of the total submitted to the Settlement Officers, there is now reported ‘a growing tendency to dispute every claim where there is a shadow of a case, and often where there is not.’”⁷⁴ In 1933 the state tried to nip this tendency in the bud by forcing claimants in land proceedings to pay certain fees and expenses at court, but to no avail.⁷⁵

In pushing the registration process colonial administrators opened a Pandora's box of popular anxieties which took the form of a flood of occupancy and property claims. As land rights claims proliferated the state presumed that some large portion must of necessity be fraudulent or “frivolous.” Dowson suggested as much based on his reading and experience of land questions in Egypt.⁷⁶ Regardless of official presumptions of peasant impropriety, peasants themselves were either fearful of dispossession and hardship or hopeful of gaining a legal foothold on their parcels, and flocked to the legal machinery established to grant title. Given that the settlement of title aided Jewish colonization by legally preparing properties for transfers and that the state's scheme was carried out mostly in coastal and plains areas of Zionist interest,⁷⁷ not to mention the distrust with which peasants had already come to view the colonial state and British intentions in Palestine, many *fellahin* surely viewed the process with great skepticism.

⁷³ *Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 47; *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 48; Peel Commission report, p. 230.

⁷⁴ Peel Commission report, p. 230; Ghandour, *Discourse on Domination*, p. 71.

⁷⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 46.

⁷⁶ *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 49; Peel Commission report, p. 230; Ghandour, *Discourse on Domination*, p. 59. The quote appears in both of the first two sources.

⁷⁷ Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 287-88.

However, especially in the midst of the agrarian crisis of the early 1930s and the increased flow of sales by Palestinians that accompanied it, the peasants' and villagers' recourse to the land courts may well have served as a legal route through which to slow or stop prospective transfers or attempt to dissuade Jewish purchase in an area.⁷⁸

Notable in the state's struggle to create a new land regime through settlement of individual title was the virtual absence of *musha'* from settlement operations. This was so in spite of the increasingly strident opposition to the institution that was enunciated in official reports, such as those of the Johnson-Crosbie and Hope Simpson inquiries, as well as from Dowson himself.⁷⁹ Although there are no composite statistics, *musha'* made up less than 8 percent of the areas where survey and registration was completed in 1933 and 1934, and the lack of any mention of the subject in the 1935 *Report to the League of Nations* leaves one to believe that the quantity was equally small if not smaller in the final year before the revolt.⁸⁰ The proportion of *musha'* which was thus subjected to compulsory *ifraz* and converted into individual plots was much smaller than its estimated incidence, by any official account. Explaining the continued existence of *musha'*, the Peel Commission channeled the frustrations of both the Zionist movement and many British officials by insinuating that the Palestine administration had gone soft when confronted with Arab sentiment, avoiding the exercise of its legal prerogative to

⁷⁸ The sheer profusion of claims and the effect these had on slowing the overall schema for settlement of title would also seem to belie the idea that peasants were generally eager for, or not predisposed against, sales to Zionist purchasing agents.

⁷⁹ Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 268-69; Hope Simpson report, p. 24; Ghandour, *Discourse on Domination*, p. 75.

⁸⁰ *Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 47; *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 48; *Report to the League of Nations, 1935*, p. 58-62. In 1933, 29,498 dunams of 334,139 settled were *musha'*, or 8.8 percent; in 1934, 19,668 of 283,464 dunams settled were *musha'*, or 6.9 percent. Cumulatively, 7.96 percent of final land settlements for the two years were *musha'*.

invalidate the institution by simply declaring it unlawful. The relatively minor progress of the survey and settlement operations in partitioning *musha* ' lands had more proximate and practical causes, however, not least of which were the difficulties inherent in the partition process itself. In areas where partition was contested there could, for instance, be up to 30 claims on a single parcel, each of which had to be evaluated before any judgment could be rendered, which itself would then be open to appeal. Certain forms of *musha* ', such as lots with indefinite numbers of shares, also posed problems which the settlement program did not have an easy time resolving. Although it is ambiguous from the annual reports relied on here, it appears probable that the penchant of peasants for disputing the partition of *musha* ', or certain types of *musha* ' holdings, may have led settlement officers to steer clear of such entanglements.⁸¹

Though the Peel Commission intimated that the Palestine government had caved in to the unreasonable and stubborn attachment of Arabs to the institution, "destructive as it is of all development," it is difficult not to conclude that as with its prior "reforms" of *mawat* and *mahlul* lands, the state could not ride roughshod over the population and expect the law to be abided. While the commissioners ventilated that an executive solution was all that was necessary to squelch the hated bastion of collective property, the lack of popular assent to any fiat declaring *musha* ' invalid would likely have rendered the measure dead on arrival. In the event, the rural population overwhelmed the settlement operations that were undertaken, whether by design or incidentally. Faced with an avalanche of claims and the unanticipated complexities of expunging *musha* ',

⁸¹ Peel Commission report, p. 219; *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 49-50. The fact that a special officer was deputed to make a preliminary assessment of such lots in 1934 supports this contention.

the administration and the settlement officers had to be content to nibble away at the institution, while the *fellahin* and Arab society continued to see it as a bulwark of the rural social economy and a “safeguard” against the creeping spread of Zionist settlement.⁸²

British rule and “close settlement” of the land

The stubborn persistence of peasants in pursuing claims to ownership and tenancy proved to be a recurrent thorn in the side of colonial administrators, and created unexpected difficulties for the state in implementing its various plans with regard to reshaping the land regime. Nonetheless, throughout the 1920s the colonial state with great consistency asserted rights to determine the disposition of lands that it claimed were state domain. Its most sizable ventures in this respect were intended to benefit the colonial state and the territorial aspirations of the Zionist movement. Two examples briefly adduced here will serve to illustrate the state’s efforts and the resistance of local Arab populations that such plans provoked.

One of the state’s first attempts to assert a prerogative to reassign possession of lands pertained to a vast stretch of lands in the region of Beisan in the north. As noted in passing in chapter 3, the Beisan lands, an expanse in the northern Jordan valley between the town of Beisan and Lake Tiberias, were seen by Zionists and the British as one of the two most valuable pieces of real estate in the state’s possession. The area, comprising over 300,000 dunams, was held prior to British rule as *jiftlik* (also known as

⁸² Peel Commission report, p. 219.

mudawwara), a designation for certain estates belonging to the former Sultan. *Jiftlik* lands were a form of *miri*, which led administrators to presume that they were state domain.⁸³ Although the Zionists were eager to obtain rights to colonize the area, local Arabs were adamantly opposed to the state's claims over their lands. As discussed at length in Fakher Eldin's study, the local population protested that the prior conversion of their lands into Sultanic estates had been illegitimate and that the colonial state therefore had no legal standing over their disposition.⁸⁴ During a visit to the area in 1921 HC Samuel was greeted by a demonstration. The public show of force made an impression on him and he was taken aback at the "sullen and hostile" reception he received.⁸⁵ Afterwards, the Land Commission concluded that the residents should be offered long-term leases as a means of creating incentives for boosting agricultural production. Residents rejected the commission's findings and the leases, insisting that the lands were not within the state's purview.⁸⁶ After continued opposition to its assertions, the administration reached a compromise with the local population. The state conceded that the local residents had a moral claim on the lands, but did not accede fully to their legal claim. The Ghor Mudawwara agreement, as it was called, recognized the local claimants as owners of *miri* plots, but effectively deferred full conferral of ownership rights until receipt of a payment of £E 1.25 - 1.5 per dunam to the state which was to be collected in installments over 15 years.⁸⁷

⁸³ Smith, *The Roots of Separatism*, p. 90; Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 71.

⁸⁴ "Communities of Owners," p. 49-80.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Smith, *The Roots of Separatism*, p. 106.

⁸⁶ Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 73.

⁸⁷ Smith, *The Roots of Separatism*, p. 106. This was later renegotiated to a 30-year term (*ibid.*, p. 107).

The state mitigated its concession on the lands' disposition by treating the agreement as a sale, although the actual settlement avoided such terms since the Arabs refused to recognize that the state had any ownership or right of sale.⁸⁸ The settlement of title was officially given a positive spin as a necessary precursor to facilitating the land market.⁸⁹ Even after the agreement, however, Arabs continued to cast suspicion on the state's motives, alleging that the delay in the official demarcation of properties (necessary for the settlement of title) was meant to give Zionist agents time to scare elements of the population into selling their lands.⁹⁰ Though their immediate fears may have been overblown, the terms of the settlement subsequently did prove too costly for many peasants, and by the end of the decade a rash of sales was underway and the earlier victory in preserving their habitation had given way to the advance of Jewish settlers.⁹¹

At roughly the same time as the contention over the Beisan lands, the colonial administration awarded a concession agreement to the PJCA for the drainage and development of swamp areas and dunes at Barrat Qisarya and Zor al-Zarqa. The two areas were part of a marshland, lying roughly between Haifa and Tulkarm, situated on the coast, and were inhabited and used by a collection of semi-nomadic Bedouin groups, the 'Arab al-Ghawarneh, 'Arab al-Dumayri, 'Arab al-Kabbara, and the 'Arab Barrat Qisarya. These groups numbered together around 800-850 persons and most (save the 'Arab al-Dumayri) lived on the lands. A small portion of the area was cultivated, while much of the population's livelihood stemmed from animal husbandry, wood harvesting,

⁸⁸ Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 74.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 76.

⁹⁰ Smith, *The Roots of Separatism*, p. 109.

⁹¹ Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p. 107-109; Fakhre Eldin, "Communities of Owners," p. 82-115; 130.

and mat-making. The PJCA had reached a tentative agreement for development of the area with the Ottomans, and after the British occupation the Land Commission forwarded a revived PJCA proposal for purchase and development. Believing it had rights to the land, the state preferred to retain title (on the advice of the commission) but rapidly offered the PJCA a 100-year lease on approximately 40,000-50,000 unsurveyed dunams in the area in the form of a concession which mandated the lands' development. The agreement, known as the Kabbara Concession, reached in November 1921, came as a surprise to the resident Arabs, who discovered it only when the PJCA attempted to prevent members of the 'Arab Barrat Qisarya from accessing their grazing lands. Local Arab resistance to the agreement and to the joint claims of the British colonial administration and the Zionists over the area led to a protracted and complicated legal struggle, elements of which lasted until the end of the Mandate.⁹²

From the outset the state had presumed that the lands at Zor al-Zarqa and Barrat Qisarya were *mawat* or *mudawwara* and therefore, after the Mawat Ordinance, state property. Successive commissions of inquiry were dispatched to ascertain their status and determine the Bedouins' rights to them, but as Forman and Kedar note, the primary question was not whether the government had standing, but how to secure the expropriation of the Kabbara lands. Colonial calculations weighed heavily against the local Arabs, especially as they were not a fully sedentarized population but lived in tents, and as their customary rights were greatly attached to grazing and usufruct unrelated to cultivation. Exemplary of their unimportance before the state, the local Arabs were

⁹² Forman and Kedar, "Colonialism, Colonization, and Land Law," p. 506, 508, 511-513, 515.

absent from the terms of the Kabbara Concession itself, save for a single reference to their potential employment on the properties under the new proprietors. During the process of assessing claims which followed the locals' rejection of the concession, the Bedouin were found to have moral rights in the Zor al-Zarqa and Barrat Qisarya lands, but in contrast to the Beisan case, this was seen as insufficient to maintain their continued residency and usufruct. The Colonial Office hedged at the Palestine administration's initial haste to be done with the Arab residents, but it subsequently granted approval for expropriation as a last resort. However, after the third commission of inquiry (in December 1922) found that the Arab residents had rights pertaining to those lands that had been cultivated and recommended their excision from the Kabbara Concession, the locals dug their heels in and their representatives called in writing for the agreement to be scrapped. Short of voluntary agreement to the new dispensation, the state then moved to intimidate the residents, warning that compensation would be greater in the cases of those who acceded to the concession and minimal otherwise. By mid-1924 the government began to make good on its threats and, after initiating expropriation measures, the 'Arab al-Ghawarneh capitulated and agreed to a negotiated exit. The following year the 'Arab al-Kabbara also cut a deal that acquiesced to the state's reallocation of their lands. The 'Arab al-Dumayri and the 'Arab Barrat Qisarya, on the other hand, refused to relent, and their continued resistance to dispossession and compensation kept the 32,000 dunams of Barrat Qisarya largely out of the PJCA's hands until 1948.⁹³

⁹³ Ibid., p. 514-32; Bunton, *Colonial Land Policy*, p. 175. See also the full discussion in Bunton, p. 171-433

While the administration's assertions of state domain met opposition from the local Arab inhabitants, the land market proved an easier arena in which to advance its dual agenda of aiding Zionist colonization and promoting intensive development. Again, two exemplary cases will illuminate the dynamics that colonial rule set in play concerning the erosion of Arab tenancy, in spite of nominal efforts by the British to prevent landlessness.

Immediately following the reopening of the land registries in 1920 Zionist purchasing organs went in search of big game, which they quickly found in the form of the vast Sursuq lands.⁹⁴ An initial agreement for a sale of 70,000 dunams in the Marj Ibn 'Amir to the Palestine Land Development Company (PLDC), an arm of the JNF, was followed by subsequent agreements that by 1925 amounted to over 200,000 dunams. The settlements that the Zionist movement subsequently built there were regarded by Arthur Ruppin, a member of the Zionist Executive and a leading figure in land acquisition, as the movement's "crowning achievement," and served as the core of agricultural colonization in the 1920s.⁹⁵ Collectively the lands were home to 22 Arab villages which paid one-fifth of their annual yields as rent, though none of them had a written contract with their Lebanese landlords.⁹⁶ Ruppin later testified before the Shaw Commission that the purchases in the Marj Ibn 'Amir displaced some 700-800 tenants – a figure accepted by some scholarly works.⁹⁷ However, the expert witness for the Arab

190.

⁹⁴ See the previous chapter for background.

⁹⁵ Alex Bein, *The Return to the Soil*, trans. Israel Schen (Jerusalem: Youth and Hechalutz Dept. of the Zionist Organization, 1952), p. 308. The quote is Bein's, not Ruppin's.

⁹⁶ Shaw Commission report, p. 117.

⁹⁷ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 88.

Executive before the Shaw Commission, Salim Farah, an agricultural engineer, put the number of families displaced by the purchases at 1746, with the total number of individuals affected at 8730.⁹⁸ The JNF and the PLDC were careful to try to make the transfer agreeable to tenants and afforded them monetary compensation, with the exception of one village, Ma‘lul, where residents were left 2000 dunams by the Sursuqs and given a lease with option to buy on 3000 dunams by the JNF.⁹⁹ Again, the rosy scenario which Zionists communicated to the administration concerning the transfer of the *marj* was punctured by Mr. Farah’s testimony, who contended that many of the region’s residents had not resettled in the district, as Ruppin claimed, but had dispersed. Some emigrated abroad, some “scattered” elsewhere in Palestine, while others worked temporarily in construction. He also noted that the Bedouin who were accustomed to using lands in the vicinity were cut off by the new owners.¹⁰⁰ Although the mass dispossession of the 22 Arab villages was arguably illegal under the LTO, which forbade mass evictions, the Arab Executive’s objections to the transfer were dismissed and the state, rather remarkably, saw no reason for concern for peasant tenancy in the matter. On the contrary, in a logical non-sequitur, both the state and the Shaw Commission were taken by the JNF’s compensation package, amounting to £P 30,000, regarding it as

⁹⁸ Shaw Commission report, p. 118; al-Shuqayri, *‘Arba‘un ‘aman*, p. 121.

⁹⁹ Porath states that the tenants were given temporary leases by the JNF, but none of the supporting documentation he cites dates to the first half of the 1920s. He quickly passes on to discussing how the tenants preferred monetary compensation, so the status of any short-term Arab tenancies under the JNF in the Marj Ibn ‘Amir is obscure. By 1930 if not earlier the JNF was working to rid itself of remaining Arab tenants in the area, such as at Ma‘lul (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 88-89).

¹⁰⁰ Ghazi Falah enumerates at least nine different Bedouin groups which frequented the *marj*. See *The Role of the British Administration in the Sedentarization of the Bedouin Tribes in Northern Palestine, 1918-1948* (Durham, England: Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, U. of Durham, 1983), p. 6.

generous and viewing it, as the JNF no doubt intended, as effectively extinguishing any concern for tenancy or customary rights.¹⁰¹

The second purchase that may serve as an example here, that at Wadi al-Hawarith, has already been discussed in chapters 2 and 3.¹⁰² It may be recalled that the Wadi al-Hawarith lands on the Palestine coast were bought by the JNF after a forced sale at auction in 1929. As at Zor al-Zarqa and Barrat Qisarya, the native inhabitants were Bedouin, who, in the eyes of the colonial state, were the not most efficient users of their real estate. Their considerable resistance to the sale and the eviction proceedings which began the same year became a *cause célèbre* in the Palestinian press and in activist circles and occasioned the involvement of nationalist activists (especially between 1931-33) in the Bedouins' struggle to remain on their lands and to resist eviction. The state and the JNF worked anxiously to quiet the unrest raised by the eviction threat and find some way of ameliorating the situation, including through provision of a segment of the *wadi* to the Bedouin tenants under lease (from the JNF), but these moves did little to keep the controversy from turning into a political firestorm which dragged on for four years until the final evictions were completed in late 1933. As the Shaw Commission vividly observed, even resettlement options, were they available, would probably be inadequate and moreover would make it "likely that the tribe will lose its identity as a tribe and become a scattered community." It was precisely such a fear, as the

¹⁰¹ Shaw Commission report, p. 117-18; Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p. 96-97; *All That Remains*, p. 347. Making matters more complicated, it appears possible that the only recipients of the compensation package were the 700-800 tenants cited by Ruppin, leaving the balance of the plain's population, who were not counted as displaced by Zionist authorities, likely to have received nothing, or perhaps a short-term lease on their former lands or some other parcel in the plains. None of the existing secondary accounts sufficiently clarify this matter, and I am without primary materials that would do so.

¹⁰² See chapter 2 for primary background.

Commission also noted specifically in relation to the Marj Ibn ‘Amir and Wadi al-Hawarith purchases, that resounded throughout the Arab countryside and led in the early 1930s to increased resistance to the state on the part of dispossessed villagers and peasants and consequently to increased deployment of force by authorities in carrying out eviction proceedings.¹⁰³

The state’s commitment to building the land base of the Zionist movement had indirect knock-on effects, chief among which was skyrocketing rents, which accentuated financial pressure on those lacking legal title. Although the British regime passed an ordinance in 1921 barring the raising of rent, this statute went ignored and unenforced. As seen above in the case of the Marj Ibn ‘Amir, rent on the Sursuq lands was 20 percent of the crop. By 1930 the most common rent found by the Johnson-Crosbie Committee was 30 percent of the crop, with the tenant paying the tithe. An alternate arrangement was to deliver 40 percent of the crop to the landowner, who was then responsible for the tithe. The monetization of rents didn’t help the tenant’s position. Hope Simpson calculated that at a median rate of 150 mils per dunam rent would equal nearly half (47 percent) of gross income at then-current prices. Most startling of all was the rise in rates for areas near Jewish colonies. The value of lands adjacent to Zionist settlements grew rapidly, and this was reflected in the increased rents that were demanded from tenant occupants. Rents escalated in some cases by as much as 100 percent over a three year period. This rate cited by Hope Simpson is from the period 1927-30, which preceded the period of widespread smallholder sales, exponentially increasing land values, and

¹⁰³ Shaw Commission report, p. 119. On the changing nature of land struggles and the land question’s impact on Palestinian politics, see also chapters 2 and 3.

speculation that followed in the early 1930s. Given the paucity of data collected on the swiftly changing rates, the picture we have is incomplete. But the strong upward curve in rent under the British, and the fact that local sales to Zionist bodies accelerated in the period directly following that covered by the Johnson-Crosbie and Hope Simpson reports, indicates that the trend likely deepened.¹⁰⁴

As soaring rents displaced peasants, lands proximate to Jewish colonies became more attractive for Zionist purchase. The absence of tenants simplified the task of land transfer for all parties involved by alleviating the obligation, nominal as it was, of protecting peasant tenancies. More generally, the rising tide of rent meant a further loss of position for those within the agrarian economy with the most tenuous connection to land, and for an unknown number, precipitated their physical dispossession and possibly their exit from the rural sphere altogether. Despite this, and the emergence of a trend towards urbanization in the coastal ports that was clearly driven (in part) by a flow of emigration from rural areas, the state did nothing to address spiking rents in the countryside until introducing new controls in the amended Protection of Cultivators Ordinance of 1933 (discussed below).

From the preceding accounts regarding purported state lands and the alienation of lands to Zionist bodies through the market it is evident that the British fears of creating a landless class had little actual impact on their handling of major property claims and land transactions. While owing in large part to the tenacity of the rural population the outcomes in each case may not have been what the state intended or what Zionists hoped

¹⁰⁴ Hope Simpson report, p. 50; Peel Commission report, p. 224. Monetary rents were found by Hope Simpson to range between 50-250 mils per dunam.

for, they demonstrate collectively the low regard of British administrators and officials for peasant tenancy and customary ownership and the state's general preference and support for Zionist land acquisition. This is arguably more so the case as concerns Bedouin populations, whose means of livelihood and ways of life often appear to have been scorned and derided more than the rest of the Arab public, owing to their slender involvement in agrarian pursuits.¹⁰⁵ Consequently their customary rights were treated as even more disposable than those of other Arabs lacking documented land titles. It is worth underscoring that in many cases peasants acted to defend their claims and customary rights on properties without initial direction or involvement from national elites or middle class nationalists, and that when other strata of Palestinian society became champions of their struggles higher class elements did not simply take charge. In the Barrat Qisarya case, for instance, the Arab attorney Wadi' al-Bustani who represented the Bedouin attempted to convince his clients in 1924 to settle on government terms for leases to fractions of their customary domains, but they rejected his advice.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, despite the solidarity exhibited by the Youth Congress, communists, and nationalist activists, there is little evidence to demonstrate that external actors had sway over the Wadi al-Hawarith Arabs, as much as they may have attempted to assist them and fortify their will to resist eviction.

¹⁰⁵ Given the colonial tendency to see Bedouin as "true" Arabs, in contrast to the settled population, this is one of the many ironies of the British record vis-à-vis the countryside.

¹⁰⁶ As Forman and Kedar discuss, al-Bustani was between a legal rock and a hard place at the time, being prevented from going to court owing to a libel verdict against him (by an Arab newspaper) which he was then appealing. His vulnerability was exploited by AG Bentwich and the state, which pressed to reach a settlement during the period that he was incapable of fulfilling his clients' needs inside the courtroom ("Colonialism, Colonization, and Land Law," p. 525-27).

A primary source of resisting state claims to land and the Zionist project of building a territorial base was the obstinate will of peasants who feared or faced dispossession by foreigners. Just as in the early period of Zionist settlement, peasant resistance during the early Mandate to encroachment on their customary lands and the regions in which they were situated called the attention of Arab society to the state's transformative and alien agenda, and proved to be a critical factor in the state's handling of the land disputes that it helped touch off. This is not to say that peasant resistance truly gave the state pause, though on occasion it did. Administrators were at least as likely, however, to see the *fellahin* as wily thieves and "trespassers" intent on filching "state lands" and infringing on the "public interest," which somehow, by another feat of colonial prestidigitation and inversion, never substantively included the indigenous population.¹⁰⁷ The state continued, for example, to extend its claims to unregistered parcels of land even when this impeded the growth and expansion of villages.¹⁰⁸ This curious definition of the public interest as principally concerning the state and the Zionist movement was visible in the state's thrusts towards reconfiguring the Ottoman land code and its selective adoption and rejection of elements of the old land regime. As Forman and Kedar have insightfully noted, the colonial administration's specious prosecution of the public interest put itself and the Zionist movement "on the side of 'law,' whereas the indigenous population-turned-trespassers were branded as obstacles"

¹⁰⁷ Ghandour quotes Dowson articulating this view, after noting an estimate that up to one-third of Palestine was potentially *mawat* land: "While the permanent retention in the hands of the State of a considerable proportion of the land of the country is of questionable desirability, it is clearly a culpable neglect of national interests to allow hundreds of thousands of acres of public land to be simply stolen" (*A Discourse on Domination*, p. 63).

¹⁰⁸ Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 179.

to that interest.¹⁰⁹ The inability of the state and the Zionist movement to treat Palestine as a *tabula rasa* in terms of land, and the troubles which peasant resistance engendered for their planning, did not alter their basic perceptions as to the weakness of peasant claims to tenure. Nor did it affect their shared conviction that fostering Zionist development was the most surefire way of raising the land's productivity and output, which were seen not only as cardinal in importance, but integral to establishing proper and rightful ownership.

Concerning the issue of Palestinian sales to Zionist entities remarked upon in the preceding chapter, it should be noted that almost 86.5 percent of the land purchases compiled by Granott for the period 1920-27 derive from a small number of transactions in the Marj Ibn 'Amir, the Zebulun Valley (in the Haifa-Acre region) and Qusqus-Tab'un (Haifa subdistrict). Most of these lands were alienated by foreign absentee Arab owners, the Sursuq family chief among them.¹¹⁰ Though the inconclusive character of the data available must hedge the extent to which firm conclusions can be drawn, the comparison of foreign-owned to Palestinian sales in these early years under the British is telling. Using the same figures, large Palestinian owners are recorded as selling 46,155 dunams at the time, while peasants were responsible for a mere 7160 dunams, or 15.2 percent and 2.4 percent respectively of the total for which Granott's data set covers. These numbers offer some perspective on the scale of Palestinian land sales to Jewish

¹⁰⁹ "Colonialism, Colonization, and Land Law," p. 528. The authors offer this comment in relation to the specific dispute they discuss, but it is, as I have suggested here, more generally applicable.

¹¹⁰ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 83-84, 88. In his discussion of land purchasing in the 1920s Stein provides a useful table documenting title possession in the Marj Ibn 'Amir and associated areas (including Qusqus-Tab'un) before the JNF acquisition (*The Land Question*, p. 60).

entities, which was probably smaller than has been suggested by Zionist-leaning accounts.¹¹¹

Though the short account here of the Marj Ibn ‘Amir purchases is synthetic, I believe it nonetheless provides grounds for an instructive revision of a Zionist contention, articulated in representative fashion by Porath, that Zionist land acquisition focused first on “desolate or half-desolate land,” and only upon exhaustion of such “sparsely inhabited parts of the country” turned towards more densely settled areas.¹¹² That 22 villages had to be emptied of their inhabitants, whether immediately or over a period of some years, illustrates precisely that there were no substantial tracts of unclaimed arable land. As treated in the preceding chapter, Zionist colonization invited opposition from the earliest years of colonial settlement by peasants and tenants who were displaced by Jewish land purchasing entities. Under the British the contours of the colonization process changed, and the Zionists found a supportive if overbearing ally in their endeavors. The fact that in the *marj* tenants largely accepted compensation and relocation, or simply recognized *force majeure* and departed to make their living elsewhere, should not obfuscate the scale of the disruption entailed. Zionist possession of this immense fertile plain meant that its Arab inhabitants had to be ejected, and this was what transpired. Jewish settlements replaced Arab villages almost one for one numerically, with 23 eventually dotting the same lands previously “sparsely inhabited”

¹¹¹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 83-84. All calculations made here use Granott’s data in Porath, which he notes also resemble the figures of Arthur Ruppin. Stein is probably the biggest offender in exaggerating the extent of Palestinian land sales. This is done mostly at a rhetorical as opposed to statistical level, concentrating on the topic at length and repeatedly throughout *The Land Question*, yet without adequate context for the sales other than the suggestion, noted previously, that Palestinian nationalism was a weak basis for social action.

¹¹² Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 80, 84.

by the indigenous population¹¹³ – and this is not to mention the Bedouin populations which had frequented the area that now found it closed to them. In some areas, such as a stretch in the Western region of the *marj* which became the Nahalal bloc, settlers even moved into the homes of departing Arabs, taking them as habitations until later building new homes.¹¹⁴ Although Zionist leaders, especially among the Labor parties, depicted Jewish land purchase as an exercise of righteous liberation, securing the “deliverance of the *fellahin* from their feudal lords,”¹¹⁵ a more sober portrait of the effects of colonization is found in the removal and replacement of Arab inhabitants by Jewish colonists.

Zionist purchasing, moreover, did not strategically prioritize less-inhabited lands, so much as building, especially under the JNF, “a sort of skeleton of Jewish Districts.”¹¹⁶ In other words, and as is well known, territorial contiguity became a central aim of Zionist land acquisition, which proceeded irrespective of the existing geography of Arab settlement and land use. The example of the Marj Ibn ‘Amir purchases, regarded by the British and by Zionists as a model of humane action and propriety, illuminates the immanent conflict between the agenda of establishing territorial contiguity between Jewish colonies and maintaining peasant tenure. It is little surprise that in succeeding

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 88.

¹¹⁴ Bein, *Return to the Soil*, p. 301. The same took place at the colony of Tel ‘Adashim. Arab dwellings were seen as unsuitable by the colonists, and the necessity of using them was regarded by the new inhabitants as a substantial hardship.

¹¹⁵ Tamari, “From the Fruits,” p. 83. This is Tamari’s apt description of Granott’s argument.

¹¹⁶ Abraham [Avraham] Granott, “The Strategy of Land Acquisition” in Walid Khalidi, ed., *From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem until 1948* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1971), p. 391.

years, and especially during the revolt, the area was targeted by rebels, who harassed and attacked its colonies with great regularity.

Funding the occupation regime: peasants, regressive taxation, and the state

Unlike the case of the land regime, the British occupation authorities were not quick to disturb and revise the agrarian tax system that they inherited from the Ottoman empire. The Ottoman tax code was a patchwork of separate imposts, largely based in rural extraction, which had grown heavier in the last decades of the old order. Despite the instability of the Ottoman system, which was tethered to fluctuating crop-yields through the tithe, the British maintained and amplified it, increasing the strain it placed on peasants by regularizing collections. By the end of the 1920s the heavy burden of taxation, combined with several other factors including skyrocketing land rents, falling prices for local agricultural staples, the absence of credit facilities, and tariff policies that were favorable to Zionist industries and corrosive of peasant interests, led to the economic ruin of a sizable segment of the peasantry.¹¹⁷ At such time, the tithe ceased being collectible and was later replaced by a new land tax, while interest in customs receipts, which had dwarfed other taxes almost from the start of the Mandate, overshadowed prior concerns with managing rural sources of revenue.¹¹⁸ While the

¹¹⁷ As will be explored in the next chapter, peasants grappled with these obverse circumstances in a number of fashions, including through participation in a myriad of sharecropping arrangements, increased labor migration, and relocation to urban slums in the coastal cities of Jaffa and Haifa in search of wage labor.

¹¹⁸ Smith writes that customs only came to play a role in state revenues equal to that had in other colonies' budgets at the end of the 1920s (*Roots of Separatism*, p. 38), yet this is contradicted by figures provided in the Peel Commission report (p. 206). Still, the numbers are not the whole story, and following Smith's

lodestone of regressive, direct rural taxation unwittingly helped bring about the growth of a restive and desperate lumpenproletariat, the change in focus to customs had the ironic effect of further isolating the colonial state from the concerns of the *fellahin* and tying its operation more tightly to the financial growth of the *yishuv*, which proceeded largely at the expense of the Arab peasantry. The 1929 uprising shook the colonial order into recognition, in some quarters, of the slippery basis of rule in the rural districts and of the problematic nature of orienting policy almost solely around the interests of the Zionist movement. Yet British measures to alleviate the crises afflicting rural Arab society proved too little, too late.

Making matters worse for the Arabs, state budgets not only relied on regressive taxation during the first decade of colonial rule, but were continually weighted heavily towards the security forces with miniscule allocations to social services, public works, or development. Indeed, Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill in 1922 brusquely informed High Commissioner Samuel that his hopes for devoting significant capital expenditure to development purposes (principally for the Jewish National Home) did not conform with imperial priorities, and that the “people of Palestine should not be led to form any exaggerated hopes of a large Government programme of cultural and economic development.”¹¹⁹ As a Colonial Office official bluntly minuted in 1923, for the authorities in London raising tax revenues was of the utmost priority and all else was of secondary importance:

suggestion it can be observed that great emphasis was placed on the tithe as a category of revenue until the 1930s.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p. 51. On Samuel’s early plans for development in Palestine, see *ibid.*, p. 51-53 and Huneidi, *A Broken Trust*, p. 122-24 and 192-229.

Expenditure must be worked out as a whole and must be brought down to the lowest possible figure compatible with decent Government... *the country must be taxed up to the hilt* and if there is anything beyond essential expenditure it must be decided on general principles whether the burden of taxation is to be lightened, or expenditure which is not essential but which is desirable, should be incurred.¹²⁰

Although the fiscal conservatism of the British empire at the time led colonial officials to exalt minimizing expenditure, according to the Arab Executive, the Mandate built a behemoth in place of the Ottoman state, with an administration that was an alleged eight times the size of its predecessor.¹²¹ To my knowledge we have no way of verifying this claim, but it is clear that the modern state structure erected by the British authorities was of an unprecedented scale. From its origin, the character of the Mandate as a regime of foreign occupation and a colonial security state was readily visible in state budgets. Expenditures on education and health were vastly outpaced by the allocations devoted to “security” (military forces, police, and prisons). The colossal sums eaten up by the postwar garrison of military forces only tapered off sluggishly over the decade, remaining as high as £E 1.5 million in 1923/24.¹²² Nonetheless, the security component of state budgets did decline over the 1920s from a post-war high of over £E 3 million in

¹²⁰ Quoted in Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p. 54 (my emphasis). In the early years of the civil administration the state was impelled by a revenue crunch, which certainly shaped its attitude towards the battery of rural taxes inherited from the Ottomans (Smith, *The Roots of Separatism*, p. 54-55).

¹²¹ AE, Memorandum on the White Paper of 1930 (prepared by ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi), December 1930, p. 3-4, PRO – FO 371/15326.

¹²² Peel Commission report, p. 186. Palestine was put on the Egyptian pound (£E) in January 1921 before introducing its own currency in 1927. The Egyptian pound was slightly less valuable than the British version, exchangeable at a ratio of £E 1: £.975 (or 97.5 piasters). The Palestine pound was introduced at the value of the British pound. On currency questions, see Hakim and el-Hussayni, “Monetary and Banking System,” p. 445-457. The Peel Commission report does not distinguish in which currency the expenditures were denominated, so I have used the time-appropriate specie.

1921/22 to just over £P 562,000 in 1929, after which it returned to an upward trend.¹²³ In 1928 and 1929, when military forces were reduced to a minimum (before the 1929 events), security costs were equivalent to 17.4 percent and 26.3 percent of the annual budgets, respectively.¹²⁴ In comparison, combined health and education expenditures amounted to 7 percent of total outlays in 1928 and 11.3 percent in 1929.¹²⁵ Beginning in fiscal year 1930, the allocations associated with security rose to around one-third of the state budget and remained in this vicinity in succeeding years until spiking in 1936 during the revolt.¹²⁶ Even in times of “quiet,” it was clear that the budget was devoted foremost to the police and prisons, which were typically its largest expense heading. This reality was hardly lost on the Arab population, which viewed the state’s “exorbitant expenditures” on its repressive and military apparatuses as derivative of the imperial commitment to the Jewish National Home.¹²⁷

The practice of taxing the country “to the hilt” – really the countryside in the first decade – and spending little in the way of social amenities was the state’s hallmark in the rural districts. The colonial emphasis on “preserving” the social order and avoiding “unnecessary changes” led to inequity in expenditures and priorities, as services afforded

¹²³ Peel Commission report, p. 185, 188. The nadir of spending was the 1926/27 fiscal year, during which the heading consumed over £E 491,000 (ibid., p. 188).

¹²⁴ *Report to the League of Nations, 1932*, appendix II, p. 146. It should be noted that the relatively low percentages for security headings (and education and health) in 1928 owed to an unusually large payment on the state’s debt that year (over £P 820,000 compared to less than one-eighth of this sum in 1929), which skewed the picture of recurrent finances.

¹²⁵ Ibid. The combined total for both headings for 1928 was £P 235,696 and for 1929, £P 241,653.

¹²⁶ Ibid; Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 99.

¹²⁷ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 34; Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p. 58. Quote from Darwaza. I don’t mean to suggest here that Palestine’s “security” expenditures were exceptional among the Mandates or other colonial regimes, as they weren’t, but rather that their presumed linkage to the Jewish National Home policy made them and their outsize place within state budgets all the more conspicuous. For a regional comparison, see Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 15.

by the state in urban areas were withheld from the countryside. This included the core social components of the state budget, education and health provision, which rural regions were often expected to finance separately on their own, while continuing to pay the lion's share of direct taxes.¹²⁸

In its first incarnation, British fiscal policy relied on the principal instruments inherited from the Ottoman tax code, which was composed of three main levies: *'ushr*, the tithe on agrarian produce, *werko*, a tax on immovable property including land and buildings, and the *aghnam*, a head tax on animals. While the rural majority faced up to three annual levies, the smaller urban population paid only *werko*, the assessments for which had lapsed prior to the war and were mostly outdated.¹²⁹ This meant that not only was the countryside subject to vastly higher rates of direct taxation, but since most Jews lived in urban areas and the great bulk of the Arabs lived on the land, the latter bore an unequal share of the direct tax burden in the first decade or more of British rule.¹³⁰

The tithe was the centerpiece of the system and the most important category of direct taxation until the latter 1920s. It consisted of a levy on the gross yield of agricultural goods, traditionally equal, as the Arabic name denotes, to one-tenth of the

¹²⁸ Miller, *Government and Society*, p. 72.

¹²⁹ Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 140. Bunton argues that the "poor functioning" of the *werko*, which was not systematically reassessed by the British but only updated on properties being sold, left the tithe to as the primary form of direct taxation (p. 141). The neglect of the *werko* is further indicative of the imbalance between Arabs and Jews in terms of direct taxation, given that there is some evidence that *werko* returns on Jewish properties had previously been of significant value. In the Ottoman district of Haifa in 1909 (1327 A.H.), for instance, Jewish *werko* payments amounted to over 257,000 *qurush* (piasters), a sum comparable to Haifa's municipal budget for the year of 300,000 *qurush* (al-Tamimi and Bahjat, *Wilayat Bayrut*, v.1, p. 235, 241). Hence the lapsing of this tax under the British represented a lowering of possibly the most significant direct levy on the Jewish population.

¹³⁰ Owen notes that by the mid-1930s three-quarters of the Jewish population was urban, while the same proportion of the Arab population remained on the land ("Economic Development in Mandatory Palestine: 1918-1948," in G.T. Abed, ed., *The Palestinian Economy: Studies in Development under Prolonged Occupation* (London: Toutledge, 1988), p. 15).

crop; however, over the last decades of Ottoman rule it had been successively raised, reaching a rate of 12.63 percent. Under the Ottoman regime collection of the tithe had been sold as tax farms, which tended to allow the wealthier elements to control and manipulate their own assessments while increasing those of the rest of the population. The British attempted to streamline the tithe by eliminating the tax farming system, thereby delivering a blow to the former *multazims* (tax farmers) and reducing a layer of mediation between the state and the producers. Nevertheless, the colonial administration remained reliant on local intermediaries. Crop assessments were conducted by government agents in conjunction with local representatives, and it was then the job of the *mukhtars* to deliver the receipts in cash, for which they were paid a 2 percent stake.¹³¹

Collecting taxes on produce was not seen as an ideal system by the administration, as state receipts were rendered dependent on highly variable agricultural harvests and fluctuating commodity prices. From early on colonial administrators evinced a strong desire to convert the tax system to one based in land, rather than on crops. As it was commonly construed, this ambition would require settling title to the whole of the lands of Palestine, a process which, as reviewed above, was laden with such an immensity of challenges that by the latter 1920s and early 1930s, the state had come to view taxation on the growing urban population as holding brighter prospects.¹³²

The process of tithe collection was burdensome to all involved and turned the avowed British aspiration for bringing efficiency and precision to government on its

¹³¹ Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p. 40-41; Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 141.

¹³² Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 132; 158-59.

head. Far from establishing uniform standards and removing intermediaries, the British method was intimately tied to personal, not impartial, evaluations, and was greatly open to manipulation and irregularity. The greatest flaw was probably in the assessment process, as the District Commissioner for the North bitingly intimated in 1926:

I have frequently invited the village representatives, the paid estimator, the paid inspector, and the District Officer, and occasionally also the treasury expert, to estimate a given heap. In not a single instance have the quantities guessed at been identical, while the percentages varied from 10 per cent to 70 per cent. Not only is estimation merely guess-work, but an estimator's guesses are deliberately increased or decreased. An evening's entertainment by the village as a whole, by a particular family or by an individual, is sufficient inducement to the estimator or to the inspector to guess moderately in favor of his host.

Peasants also tried to evade and lower assessments by hiding a portion of their crops or by arranging them in deceptive fashions (packing down the produce on the lower layers of their piles). The utter lack of standardization and regularization in crop assessment left the tithe wide open to corruption and rendered it a highly arbitrary system, one which some administrators ultimately viewed as an immoral basis for revenue generation.¹³³

Despite the flawed assessment system, the machinery of tithe collection under the Mandate allowed the state to inflate its claims on agricultural produce and to compel peasants into uneconomic and damaging behavior. Before the institution of the commuted tithe in 1928, the assessment process could last six months, and the delay in bringing crops to market caused significant losses.¹³⁴ For the great majority without

¹³³ Ibid., p. 143-44, including the quote from DC-Northern.

¹³⁴ Memorandum, Commissioner of Lands to the Acting Chief Secretary, 12.5.31, PRO – CO 733/207/6. Peasants were compelled to pay for storage of their crops until assessments were completed, and if their yields were placed under lien for debt, they were additionally responsible for paying guards to watch over

liquid reserves or savings, the necessity of paying the tithe after completion of the assessment then trapped them into accepting lower rates for their goods, which they disposed of while relative surpluses, including from imports, clogged the markets.¹³⁵ In spite of this, the government fixed redemption prices for its share of the crop at top values, above their actual market rates at the time of sale, in effect increasing the quantity of tax claimed by the state.¹³⁶ The state's overstatement of prices could be quite dramatic, as the Johnson-Crosbie Committee and Hope Simpson inquiry illustrated in their 1930 reports. Taking a sample of 104 villages, the Johnson-Crosbie Committee estimated their annual gross revenues from field crops at £P 483,600. Hope Simpson, who carried out his study subsequent to the Johnson-Crosbie Committee, adjusted the prices used in his predecessors' calculations to actual market rates, arriving at a considerably lower figure of £P 306,043. The Johnson-Crosbie Committee, which had been established to survey the state of the peasantry and agricultural conditions in the country, ironically demonstrated the state's penchant for leaning on the *fellahin* and the rural sector, overestimating the state's claim to the sample villages' income from crops other than fruit trees by a staggering margin of 58 percent.¹³⁷ By the late 1920s if not

the crop (Mahmoud Yazbak, "From Poverty to Revolt: Economic Factors in the Outbreak of the 1936 Rebellion in Palestine," *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 36, n. 3 (July 2000), p. 97).

¹³⁵ On imports, see below.

¹³⁶ After assessments were made, the government calculated the value of its claimed share according to redemption prices – its official version of the going rates of commodities in the markets – that were set by the Revenue Department (Smith, *Root of Separatism*, p. 40-41). The tax was then paid in cash, according to the value arrived at not through actual market sales, but according to the government's stipulated and artificially inflated rates for commodity prices.

¹³⁷ It should be noted that both of these examinations were conducted after the tithe was reformed and its replacement, the commuted tithe, instituted in 1928. As discussed below, this reform in fact did more damage to the peasantry. Owing to the general slump in prices at the time, some fruit crops, including olives, were also vastly overestimated in value. Hope Simpson notes that Johnson-Crosbie quoted a ton of olive oil at £P 53, when the market rate at the time was £P 33 (report, p. 49).

earlier, however, the state's gaming of the tithe system reached a point at which its levies were more fantasy than reality, as peasants repeatedly proved unable to pay the tax, arrears mounted, and ultimately the state began to remit large portions of the tithe.¹³⁸

Although taxation was often seen as an index of the state's authority, the tithe was not universally viewed with favor. In 1924 the Director of the Agriculture Department objected to it as a drain on the rural economy, referring to it as an "insuperable obstacle" to development.¹³⁹ As a tax on gross (rather than net) returns, and with the colonial state's rampant manipulation of redemption prices and outsize assessments of yields, the actual rate of the tithe was well above the formal percentage, and as a function of net incomes it was substantially larger yet. By one evaluation, it was estimated in the 1920s at approximately 35 percent of average net cash income.¹⁴⁰ Later, in 1931 after the official tithe rate had been dropped to 10 percent, the Commissioner of Lands estimated that it was still equal to 30-33 percent or more of the *fellah's* net income.¹⁴¹

Owing to both its heavy burden on the peasantry and its symbolic meaning in liberal democratic politics, taxation was quickly made the target of remonstrations by the Arab population. In 1920 there was a tax boycott in Beisan.¹⁴² Several years later in 1923, after the Mandate had been ratified, a swell of antipathy to taxation crested in the

¹³⁸ Yazbak, "From Poverty to Revolt," p. 97-98; Hope Simpson report, p. 49. On the death of the tithe, see below.

¹³⁹ Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 144.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p. 41; M.F. Abcarius, "The Fiscal System," in *Economic Organization*, p. 516.

¹⁴¹ Memoranda, Commissioner of Lands to Acting Chief Secretary, 11.5.31 and 12.5.31, PRO – CO 733/207/6.

¹⁴² Fakher Eldin, "Communities of Owners," p. 90.

press, and the idea of a tax strike was seized upon by advocates of Palestinian rights as preferable to continued representations to British authorities. At the sixth Palestinian Arab Congress in June of the same year, Jamal al-Husayni argued at length for non-payment of taxes, contending that Arab taxes were being funneled to the Zionist cause and that the absence of government credit was crushing the *fellahin*. The slogan “no taxation without representation” was raised, but internal disagreements over the proposed policy sent the motion down to defeat.¹⁴³ Kayyali notes that the opposition to taxation and to the tithe was widespread, as various government reports from the time attested to, and that Jamal Effendi’s position was appreciated throughout the country.¹⁴⁴ In 1925, after continued friction, the colonial administration dropped the tithe rate to 10 percent.¹⁴⁵

Shortly after the tithe was lowered, in 1926, the committee overseeing its operation recommended that a new system be implemented both in order to rid the government of the cumbersome and expensive assessment process and to curb the losses that the system caused peasants to incur. The new standard of agricultural taxation, known as the commuted tithe, was approved in 1927 and implemented in most regions in

¹⁴³ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 118-19. Some of the support for a tax strike came from *Filastin* and its editor, ‘Isa al-‘Isa, and other Christian middle class intellectuals and activists. Those who argued down the proposal were likely to come from the wealthy landed class, which feared it would bear the brunt of the administration’s response (120). The charge by Jamal al-Husayni concerning credit must inevitably also be taken with a grain of salt, since his family was a well-known beneficiary of the 1858 Land Law and had amassed domains in the Jerusalem region, thereby making it one of the insufficient sources of local credit about which he complained (Manna’, *Tarikh Filastin*, p. 192).

¹⁴⁴ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 120. Jamal Effendi had, previous to the sixth Congress, told the High Commissioner that he was against a tax strike (p. 118).

¹⁴⁵ Yazbak, “From Poverty to Revolt,” p. 97.

1928.¹⁴⁶ It was based on an average of the cash value of the four preceding years of tithes, which was thought a reasonable means by which to arrive at a fixed assessment. The commuted tithe was also officially billed as an incentive booster, since additional production and higher yields would no longer add to the producer's tax bill. Though it was seen as a reform and was reported by the High Commissioner to have worked smoothly in its first years, in truth it represented a gain in state efficiency without offering peasants substantial relief from the rate of taxation. As one District Commissioner pointed out, the "guess-work" and arbitrary quality inherent in the former tithe was preserved and retained in the commuted tithe, though it was camouflaged within an average of previous rates. The commuted tithe quickly gave way to what Yazbak identifies as a "sharper distortion" than the original tithe when agrarian commodity prices dropped in the years after 1927. Between 1924 and 1927 they had already declined, but in the succeeding years they went into freefall, plummeting approximately 50 percent. With the commuted tithe in place, the rate of taxation on agricultural produce held steady while collapsing prices led to lower cash returns for peasants. As the administration's 1929 *Report to the League of Nations* explained: "the fixed redemption prices of the tithe calculated on the natural tithes for the previous three years exceeds the present market price of cereals, with the result that taxation is higher in relation to income than it was in the previous year." This alarming trend deepened in the years of the Great Depression, as commodity prices remained low and rural Palestine

¹⁴⁶ Aside from Bedouin areas in the south, internecine disputes in Nablus, Tulkarm, and Jenin prevented the commuted tithe's operation until 1929, after which only some of the southern Bedouin areas were exempted (Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 146; *Report to the League of Nations*, 1929, p. 11).

was wracked by a succession of poor harvests from 1930-34. The scale of the gulf between official redemption prices under the commuted tithe and actual market prices and producer incomes has been alluded to above with reference to the Johnson-Crosbie Committee's distorted calculations of taxable yields and gross incomes.¹⁴⁷

Aside from exacerbating the tithe's already onerous and unrealistic levels of taxation on the peasantry, the steep fall-off in market prices for common agricultural commodities in the late 1920s brought peasant net incomes to what Hope Simpson bleakly termed the "vanishing point." Where net incomes for owner-cultivators and tenants (sharecroppers) had respectively been estimated on average previously at £P 35.2 and £P 20 per year, in 1930 with contemporaneous prices Hope Simpson found them reduced to averages of £P 11.8 and £P 3.6. Given that during his inquiry he repeatedly heard proposals such as that from a district officer at Jaffa to cancel outright all taxes on those families making less than £P 30 per year net (estimated at over 50 percent in the subdistrict), it is startlingly evident that both owner-cultivators and sharecroppers, with average incomes approximately one-third and one-ninth of this minimum prescription, were experiencing what can only be described as economic ruin.¹⁴⁸

At about the same time as agrarian incomes fell precipitously, the tithe ceased to be a functioning source of state revenue. The already meager and exhausted resources of the bulk of the peasantry were further hit hard as the early 1930s witnessed an unforgiving stretch of poor harvests, owing to climate conditions and pests (mice and

¹⁴⁷ Buntun, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 146-47 (first quote); Yazbak, "From Poverty to Revolt," p. 98 (second quote); *Report to the League of Nations, 1929*, p. 11. Hope Simpson provides an instructive table charting redemption prices on six major Palestinian crops from 1924-27 and their market rates in 1930 (report, appendix 14, p. 174).

¹⁴⁸ Hope Simpson report, p. 50, 52.

locusts), which lasted through 1934. In 1930, the colonial state began a series of remissions of tithes that effectively eviscerated the tax and signaled its death-knell. Over the course of 1930 and 1931 almost £P 300,000 were remitted.¹⁴⁹ In 1932, of a total assessment of £P 246,000, £P 173,000 (71.5 percent) was relinquished.¹⁵⁰ According to Edward Keith-Roach, DC-Northern in the 1930s, during HC Arthur Wauchope's tenure (beginning in 1931), the state relinquished some £P 600,000 in tithes. In his memoir he wrote that the District Commissioners complained of this, but "The whole structure of government was undermined and, eventually, we were unable to collect any rural taxes worth mentioning."¹⁵¹ Keith-Roach's casting of blame on the High Commissioner, however, omitted the obvious reality that the tithe had ceased being collectable, not on account of the state's lack of will, but owing to the greatly diminished earnings of agriculturalists. Its receipts in the early 1930s were proof of this. In 1933, for instance, the total adjusted outstanding tithes (current and arrears, after remissions) was £P 185,028, of which only £P 33,017 (17.8 percent) was collected for the year; and in 1934, the final full year of the tithe, the total adjusted figure amounted to £P 247,208, of which £P 81,349 (32.9 percent) was paid.¹⁵²

Recognizing that the tithe had outlived its utility, the state moved to enact what many in the administration had desired from the outset, a tax based on land, rather than on crop yields. The Rural Property Tax Ordinance was issued in December 1934 and

¹⁴⁹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1931*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁰ *Report to the League of Nations, 1932*, p. 7.

¹⁵¹ Edward Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem: Memoirs of a District Commissioner under the British Mandate* (New York: Radcliffe Press, 1994), p. 131.

¹⁵² *Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 49; *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 51. In 1933, of the original assessment of £P 245,000, £P 193,500, or 79 percent, was waived (*Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 24).

extinguished both the tithe (including the commuted tithe and *'ushr*) and the *werko*. In their stead it imposed a tax on rural land according to a scale of 16 grades based on soil fertility and on the "type of cultivation" (including the specific crops) employed thereon. Sidestepping the ever-fraught arena of legal title, assessors valued rural plots and categorized them according to the new taxonomy, producing a per dunam assessment of annual dues which district officers were responsible for collecting.¹⁵³ The new method effectively ended the collection of an agricultural tax on gross yields, as the scale of land grades was based on an assessment of net product specific to each category within the system.¹⁵⁴ According to the annual *Report to the League of Nations* for the first year of its enactment, 1935, the new rural property tax reduced the assessments of cereals cultivators by up to 70 percent as compared to their former rates under the commuted tithe. Nevertheless, total assessments for the year under the heading were tabulated at £P 220,376, a sum not dissimilar from previous years' tithes.¹⁵⁵ At this point the tithe, under British management, had done its damage, and any relief brought by the new rural property tax was far too late in coming to halt peasant alienation from turning into zealous support for the national rebellion which began scarcely a year after the tithe was finally wound-up in March 1935.

¹⁵³ *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 80. Urban property tax was calculated differently, according to "a rate on net annual value" of properties (*ibid.*). A history of the RPT's origins and a short explanation of its method of assessment appear in *Report to the League of Nations, 1935*, p. 55-58.

¹⁵⁴ Graham-Brown, "The Political Economy of Jabal Nablus," p. 96. See also ft. 8 above.

¹⁵⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1935*, p. 25, 57. The Rural Property Tax Ordinance was effective from 1 April 1935 (p. 55).

Protection for Zionist industry: price shocks and Arab marginalization

The sharp fall in prices in the late 1920s was closely tied to the global economic depression that hit around the same time, but customs and trade policies pursued in the Mandate's first dozen years also contributed to price trends that had negative consequences for the rural Arab population. Over the 1920s the colonial administration gradually adopted a protectionist regimen of tariffs and policies favorable to nascent Jewish industries, such that by the close of the decade Hope Simpson famously observed: "The rest of the population is taxed in order that the proprietors of these industrial concerns may be in a position to pay the wages of their laborers and to make a profit for themselves." A number of key agricultural commodities were exempted from import duties, including primary local crops like wheat and sesame and common processed products such as olive oil and flour. These exemptions were instituted to aid some of the largest local Jewish businesses, the Grands Moulins flour refinery and the Shemen Oil Company, both based in Haifa, by lowering the price of necessary inputs. Conversely, duties were raised on imports of certain commodities, such as salt and cement, to shield Zionist producers from foreign competition. Hope Simpson concluded that a number of the largest Zionist concerns, including Nesher Cement Co. and Shemen Oil, along with other well-known businesses like the Rishon LeTzion and Zihron Ya'akov wineries, were dependent in absolute terms (i.e. for their existence) on the special tariff schedules erected by the state at the behest of Jewish industry.¹⁵⁶

In instituting a protectionist customs policy for Jewish industry the British

¹⁵⁶ Hope Simpson report, p. 78, 81; Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 89.

departed from the former Ottoman system which added a blanket *ad valorem* impost of 11 percent on imports. High Commissioner Samuel began by advocating lower duties for imports of diamonds and industrial machinery and, by the mid-1924, a set of exemptions to the tariff regime began to be effected as an aid to early Zionist industries, which were conceived of as benefiting the overall economy. The exemptions to the schedule of duties were augmented considerably in two ordinances in 1926 and 1927 and thereafter through amendments, following consistent and vociferous campaigning by Zionist agencies. Though aid to Jewish industry was first seen by British officials and administrators as unrelated to the Arab agrarian sphere, Hope Simpson's report subsequently forced them to acknowledge that the manipulation of tariffs played a significant part in damaging Arab agriculturalists. As May Seikaly tidily sums the trade-off up, "By 1930, when a Jewish modern industrial nucleus had taken shape, its corollary was a deteriorating Arab agricultural sector."¹⁵⁷

Warning bells concerning the negative impacts of tariff exemptions on the *fellahin* were sounded considerably earlier, but were disregarded. Edward Sawer, the Director of the Agriculture Department, pointed out in 1926 that the exemptions allowing duty-free sesame and olive oil into the country contradicted his department's initiative to increase local olive production and tree planting, and put sesame growers in a bind.¹⁵⁸ The flow of customs-exempt imports stimulated Zionist industry but had a depressive effect on Arab agriculture. They brought down market prices for local crops,

¹⁵⁷ Graham-Brown, "The Political Economy of Jabal Nablus," p. 97; Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p. 164-66; Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 89.

¹⁵⁸ Graham-Brown, "The Political Economy of Jabal Nablus," p. 97.

reducing Arab peasants' incomes, while swelling the ranks of seasonal labor flows to urban centers.¹⁵⁹ Despite Sawyer's objections, it wasn't until after the violence of 1929 and the agrarian downturn of the 1930 harvest season that the government moved to reimpose a duty on sesame and to ban the importation without prior license of unrefined olive oil, along with wheat, flour, and semolina.¹⁶⁰ By that time, the value of olive oil against its average 1923-27 redemption price had fallen 44 percent, sesame had lost between 20-46 percent of its market value (depending on the district), and wheat prices had dropped 48-50 percent.¹⁶¹ While the incomes of *fellahin* and large growers producing these crops suffered great losses, the Shemen Oil Company, for which the sesame duty had been dropped in 1925, attained viability through the tariff. According to Hope Simpson, Shemen then overproduced oil for the local market, contributing to the fall-off in the value of sesame.¹⁶² Shemen, which manufactured soap as well as oils, was able during the five years of tariff exemption to build market-share in soap both internationally and locally, competing with the renowned olive oil soap of Nablus.¹⁶³ By 1931 Arab soap manufacturing was experiencing difficulties, and by 1933 and 1934 the colonial state made proposals to ameliorate the situation, though these revolved largely around notions of proper branding and improving quality, rather than addressing the effects of prior industrial protectionism.¹⁶⁴ The damage to the Arab soap business, the preeminent proto-industrial concern of Arab Palestine before the Mandate and during its

¹⁵⁹ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 89.

¹⁶⁰ *Report to the League of Nations, 1930*, p. 15.

¹⁶¹ Hope Simpson report, appendix 14, p. 174.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, p. 74, 81.

¹⁶³ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 107; Deborah Bernstein, *Constructing Boundaries: Jewish and Arab Workers in Mandatory Palestine* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 119-120.

¹⁶⁴ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 106; *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 15-16.

early period, sent Nabulsi emigrating to Haifa¹⁶⁵ and symbolized again the colonial state's wanton neglect of Arab interests and its propensity to undermine such in service to Zionism.¹⁶⁶

Special mention must also be made of the colonial state's trade policies concerning wheat. In the fall of 1920, the colonial administration banned the export of cereals and meat, and asserted military control and purview over relevant local contracts. This move, heatedly opposed by grain traders, all but killed their business, which depended on exports of Palestinian cereals, and importation of the same from Morocco and the Sudan later in the year, buying cheap and selling dear. The administration claimed that its purpose was to assure essential foodstuffs, including for a projected influx of Jewish immigrants. In a matter of months the new strictures sent wheat prices crashing to half their value, injuring peasant growers and merchant traders alike. At the time, wheat was far and away the most widely grown crop in Palestine.¹⁶⁷ Members of the AE voiced their objection to the policy before Colonial Secretary Churchill in March 1921 in the following pointed terms:

¹⁶⁵ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 107.

¹⁶⁶ The soap business at Nablus was estimated by Hope Simpson to bring in £P 240,000 annually and to employ 200 workers. The extent of Shemen's intrusion into Nabulsi markets is, as Deborah Bernstein notes, difficult to ascertain. However, it is clear that this was Shemen's intent. Nabulsi soap was known for its purity of craftsmanship and its high quality, and was mixed with dust residue from brick-making to give it a distinctive reddish coloring. Emulating its well-reputed competitor, Shemen injected its own soap with a red pigment to give it a similar appearance. Shemen's competition with Palestinian soap, including that made in the other principle soap-producing areas in Jaffa and Ramle, extended internationally, as both Arab and Jewish products vied for market share. The importance of the international dimension – which may well have outweighed local competition since both Arab and Jewish products carried distinct markings that may have impacted consumption in Palestine (Shemen soap was imprinted with an image of a menorah) – is suggested by the fact that over half of Palestine's exports in 1927-28 were soap, and that up to 40 percent of Shemen's annual production was exported. See: Hope Simpson report, p. 78-79, 83; Bernstein, *Constructing Boundaries*, p. 119-120.

¹⁶⁷ Roger Owen, "Economic Development," p. 20-21.

Palestine is an agricultural country and depends largely on her export of cereals for a living. Now Jewish immigration has raised the cost of living, and the government, in order to keep prices down in the interest of the Jewish consumer has prohibited the export of certain cereals, with the result that the granaries of the land are stocked with products and merchants cannot find an outlet for trade. Consequently a financial crisis set in and hundreds of merchants were bankrupt[ed].

Later that year the controls were abandoned, but by that time the price of wheat in external markets had also dropped off and many merchants still holding reserves were forced to take further losses to dispense with their produce. The effect on peasant owner-cultivators and tenants is difficult to ascertain, but given the steep decline in prices and the damage absorbed by traders, it could hardly have been negligible. The fact that this early debacle in colonial agrarian and trade policies was followed in succeeding years by a broader, multi-faceted program of protectionist tariffs for Zionist industries – induced by successful lobbying and by ample support from high officials in the Palestine administration – speaks volumes about the marginality of peasant livelihoods within the economic calculus of the Mandate.¹⁶⁸

The absence of credit facilities

As has been noted above, World War I left much of the Arab peasantry in or vulnerable to acute financial distress. The British acknowledged this when they closed the land registries, reopening them later, as we have seen, upon encouragement from High Commissioner Samuel. The peculiar situation regarding land records not only

¹⁶⁸ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 105. Grain traders rebounded somewhat from the 1920-21 crisis, but Seikaly notes that local production of cereals continued to decline and by the close of the decade wholesalers could no longer make ends meet from their traditional business and were forced to diversify their enterprises (p. 106-07).

complicated peasant claims to land, but also dampened the likelihood of their receiving credit facilities through the colonial state. As Bunton has pointed out, the colonial rulers saw legal title as a necessary prerequisite for credit.¹⁶⁹ The question of ascertaining landed title was exacerbated by British standards of proof that all but invalidated customary and oral claims, and, despite widespread illiteracy, privileged written title. Those who were most in need of cheap credit were therefore most often deemed by the colonial state and the authorities in London to be without adequate proof to the collateral necessary for a mortgage or long-term credit. On top of the considerable hurdle of proving and attaining creditworthiness, the state failed to carve out a proactive policy on the provision of credit. Ironically, despite the manifest interest of the colonial authorities in boosting agricultural productivity and efficiency, credit was not seriously factored into British visions for stimulating agricultural development.

Government loans to Arab cultivators were unpopular with the Colonial Office from early on, and were generally treated with a great deal of skepticism and handled with reluctance and anxiety.¹⁷⁰ The fiscal constraints upon the Palestine administration and its need to provide its own budget almost exclusively from local sources likewise contributed to rendering the extension of credit facilities to impoverished *fellahin* a low priority. Consequently, in the first 10-12 years of the Mandate there was no institutional development of credit facilities despite the palpable need for such. During this time government extended limited credit in an ad-hoc fashion: it was provided grudgingly in

¹⁶⁹ Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 102.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110-12.

the aftermath of the war, in cases of drought, and under similar circumstances.¹⁷¹ The sums distributed were thus not significant enough to alter the declining position of many peasants living on the margins and were void of any broader design or intention to address the rampant indebtedness of the *fellahin*. As Barabara Smith pointedly concludes concerning the provision of credit, “The failure of the Administration in this area was... tantamount to a total withdrawal of active efforts to aid the local population in economic activity.”¹⁷²

British policy on credit represented a set-back for *fellahin* and rural landowners. Under the Ottomans, a portion of the tithe (.5 percent) had been earmarked for the Ottoman Agricultural Bank (OAB), which offered agricultural loans to the public at six percent interest with a one percent initial fee. Like the land registries, the OAB’s books were missing after the war, and the British authorities decided to terminate what remained of its operations and absorb its capital and accounts, which were subsequently tallied, after years of piecing disparate records together, at just over £P 20,500 in cash, £P 15,000 in property with another £P 66,000 outstanding from loans. Until the tithe was adjusted downward to 10 percent the government continued to collect the portion allotted to the OAB, the receipts for which equaled £P 76,000 cumulatively by 1925. These were added to the general fund of the Mandate’s treasury. Modest as the OAB’s operation was (the details of which we know little), its shuttering and lack of replacement by the British could hardly have helped credit-strapped *fellahin*.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Roza I.M. el-Eini, “Rural Indebtedness and Agricultural Credit Supplies in Palestine in the 1930s,” *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 33, n. 2 (April 1997), p. 314.

¹⁷² Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p. 114.

¹⁷³ Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 103-05.

After it was realized that inaction on the provision of credit would hurt tithes returns, the military administration began an ineffectual program of lending, based in sales of mules to peasants on credit. Beginning in 1919, however, the military government turned to the Anglo-Egyptian Bank for a loan of £P 500,000 in order to redress the shortage of available credit.¹⁷⁴ A series of government loans, both long-term (over £P 60, amortized over five years) and short-term (under £P 60), were subsequently extended to *fellahin* and rural borrowers between 1919 and 1923. With much hand-wringing on the part of officials about the prospects for repayment, a total of £P 576,319 was disbursed, mostly in short-term loans. Almost immediately, in 1920-21, the state began to trim its lending while arrears increased, but by the end of 1923 over 16,000 loans had been extended.¹⁷⁵ Although it took longer than the state planned or thought desirable, most of the capital it lent in this formative stage was later recollectd, with only £P 38,211 (6.6 percent) outstanding a decade later in 1933. Aside from the slowness of amortization, several other problems combined to cool the already fragile enthusiasm for the business of direct lending. Some of the loans were misused, and in the most egregious cases they were employed as capital for moneylending and speculation. A thornier predicament was presented by the issue of defaults: if a peasant had only land as collateral (which was required on any loan over £P 20) and was unable to repay a loan, the state's sole recourse was seizure of the cultivator's land, but calling in the collateral would then result in the even larger problem of dispossessing peasants. Finally, where peasant budgets were tight, as they were for the majority, the necessity of

¹⁷⁴ Anglo-Egyptian later merged with Barclays Bank.

¹⁷⁵ Smith, *Roots of Separatism*, p. 114.

maintaining a loan repayment schedule could compete with or block payment of the tithe, causing shortfalls in state revenue.¹⁷⁶

The complications that arose from the state's loan program, enumerated in a 1924 report on the government's agricultural lending, helped give the Colonial Office the ammunition it needed to argue strongly against the continuation of state involvement in direct credit provision and to oppose the Palestine administration's ambitions for opening an agricultural bank. Given the constraints on calling in collateral in land from poor peasants, such a bank, backed first by HC Samuel and later by HC Chancellor, was seen in London as little more than a fool's errand, and one that would inevitably redound negatively on the administration's exchequer, which would be forced to cover deficiencies in repayment. Any need for banking services on the part of the rural population could, it was held in the Colonial Office, only be adequately met through the channels of a proper, commercial bank. The Palestine administration's perceived lack of the necessary capital with which to establish an agrarian bank sealed the argument in London's favor, and Barclays Bank eventually came to play the role of private creditor that the Colonial Office saw as most appropriate.¹⁷⁷

While the question of an agricultural bank was being fought out between administrations in Palestine and authorities in London, conditions in the countryside continued to call attention to the need for additional supplies of credit. Beginning in 1927, following crop failures owing to drought, the Palestine administration succeeded in gaining permission to issue small short-term loans to cultivators for relief. In 1927

¹⁷⁶ Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 106-07, 109, 111.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 110-15.

and 1928 the government issued loans to the tune of £P 19,995 and £P 13,819 respectively.¹⁷⁸ Barclays Bank at the time outpaced the administration, managing £P 40-45,000 in annual short-term credit for the northern district.¹⁷⁹ With the onset of a severe agricultural depression in 1930, the government increased its short-term lending, but effectively ignored popular sentiment among *fellahin* in support of the establishment of an agricultural bank.¹⁸⁰ The authorities in London also opposed a recommendation made in the Johnson-Crosbie report (in 1930) for the disbursement of £P 100,000 in short-term credit.¹⁸¹ Instead, in 1930 and 1932 government allocations for short-term loans totaled £P 35,000 per year, though in 1931 only £P 14,000 was issued. But in 1933 the sum rose to £P 106,000, falling off somewhat in 1934 to £P 80,000.¹⁸² Facing continued crisis and short of any wider agreement with London for new lending facilities, the Palestine administration turned to Barclays in 1933 to expand necessary lines of short-term agricultural credit. Agreement was reached on a rate of nine percent interest and two new bank branches were opened at Hebron and Gaza.¹⁸³ By 1936 annual lending by

¹⁷⁸ *Report to the League of Nations, 1928*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁹ El-Eini, "Rural Indebtedness," p. 326. At the time the bank's three branches were all situated in the center-north of the country, in Acre, Nazareth, and Nablus.

¹⁸⁰ The public response in Tulkarm in March 1930 when word circulated of possible government interest in opening an agricultural bank was likely generally representative. Members of the public were recorded by the district officer as saying that if the government desired peasants to live, this institution must be opened as quickly as possible (Political report, Tulkarm area district officer, 3.3.30, ISA (112) 5170 – 4m).

¹⁸¹ El-Eini, "Rural Indebtedness," p. 325.

¹⁸² *Report to the League of Nations, 1930*, p. 15; *Report to the League of Nations, 1931*, p. 7; *Report to the League of Nations, 1932*, p. 7; *Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 23-24; *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 18-19. A previous study cited by other accounts, that of George Hakim and M.Y. el-Hussayni ("Monetary and Banking System," p. 498-99) reports a considerably lower figure for the period 1930-34 (just under £P 190,000) than that derived from the annual reports to the League of Nations used herein, but cites no sources to back up its lower tabulation.

¹⁸³ El-Eini, "Rural Indebtedness," p. 326-27, 329.

Barclays Bank reached £P 248,000, serving over 16,300 borrowers in 420 villages, though as Nadan notes, the bank actually targeted wealthier peasants.¹⁸⁴

Though short-term lending by the government increased during the prolonged downturn of 1930-34, and in 1935 it opened a £P 50,000 line of long-term credit for applicants in the hill country,¹⁸⁵ the government's lending can only be judged as parsimonious in the extreme. Its own financial position throughout the agrarian crisis was flush. It held an accumulated budget surplus of £P 773,069 as of 1 January 1930,¹⁸⁶ and ran budget surpluses for the three fiscal years following the end of its first push into lending from 1919-23. From 1923/24 to 1926/27 the annual surpluses ranged in value from £P 301,961 (1924/25) to £P 716,677 (1925/26), and accounted for between 13.4 percent (1926/27) and 25.5 percent (1925/26) of government receipts. Although the government ran a substantial deficit in 1928 (£P 797,676, equal to 30.9 percent of annual receipts), a year as previously noted in which it paid an outsize portion down on its debt, it still rounded out the decade in which the peasantry were brought to incomes at the "vanishing point" with a substantial surplus. Moreover, after running small deficits in 1930 (£P 146,958) and 1931 (£P 40,972) equal to 6.2 and 1.75 percent respectively of annual receipts, it ran a combined surplus for 1932-33 of £P 645,156 (17.6 percent of receipts) before accruing an unprecedented surplus for 1933/34 of £P 1,280,636, equal to 32.1 percent of the revenues for the year. As of 31 March 1934, with the Arab peasantry battered from three and a half years of terrible harvests, a decade or more of negative

¹⁸⁴ Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 217.

¹⁸⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1935*, p. 25.

¹⁸⁶ *Report to the League of Nations, 1930*, p. 13.

price movements, and over 15 years of crushing tithes and increasing costs, the colonial state had accumulated a total surplus of £P 2,510,932, roughly equal to an entire year of revenues. The sum of the surplus continued to grow geometrically in the years before the revolt, reaching £P 6,267,810 on the eve of the revolt, at the close of March 1936. In short, though the imperial Treasury, the Colonial Office, and segments of the Palestine administration fretted over containing expenses, the colonial authorities all but left the bulk of the country's population out in the cold while the state ran substantial surpluses throughout most of the 1920s that grew to truly enormous proportions in the 1930s.¹⁸⁷ This was so in spite of the spate of inquiries in the 1930s, beginning with the Johnson-Crosbie commission, which documented many of the immense stresses and financial burdens on the peasantry.¹⁸⁸

While colonial authorities banked the state's surpluses and refused to utilize them to alleviate the torments and insolvency of much of the *fellahin*, they were well aware of the population's continual desire for credit facilities. Not only did Arabs support the creation of an agricultural bank, but short-term loans were avidly sought out by

¹⁸⁷ The Peel Commission (report, p. 207) attempted to suggest, after the surplus was diminished £P 1,460,000 on account of extra military and police expenditures in 1936, that the balance of £P 4,807,000 was largely already committed to future expenses. Its discussion is abstruse on the point, but critically omits that any planned future expenditures reflected choices made by colonial officials and could hardly explain the longer-term record of the administration.

¹⁸⁸ Calculations herein are made from data provided in: *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 153. The 1936 figure is from *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 46. The state's confidence in the health of its fiscal position was evident in the tenor of its comments concerning customs revenues in its annual reports. In its 1930 report it noted that: "Nothing testifies more highly to the country's powers of sustained financial endurance and recuperation than the fact that the revenue from Customs in 1930 approached £P 1,000,000" (p. 13), while in 1932 it referred to customs dues as an "index of the sound position of the country" (p. 12). In fiscal year 1932/33 (ending 31 March), when customs reached almost £P 1,287,000, the government no longer felt a need to crow about the benefits of the income derived (*Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 149, 166). By this point it appears as a given that the financial basis of the colonial regime was bound to customs, which itself was reflective of the rapid growth of the *yishuv* in the early 1930s. A chart of customs receipts set against annual revenues and expenditures, through the first year of the revolt, may be found in: Peel Commission report, p. 206.

agriculturalists of all classes.¹⁸⁹ In the Tulkarm area, further evidence of a credit crunch was apparent in 1930 as moneylenders ceased giving advances to their clients. Local usurers further tightened the already inadequate supply of credit by refusing to lend small sums, since default on repayment of minor sums was not punishable by imprisonment.¹⁹⁰ In 1930 the district officer succinctly summarized the early phase of the crisis of 1930-34 by commenting that: “The financial situation continues to be unbearable.”¹⁹¹ Over time the government was forced to increase its lending to affected peasants as the crisis intensified, so as “to keep them alive,” as one Barclays Bank officer put it in 1934.¹⁹²

As credit tightened, and despite the ravaged state of the countryside, arrangements to provide new channels for lending were slow to come to fruition and inadequate. This was the case for long-term credit as well as short-term. After several years of negotiations the colonial state finally opened an agricultural mortgage bank in 1935. However, after lobbying pressure from the Jewish Agency, the bank’s projected allocation of capital (from an initial pool of £P 100,000) was set 3:1 in favor of lending to Jewish concerns.¹⁹³ Zionist influence was thoroughgoing from the start, and the bank was envisioned by the Jewish Agency as a means for shrinking Arab holdings and for undermining the Protection of Cultivators Ordinance (discussed below). In 1935 a Colonial Office official minuted that the bank could become a direct agent of Arab

¹⁸⁹ Political report, Tulkarm area district officer, 23.6.30, ISA (112) 5170 – 4m.

¹⁹⁰ Political reports, Tulkarm area district officer, 2.6.30 and 28.4.30, ISA (112) 5170 – 4m.

¹⁹¹ Political report, Tulkarm area district officer, 19.5.30, ISA (112) 5170 – 4m.

¹⁹² Quoted in Fakhri Eldin, “Communities of Owners,” p. 130.

¹⁹³ Bunton notes this is where the £P 50,000 long-term loan fund for Arabs in hill districts, also opened in 1935, originated – thereby balancing the state’s long-term credit allocation between the two communities equally at £P 75,000 each (*Colonial Land Policies*, p. 127).

dispossession and Jewish colonization (selling Arab properties reclaimed for collateral at auction to Jews). Needless to say, this was hardly the type of agricultural bank that Arabs had in mind, and did little to arrest the decline which had swept through the Arab countryside.¹⁹⁴

Debt and dispossession

Perhaps the most conspicuous indicator of the weakened state of the Arab peasantry during the Mandate period was its chronic indebtedness. As we saw in chapter 4, debt was used as an engine of mercantile growth and capital accumulation in the late Ottoman era, and affected wide areas of the country long before British boots set foot there. While precision concerning the growth of *fellah* indebtedness during the British occupation is not possible to attain, it is safe to conclude that the problem deepened significantly as burdens mounted on peasant shoulders. Evaluating the growth of indebtedness one study concluded simply that “Before the [First World] War rural indebtedness existed but to a much smaller extent than that which has accumulated since the War.”¹⁹⁵ Ultimately, the increasing strains of debt and the declining prospects of financial viability for agriculturalists led an increasing number of smallholders to sell their lands and seek their livelihood as sharecroppers or wage-laborers, or probably most commonly, through some combination of both. Though the British were loath to create

¹⁹⁴ Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 123-29.

¹⁹⁵ Hakim and el-Hussayni, “Monetary and Banking System,” p. 497. This is not to say that poverty and landlessness weren’t already widespread in certain areas, as noted in the previous chapter.

a class of uprooted, disgruntled peasants, this is exactly what their policies succeeded in bringing about.

Signs of the depth and growth of indebtedness were abundant, and ranged from the mundane to the alarming. One indication came in the form of manure sales by peasants to citrus orchard owners. In the Galilee and the Nablus subdistrict, instead of keeping manure produced by their livestock to use as fertilizer for their own plots, smallholders regularly marketed it to those with capital to spare.¹⁹⁶ In the Tulkarm subdistrict government officers sent to repossess movable property from those in default found their houses empty, already culled of any saleable items.¹⁹⁷ Perhaps most remarkably of all, arrests for lack of debt repayment skyrocketed by 1930. That year Hope Simpson found that in only two months, the courts had handled 2677 warrants for imprisonment for debt, of which 599 resulted in sentences. These figures did not cover the districts of Jaffa and Haifa, but separate information for the latter only amplifies the portrait of catastrophic destitution. In one year's time the Haifa subdistrict handled 8701 proceedings for debt, issuing 2756 orders for imprisonment. Though the figures were not disaggregated between Arabs and Jews, we can be sure that they applied in the great majority to the former, and as Hope Simpson observes, a whopping 64 percent of the families of the subdistrict were subject to proceedings that year alone.¹⁹⁸ The extent of impoverishment that such figures revealed can only be considered crushing.

¹⁹⁶ Yazbak, "From Poverty to Revolt," p. 96.

¹⁹⁷ Political report, Tulkarm area district officer, 2.11.31, ISA (112) 5170 – 4m.

¹⁹⁸ Hope Simpson report, p. 51.

Legally the colonial state had capped interest rates at nine percent, but there was no attempt to enforce this statute and, without alternative avenues for obtaining credit, peasants were compelled to turn to moneylenders, who flouted the law without compunction. A common arrangement was the '*ashara-khamst*' '*ash*', or pre-harvest loan of £P 10, repayable at the rate of £P 15 after the harvest, netting a 50 percent return often for only a three-month period. At such a rate, interest could run as high as 200 percent annually, though more commonly it ranged between 30-75 percent.¹⁹⁹ Hope Simpson calculated from the Johnson-Crosbie Committee's data that statistically the average debt of a Palestinian family in the villages sampled amounted to £P 27. At a 30 percent annual interest rate, this translated into £P 8 of service on the debt before touching any of the principle. Given that his revised assessment of the average owner-cultivator's annual net income was £P 11.8, debt service alone appears to amount to a gargantuan share of household expenditure. This was all the more so for sharecroppers and laborers who were hopelessly underwater. The inescapable prominence of debt was further illuminated in Hope Simpson's closer examination of Bir Zayt as a somewhat representative village of the hill country. Bir Zayt, located near Ramallah, was at the time a relatively well-off village. Nonetheless its cumulative debt was estimated by Hope Simpson at £P 7000, which meant that statistically each of its families held an average debt of £P 39. The average debt of this comparatively prosperous village was thus 44 percent higher than the average calculation for the 104 village sample from the

¹⁹⁹ ESCO Foundation for Palestine, *Palestine: A Study of Jewish, Arab, and British Policies* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1947), v. 2, p. 706; Hope Simpson to Colonial Secretary, 18.8.30, p. 3, appendix 2 to Hope Simpson report. Hope Simpson estimated the average annual rate of interest at around 75 percent where Johnson-Crosbie had found a lower average of 30 percent. The wide range between these figures suggests great variability in the terms of credit offered by moneylenders.

Johnson-Crosbie inquiry, indicating that debt loads could easily exceed the already unrepayable quanta which these examinations revealed.²⁰⁰

By 1930, after the state was shaken from its complacency towards the countryside by the mass violence of 1929, its intensive studies successively illustrated that rural Arab society was in tatters. It was known at the time to multiple departments within the state that the government's own exactions on the peasantry subjected it to further onerous borrowing from usurers. Both the Director of Education and the Commissioner of Lands reported in 1930 and 1931 on the phenomenon of peasants borrowing simply to be able to pay the tithe.²⁰¹ Debt and the burden of taxation not only drove further borrowing, they also led to land sales and shrinking Arab farm sizes, as parcels of lots were alienated to cover the obligations saddling peasant families and to afford them a living.²⁰² As one *fellah* told the Director of Education: "We have been struggling in deep water for several years, and very soon the water will close over our heads."²⁰³

The Palestine administration developed a dual position towards the peasantry and the issue of their declining position. On the one hand it saw them as the weakest element of Palestinian society, prey to exploitative moneylenders. In spite of this view, successive administrations took no action to restrain usury or enforce the 9 percent legal limit on annual interest rates until 1930, when an ordinance was drafted to decrease the sentence for imprisonment for outstanding debt. Gradually, the state sought to erect a

²⁰⁰ Hope Simpson report, p. 46, 49.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 47; Memorandum, Commissioner of Lands to Acting Chief Secretary, 12.5.31, PRO – CO 733/207/6.

²⁰² Hope Simpson report, p. 50.

²⁰³ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 47.

measure of protection for the indebted. In 1931 the Imprisonment for Debt Ordinance was passed, which stipulated that a debtor could only be imprisoned if it could be shown that they had at their disposal adequate means to discharge the debt.²⁰⁴ Only in 1934, after the withering decade of the 1920s and the prolonged crisis of the early 1930s, was the Usurious Loans Ordinance promulgated. This measure, which enhanced the powers of the courts to handle claims of illegal interest rates as they affected proceedings brought before the law, contributed to curbing the ubiquity of moneylending in the countryside, but interest rates often continued to exceed the legal ceiling.²⁰⁵

While colonial administrations reckoned that peasants were taken advantage of by the notables, they also saw the *fellahin* as irrational and short-sighted, generally incapable of soundly managing their financial affairs. This view of the peasantry licensed a project of reforming peasant social and economic practices, underwritten by a moralizing discourse of spurring uplift. Its plainest manifestation lay in the push to create Arab cooperative societies after 1929. In March 1930 Colonial Secretary Passfield wrote to HC Chancellor favoring the rapid establishment of such organizations, and arrangement was made to utilize the balance of the liquidated Ottoman Agricultural

²⁰⁴ As Nadan discusses at length, colonial administrators and experts were often convinced that peasants had a propensity towards “strategic default,” or refusing repayment on a loan despite having the necessary capital to do so. In his treatment on the subject, Nadan falsifies this claim by showing that peasants were on the contrary sometimes willing to take on debt from usurers in order to maintain access to official channels of credit. See *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 212-60.

²⁰⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1930*, p. 15; Graham-Brown, “The Political Economy of Jabal Nablus,” p. 98; *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 64. As argued above, the state was reluctant to make its own financial commitment to alleviating the peasantry’s plight, in spite of its recurrent surpluses. It thus narrated the outset of the 1930-34 crisis in language that intimated that there really was no alternative to more usury and increasing debt: “Without seed for his summer crops, or funds for the winter ploughing, the fellah could only turn to the money-lender and sink further into debt” (*Report to the League of Nations, 1930*, p. 15).

Bank accounts, £P 20,500 held in escrow, as their start-up capital.²⁰⁶ To assay the situation and make recommendations for how best to build a cooperative infrastructure, the registrar of credit cooperatives in Punjab, C.F. Strickland, was brought to Palestine the same year.

Strickland held that peasant indebtedness owed in great measure to “the lack of control over the credit which he has received, at cruel rates of interest, from the merchants and professional money lenders,” but also to peasant illiteracy and lack of frugality. As part of his recommended program to rectify the peasants’ reliance on moneylenders, he counseled that a registrar of cooperatives, such as existed in Punjab, should be appointed. The enormity of the registrar’s task was laid out in Strickland’s report in no uncertain terms: “He is not merely relieving the peasants from debt but is *undertaking a reconstruction of their lives and of the future of the country*. He must aim at adult education and at the teaching of citizenship in a community in which these ideas are at present almost unknown.”²⁰⁷

Strickland envisioned cooperatives as a kind of panacea for remedying the peasantry’s benighted condition, and forcefully opposed the opening of an agricultural bank, which he claimed would be an inappropriate solution to the issue of indebtedness. He based his argument in part on the difficulty of foreclosing on defaulters, but also on the *fellahin*’s ostensible ignorance of the necessity of timely and regular repayment of their debts to a distant institution – a supposition which itself strangely ignored the fact

²⁰⁶ El-Eini, “Rural Indebtedness,” p. 318-19. Support for cooperatives for Arabs was also written into the 1930 White Paper (*ibid.*, p. 319).

²⁰⁷ Quoted in ESCO Foundation, *Palestine*, v. 2, p. 708, 710-11. Emphasis added in the second quote. El-Eini notes that “Strickland was originally considered for the post, but was not chosen because the Treasury distrusted his ‘expensive’ ideas” (“Rural Indebtedness,” p. 321).

that peasants were already familiar with banking through their experience with the OAB, and most of all with moneylenders. In lieu of an agricultural bank, cooperatives held the benefit of both providing affordable credit and molding the supposedly deficient moral fiber and financial knowledge of their memberships. Elaborating on this notion, Strickland believed that it was a mistake to seek to wipe out peasant debts at a stroke because peasants lacked the sense to keep themselves from borrowing again and falling back into debt. Cooperatives, by contrast, would start by providing small loans, and only after three years of membership, move on to extinguish an individual's debt. In that time, the atmosphere of continued struggle was intended to instill vigor in the peasant; the cooperative thus aimed to reshape peasant "character" while giving them the "courage to defy the moneylender and boldly invite him to go to court," where settlement would produce a write-down on the debt.²⁰⁸

The creation of a cooperative movement faced an uphill battle in Palestine. Colonial schemes for improving cultivation had by that time grown to be something of an irritant to many peasants. The situation was little different with respect to cooperatives. After prolonged haggling over the position of registrar, the administration was finally prepared to take action in 1933. Using most of the capital from the OAB, loans of up to £P 500 for a three-year period would be made available to the members of new societies at nine percent annual interest.²⁰⁹ Although the initial push to found cooperatives in Arab villages was announced with considerable fanfare in the annual report for the year, the results were hardly an auspicious start. In all, 14 credit

²⁰⁸ Hope Simpson report, p. 65-66.

²⁰⁹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 13.

cooperatives with a combined membership of 264 persons were established in 1933. Two years later at the close of 1935, 61 cooperatives held 2422 members and drew on combined assets worth £P 40,766.²¹⁰ Though growth of the societies was not as anemic in 1935 as in the initiative's first year, their membership rolls were still modest. The Peel Commission additionally discovered in its investigations in 1936-37 that Arab cooperatives were typically comprised of more well-off peasants, who held smaller quantities of debt than their peers.²¹¹ After several years the colonial authorities were divided as to whether the cooperative movement in the Arab countryside had legs. The Peel Commission heralded it as an important development, while in the annual *Report to the League of Nations* for 1937 the Palestine administration itself cast doubt on the results after four years.²¹² Regardless, it is clear that those cooperatives which were established at the time, however much they aided their memberships, did rather little collectively to alter the malaise and grinding poverty gripping rural society.²¹³

Despite the belatedness of its measures addressing peasant indebtedness and the prevalence of usury, and irrespective of their piecemeal quality, the Palestine government was quick to publicly proclaim victory and to regard its efforts as a triumph. In its 1935 annual report the authorities credited the Imprisonment for Debt Ordinance (1931), the Usurious Loans Ordinance (1934), tithe remissions, and the provision of credit through Barclays Bank, the Mortgage Company, and the Arab Bank of Co-

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 13-14; Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 226.

²¹¹ El-Aini, "Rural Indebtedness," p. 323.

²¹² Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies*, p. 122.

²¹³ El-Eini is far too generous in her assessment of the cooperative initiative, regarding it as a guarded success which helped spell the end of moneylenders' influence ("Rural Indebtedness," p. 323-24), yet there is no evidence to back up this grand claim, the validity and scope of which is further vitiated by the societies' tiny memberships.

operative Societies for curbing the thrall of moneylenders and relieving *fellahin* of a significant portion of their debt. It drew particular attention to the northern district, where it claimed to have engineered a very considerable 60 percent reduction in debt loads.²¹⁴ Some pause is due this assertion, however, not least because of the susceptibility of authorities to gloss things for the sake of public reporting to the League of Nations, but more so because payable arrears on tithes were hardly dented for the year. Excluding the Beersheba subdistrict, the outstanding debt on the defunct tax amounted to £P 171,021 in 1935, of which a mere £P 19,750 (11.5 percent) was paid.²¹⁵ Such a paltry and unremarkable sum – one indistinct from previous years of repayment on arrears – is not suggestive of any substantial reduction in outstanding peasant debts, a significant chunk of which were owed to the state. While this is not conclusive evidence that the state's belated campaign against usury was without effect, it hardly squares with the authorities' rosier estimations, and without further evidence to corroborate the official claims, the absence of repayment on tax arrears likely stands as a more conclusive indicator of the peasantry's fiscal health.²¹⁶

While the colonial state slowly assembled its response to the crisis of rural indebtedness, portents of ongoing seismic shifts in landownership and of the growth of landlessness became increasingly visible. Even before the state recognized debt and

²¹⁴ *Report to the League of Nations, 1935*, p. 25. It is perhaps noteworthy that no further evidence or detail is provided regarding this alleged remarkable achievement.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

²¹⁶ It could be argued that the peasantry was quite possibly counting on official debts to be forgiven as they had been in the past both through remissions and through write-downs, though it should be noted that the latter were much less financially weighty than the former. If this were the case then the indebted may have wagered it was a smarter bet to pay unofficial debts before those due the state. We have, to my knowledge, no way of assessing such a hypothesis, though it does seem reasonable.

usury as issues which it needed to address, the Shaw Commission had warned in 1930 of the danger of growing landlessness and the creation of a landless class of peasants. Like High Commissioner Chancellor, the Shaw Commission judged that, barring an improvement in cultivation techniques that would increase yields, there were no remaining stretches of land which could be acquired by the Zionist movement without prejudicing the position of the Arab cultivators in the country.²¹⁷ In tracing the rise of landlessness it pointed to the failure of existing legislation, including the Land Transfer Ordinances and the Protection of Cultivators Ordinance of 1929 to protect peasant tenancies, in spite of the express intention, especially of the former, to do so. It concluded tersely that: “The position is now acute. There is no alternative land to which persons evicted can remove. In consequence a landless and discontented class is being created. Such a class is a potential danger to the country.”²¹⁸ Although the Zionist movement succeeded in squelching the limitations proposed in the 1930 White Paper on the Jewish National Home, the quandary of peasant landlessness weighed increasingly on the Palestinian community and on the considerations of the colonial authorities.

As noted previously, contention surrounds HC Chancellor’s recommendations to reconfigure implementation of the Jewish National Home policy and his purported influence on the Shaw Commission, Hope Simpson’s work, and the Passfield White Paper.²¹⁹ Despite this, the Jewish Agency succeeded greatly in delimiting the

²¹⁷ Yehoshua Hankin, a longtime purchasing agent for the PLDC, stated in a letter to Hope Simpson that after acquisition of the 100,000 dunams of Arab land then on the Palestine market in mid-1930, Arabs tied to any further purchases by Zionists would find it very difficult to resettle elsewhere, owing to the shrinking base of Arab agricultural estates and their saturation with tenants (Hope Simpson report, p. 38).

²¹⁸ Shaw Commission report, p. 162.

²¹⁹ Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 76, 92-93. See chapter 1.

government's approach to the question of landlessness. It did so in good measure through subverting the apparatus established to enumerate the landless. Following the MacDonald letter, the government proceeded to enact a pared-down version of Hope Simpson's recommendation to institute a development program aimed at modernizing the country's agriculture. The intention behind the scheme was to remedy Arab landlessness and provide room for further Zionist settlement²²⁰ by reducing the "lot viable," or minimum estimated plot which a cultivator and their family required for survival.²²¹ For these purposes, a Development Department was created within the Palestine administration in 1931. The Jewish Agency quickly exerted itself and succeeding in controlling the appointment of the department's legal officer, who was responsible for evaluating claims to landlessness.²²² The leverage it gained through this officer, A.H. Webb, a former district court judge at Nablus, along with the constricted definition of landlessness used by the state, helped to minimize and distort the official count of the landless.

Webb proved most agreeable to Zionism and made a mockery of the task with which he was entrusted. He generally disregarded outright *fellah* judgments concerning the sizes of their holdings, and in a further act of blatant bias, began his term by sending each and every application for landless status he received to the Jewish Agency for

²²⁰ Again, see chapter 1 for detail.

²²¹ A great debate swirled over the notion of a lot viable, the details of which will not be entered into here. The concept became a political football and was intertwined with equally strenuous debates over measuring arable land and potentially arable land, which were both pertinent to estimating the 'absorptive capacity' of the country.

²²² Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 149. The first suggested candidate for the post, R.C. Tute, a land court judge, was opposed by AG Bentwich for his "imperfect sympathy with Zionism" and was consequently not appointed (p. 148-49).

vetting before he himself even opened the files. Arab claims of dispossession thereby became subject to adjudication by the JA's Legal Department as much as by the state itself.²²³

The definition that was employed in ascertaining landlessness – derived from the MacDonald letter – was highly restrictive, and included only those who “can be shown to have been displaced from the lands which they occupied in consequence of the lands passing into Jewish hands, and who have not obtained other holdings on which they can establish themselves, or other equally satisfactory occupation.” The narrowness of this definition surpassed even that proposed by the JA, on which it was based,²²⁴ but both the state and the JA agreed that the primary focus of the count should be on tenants who had lost their access to land through sales by absentee landlords or large owners. This interpretation of the definition ruled out certain classes of claimants, such as persons who had sold their own plots,²²⁵ and thereby discounted smallholders who were forced to sell because of debts or taxes. Though the notion that attaining land elsewhere mitigated any claim to dispossession could reasonably be debated, the inclusion of the clause on labor (which was an addition of HMG and not the JA) obfuscated any remaining semblance of arriving at a remotely accurate assessment of the scale of the phenomenon. The insertion of a wholly extraneous criterion rendered the already constricted definition of landlessness a flawed admixture and was guaranteed to shrink the count further. The definition proffered by the colonial authorities illustrates that the

²²³ Ibid., p. 155. Webb later began to review the files first before sending them to the JA.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 128-29; MacDonald letter quote from p. 129.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 153.

government was inclined to downplay the tensions surrounding the Zionist enterprise that had been revealed in the reports of HC Chancellor, the Shaw Commission, and those of other official experts such as Hope Simpson. Its wish to obscure the emergence of a growing landless population, and the JA's strong hand over the process of claims evaluations, succeeded in producing an "official but inaccurate" estimation of 900 persons as rightful claimants to the status in the eyes of the state.²²⁶ Given the rampant politicization of the landless inquiry, it is certain that this count, which is rightly recognized even in accounts sympathetic to Zionism as short of the mark,²²⁷ is reflective of little more than the conjoint British and Zionist interest in sweeping the issue under the proverbial rug.

Despite the state's election by the time of the MacDonald letter to obscure and deny the spread of landlessness, its officials commented internally on the problem and official reports continued to track its development. Lewis French, head of the Development Department, reported in a major survey in late 1931 that over the preceding decade in one unnamed hill district, 30 percent of the region's lands had passed from the hands of smallholders to large landlords.²²⁸ The remarkable concentration of lands that transpired in this period, combined with the alienation of parcels to Zionist purchasers, led to burgeoning landlessness. Indeed the 1931 census

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 110. The Peel Commission viewed this count as partial, stating that it "represent[ed] only a portion of the displacement of Arab population resulting from Jewish land purchases" (report, p. 240). The state's resettlement efforts were pathetic, and only somewhere over half of the officially designated landless families consented to their relocation and resettlement on new lands courtesy of the state (ibid.).

²²⁷ E.g. Porath, *Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 87-90; Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 110. The former provides a useful sample of cases in which groups or claimants were discounted from being considered landless. See also Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory*, p. 113-15.

²²⁸ Yazbak, "From Poverty to Revolt," p. 104. Stein claims, on the basis of a citation to Arthur Ruppin, that all of this land was subsequently alienated to Jewish purchasers, although the comprehensiveness of the claim seems far-fetched ("One Hundred Years," p. 69 and ft. 45, p. 80).

conducted by the government found that of those deriving an income from agriculture (calculated at 108,765 earners, supporting a rural population of 440,000), 42.8 percent owned no land. Almost a third of those bringing an income to a family or to themselves, 29.9 percent (32,539 persons), were laborers – that is, without tenancies and without access to land except as hired hands. Another 12.9 percent (14,000) were tenants. The remainder were owner-cultivators (56,000) or rentiers (5,311).²²⁹ In spite of this, the High Commissioner, who fancied himself a supporter of the *fellahin*, ignored this data, offering a lower estimate of 20 percent of the population as landless in late 1935.²³⁰ In contrast to the High Commissioner's sunnier, if inaccurate, evaluation, only a month later Colonial Secretary J.H. Thomas envisioned the possibility in a paper to the Cabinet that, barring some change to the situation, virtually all Arab smallholders could sell their lands "until practically the whole of the agricultural land of the country which it is profitable for the Jews to buy has passed into Jewish hands," thereby swelling the landless population and driving labor migration and urbanization to unforeseen heights.²³¹ Though the 1931 census is probably the best hard data available for assessing the true scale of landlessness in strict legal terms, it should further be remembered that smallholder sales escalated in succeeding years while sales by large owners and foreign owners continued, so the tally of the dispossessed doubtless grew further in the years before the Great Revolt.

²²⁹ All figures from the census are taken from: Stein, "Legal Protection," p. 236.

²³⁰ HC to Colonial Secretary, 7.12.35 (Secret A), CP 3 (36), PRO – CAB 24/259. One might suspect that the HC was trying to stay faithful to the official definition of the category, but the 20 percent figure doesn't square with the final tally of 900 individuals. The High Commissioner's surmise suggests that the official parameters were not only highly misleading, but that internally, state officials did not take them as accurate.

²³¹ Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 10.1.36, p. 2, CP 3 (36), PRO – CAB 24/259.

Before examining the government's legislative efforts to preserve peasant tenancies, we must first turn to look at smallholder sales again in order to better grasp peasant attitudes towards sales. It has been suggested as a general argument here that many if not most smallholder sales were likely derivative of the accumulated pressures on the middle and lower strata of the peasantry, and the financial straits they found themselves in under the extractive and disadvantageous rule of the British. At least two other considerations need also be born in mind in comprehending the profusion of smallholder sales to Arabs in the 1920s and to Jewish entities in the early 1930s. The first is that many *fellahin* were probably not interested in permanently alienating their lands and likely regarded many sales as temporary since under Ottoman rule sellers could claim certain rights of resumption if the land was sold to the holder of a debt. According to such arrangements, several forms of which existed, the sale of the land was considered a deposit on or surety for the debt, and upon its repayment, the land reverted to its original holder.²³² Given the predominance of transfers from Arabs to other Arabs during the Mandate and the concentration of land that took place in the 1920s (as just noted above), which surely owed a great deal to peasant indebtedness to their creditors, it appears probable that many peasants were desirous of repossessing their former lands, or at least saw this as a potential option. That is to say that peasant views of their sales were quite different from the state's perspective in which sales represented the closure of

²³² See Eugene Rogan's discussion of temporary sales *cum* lending arrangements: "Moneylending and Capital Flows," p. 242-43. See also Martha Mundy and Richard Saumarez Smith, *Governing Property, Making the Modern State: Law, Administration and Production in Ottoman Syria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 46.

a transaction and were not related to future dispositions of the same lands. The permanency that English law brought to the practice of selling land was not only alien and contrary to indigenous practices, but foreclosed yet another Ottoman safety net for peasants by removing rights of resumption on applicable sales. This is certainly not something that peasants could be presumed to have agreed to, nor would the reality of the new colonial meaning of a land sale necessarily have been clear to *fellahin* until they were barred from pursuing resumption. Given the difference in the mechanics of sales to creditors between Ottoman and English legal traditions it is no surprise that this issue too became fodder for conflicts over land in Palestine.²³³

The second consideration relates to Zionist purchases of *musha'* lands. Where previously Zionist buyers had avoided shares in *musha'* lands since they were communally-held and periodically redistributed, from 1921 on they took greater interest in acquiring shares and in advocating, as the government did, for the permanent partition and assignment of *musha'* plots under individual titles.²³⁴ In such cases where peasant owners of *musha'* alienated their shares to Zionist entities, they typically presumed that they would in fact remain on their lands until partition was carried out, especially as Zionists would not or could not take possession of unpartitioned shares.²³⁵ Owing to the slowness of the partition operations and their immanent legal contestability, many peasants probably viewed these sales as without immediate or even definite repercussions, and perhaps as temporary sales, where they would have the option of full

²³³ So far we know little about this in the Palestine case, but for one example, see the discussion of the Sakhina population in Fakher Eldin, "Communities of Owners," p. 135-145.

²³⁴ HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.1.30, p. 51-52, PRO – CO 733/182/9.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 52. See also: Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 286-88.

legal resumption. What is clear, as High Commissioner Chancellor reported to London in January 1930, is that peasants had no interest in *ifraz* and presumed that in *musha* ‘sales, they would remain on their lands for a period that would probably last years, with the future undetermined.’²³⁶ Again, the fundamental distinction between colonial and indigenous assumptions regarding sales of this class of lands was pronounced, and does not suggest that *fellahin* were eager to cash out of their attachment to their lands, as has sometimes been depicted. Instead they may have been playing for time, hoping to straighten out their own affairs in the interim, or more simply exploiting the ambiguity of the situation and seeking to maintain access to land.

While peasants strove to remain on their lands using the legal and customary tools that had been at their disposal prior to the British occupation, the advent of colonial legal structures and principles, as we have seen, did not help their cause. This was the case even with legislation aimed, ostensibly, at preserving peasant tenures. After the failure of the Land Transfer Ordinances (1920/21) in this respect – which was known to the government long before it was raised by HC Chancellor, the Shaw Commission, and Hope Simpson²³⁷ – the authorities failed to take any appreciable step concerning the issue until 1929, when the first Protection of Cultivators Ordinance was passed. As Stein has emphasized, the series of legislations (including amendments) bearing this name that were enacted from 1929-33, focused narrowly on Arab tenants. The amended

²³⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.1.30, p. 51-52, PRO – CO 733/182/9. Chancellor did not mention the span of time that peasants presumed to remain, but owing to the legal obstacles to partition and given the history of the state’s pursuit of it, a measure in years seems the most likely. This may have changed somewhat after enactment of the Land Settlement Ordinance of 1928, noted earlier in the chapter, but the matter begs further research.

²³⁷ Shaw Commission report, p. 114-16.

ordinance of 1931, promulgated after the Wadi al-Hawarith affair had become a source of Arab anxiety and state concern, broadened the protected category to include Bedouin claims on grazing areas. Still, the number of those eligible for some form of protection under the statutes before 1933 was no more than 20,000 persons, or 18.4 percent of the agrarian income-earning population based on the 1931 census figures.²³⁸

From the beginning the utility of such legislations in protecting tenants was restricted largely to attempting to ensure that they were monetarily compensated in the event of their removal upon sale of the lands they worked. Since the Jewish Agency was heavily involved in the drafting process for both the 1929 and 1931 versions of the law, it made sure that compensation in land was ruled out. The Protection of Cultivators Ordinance thus actually simplified and eased the process of Zionist land acquisition. According to the provisions of the LTO, tenants as well as former owners were supposed to have lands elsewhere to remove to, but this hurdle, long ignored in practice, was written out of the Protection of Cultivators Ordinance in favor of simple cash payments. Landlords also gained new powers from successive versions of the law which paradoxically helped them to evict tenants. The 1929 law gave them the ability to serve one-year notices on rent increases, which was then used to clear lands of tenants where owners wanted to sell the properties to Jewish purchasers. The 1933 version of the law instituted restrictions on raising tenants' rents, but it too gave landlords additional

²³⁸ Stein, "Legal Protection," p. 247-49. This estimate adduced by Stein includes both those who were solely tenants and owner-cultivators who supplemented their incomes by serving as a tenant on other lands.

powers, including the right to resume lands for purposes of development, upgrading, or “close settlement,” which amounted to new means by which to eject tenants.²³⁹

As with the LTO, the strictures of the Protection of Cultivators Ordinances could be bypassed when sellers had the will to do so.²⁴⁰ But more profoundly, the new protections offered to “statutory tenants” in the 1933 law – those with one year or more of continuous residency on a plot – strained relations between landlords and tenants and created perverse disincentives to production. So long as they maintained their lands and paid rent, statutory tenants were generally to be shielded from dispossession and were to be provided with alternative lands (proximate to their old demesnes if possible) in cases of their removal. Landlords were aggravated by the law and fought against peasants attaining the legal rights appertaining to the new category. Large landowners became reluctant to lease for fear of new claims being placed upon them by peasants. Stein asserts that rather than submit to this reordering of lord-peasant relations, some landlords chose to sell their lands, including to the JNF. Many others used the powers of resumption to evict tenants, or otherwise induced them to leave, usually through some measure of surreptitious buyout. Yet other landowners chose to hold lands fallow. In both the south and the coastal plain, large areas were left uncultivated, putting precarious peasant existences and incomes in these regions under tremendous strain. By sowing

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 243-44, 247, 249-50.

²⁴⁰ Informal agreements with tenants were often used by lords to circumvent the law, whereby the former were relieved of paying part of their rent and exempted from paying their share of the tithe in return for exiting from the land (ibid., p. 250). Another ruse entailed paying peasants to claim that they had used land without permission and thus were ineligible to claim statutory protection (Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 190).

such discord the 1933 law may well have inadvertently caused an increase in landlessness, even as it erected the strongest legal protections for tenants on the books.²⁴¹

Although the problem of landlessness garnered official attention from 1929 forward, the recommendations of those who cautioned most against allowing its development were largely disregarded. In 1931 with the MacDonald letter the British authorities in London demonstrated their unwillingness to acknowledge that the growth of the Zionist project had negative repercussions for Palestinian Arabs. In part owing to Zionist access to the administration's statistical evaluation of landlessness and to the process of forging legislative remedies, only in 1933, when the Jewish Agency was not party to the drafting of the final Protection of Cultivators Ordinance,²⁴² did landlessness receive a remotely serious legal response. Yet the results of the law were hardly what the authorities could have intended, and moreover, the law's strict focus on tenants left the issue of smallholders' sales entirely unaddressed. Regarding the embattled smaller owner-cultivators, the state had little to offer in the way of stemming their shrinking numbers, and in fact mooted legislation in early 1936 that resuscitated the same ineffectual clauses from the LTO stipulating that sellers must hold adequate lands for their provision elsewhere.²⁴³ From their concentration on the issue of tenant dispossession it appears clear that the authorities believed this to be the key to the situation, though in actuality there is no evidence in support of this conception.

²⁴¹ Stein, "Legal Protection," p. 239, 249-253; *Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 11; Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 195. Several years later in 1941 a committee of the Palestine administration concluded that the law was "contentious, uniformly unsatisfactory, consistently evaded, and an obstacle to [economic] development" (quoted in Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 190-91, brackets are his).

²⁴² Stein, "Legal Protection," p. 249.

²⁴³ Peel Commission report, p. 89-90.

Ultimately, in the field of contending forces and interests the British displayed great fealty to the “hidden hand” of the market and to the Zionist movement. They did so knowing that the market served to expand the ranks of landless Arabs while growing the land base of Zionism. The contours of policy were thus shaped at the expense of both the official commitment not to prejudice the interests of the “non-Jewish” population, and the colonial power’s concern over the creation of a dispossessed class.²⁴⁴

Conclusion:

Reading the Palestine administration’s annual reports to the League of Nations one would be hard-pressed to assay the scale of the crisis which plagued the rural order and its social systems during the first decade and a half of British Mandatory rule. The reports, fashioned of course to paint the Mandate in the best possible light, in fact contain precious little that would signal the existence of crisis, other than noting several years of weak harvests in the early 1930s whose causes appeared natural rather than social or political.²⁴⁵ By contrast, the sparse moments in which officials captured the interjections of Palestinian peasants reveal a world diametrically opposed to the Mandate’s public claims to be paving a way to universal progress. As the High

²⁴⁴ At least in public, the authorities opined that they were engineering a balance between protecting tenants and stopping landlessness, on one hand, and facilitating the work of the market, on the other: “It is believed that the [1933] Ordinance will prevent the creation of further landless Arabs by the eviction of agricultural tenants without adequate provision in land for their subsistence, while at the same time it places no obstacle in the way of the buying and selling of land where the transfer of ownership will not adversely affect the tenant” (*Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 11).

²⁴⁵ This is of course debatable, since the scale of natural disasters is always mediated by social factors. In Palestine in 1931, for instance, peasant fields were laid to waste by a plague of field mice (*Report to the League of Nations, 1931*, p. 7). Hope Simpson concluded the previous year that in the Marj Ibn ‘Amir, the mice epidemic had its origins in the lands held in reserve (i.e. uncultivated) in the region by Zionists (Hope Simpson report, p. 13).

Commissioner reported to London in late 1935, the “grievance” “that the Jew is ‘eating up the land’[] is felt in every town and village in Palestine, and year by year with increasing strength.”²⁴⁶ The basis for the Arab view that Zionism was “eating up the land” derived from the shrinking fortunes of the rural population, especially its smallholders, tenants and agricultural workers, whose standing generally suffered greatly from the environment produced by British colonial rule. Large landowners sometimes also struggled, and as large- and smallholders were induced to sell, or, as argued here vis-à-vis smallholders especially, were compelled to sell by force of economic circumstances, the Zionist movement reaped the benefits.

Neither the British nor the Zionists regarded the market as the sole mechanism through which the latter should acquire land. The British had agreed in the articles of the Mandate covenant that state resources should be put at the disposal of the Zionists, and considered in general that this would benefit Jews and Arabs alike. They also believed that the key to squaring official support of the Zionist project with the interests of the native Arab population lay in productive and remunerative development of the country’s agricultural and natural resources. To inject dynamism into what they perceived was a stagnant system would require reconstructing or deconstructing the Ottoman land regime, with its baffling peculiarities and, it was thought, unnecessary complexities. Yet many of the state’s ventures in this regard, such as asserting that *miri* and *mawat* lands were public domain or the aspiration to extirpate *musha’* and universalize private ownership, ran into firm and intractable Arab opposition. Efforts to

²⁴⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 7.12.35 (Secret A), CP 3 (36), PRO – CAB 24/259.

reserve and allocate purported state lands to the Zionist movement often sank into the quicksand of competing claims, leaving Jewish colonists frustrated with the British, who they pilloried for retreating in the face of resistance by Arab peasants who they regarded as primitive, unproductive and undeserving of the lands in question. A similar conclusion regarding the longevity of the Ottoman land regime was reached by the Peel Commission, which castigated the administration's failure to put in place a system which would "promote close settlement and intensive cultivation," as per the Mandate's guidelines.²⁴⁷

For the colonial state, the consistent efforts of *fellahin* to contest its plan to absorb vast areas into its possession led to a renewed concentration on models of efficiency. Barbara Smith has aptly summarized the resultant contradictions in official policy aims:

When it was realized that it would be impossible to offer the Zionist Organization much [state] land that was viable for development because of such obstacles as the moral rights of Arab cultivators, the Administration stepped up its efforts to encourage Arab agriculturalists to increase productivity and thus decrease their land requirements. But it did very little to eradicate rural indebtedness or to provide financial support to Arab farmers, which would have made such intensification of production possible.²⁴⁸

Imperial rule was quickly caught in a trap of its own making, between the principles of fiscal conservatism and economic liberalism, the material commitment to Zionism, and its Orientalist vision of an inherently hierarchical Arab society whose leaders made for a convenient pillar on which to rest British authority. The tendency of colonial authorities

²⁴⁷ Peel Commission report, p. 227.

²⁴⁸ *The Roots of Separatism*, p. 109.

to resolve the ensuing conflicts and remake the local political economy in favor of Zionism affected the character of the state and its appreciation of the transformations it catalyzed in the indigenous social economy.

Though purporting to erect a typical modern bureaucratic state and liberal economy in Palestine the British were in fact embarked on a rather different mission: balancing their aid to the Zionist movement, a colonial settler project, with the maintenance and development of their own strategic interests in Palestine, which required the passivity of the indigenous population. The cloak which the British empire cast over its own interests was the doctrine of “dual obligation.” The incommensurability of British “obligations” to the two communities resident in Palestine was always objected to by Palestinians, but first came under fire from inside British colonial ranks after the violence of 1929. High Commissioner Chancellor was the first senior official to contend that the Mandate had wrongfully accorded the Jewish settlers a privileged position with respect to the Arabs. He maintained that the Jewish National Home policy was not inherently pernicious towards the Arabs, but rather that the Balfour declaration’s pledge to preserve their civil and religious rights was systematically ignored, to the detriment of British interests. Chancellor was also the first colonial official to claim that there were no lands left for the Zionist movement to purchase which would not entail the dispossession of Arabs.²⁴⁹ In the stream of committees of inquiry that followed, the refractory mood and declining position of the Arab population was continuously noted and evaluated, and Chancellor’s warning of the danger of

²⁴⁹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.1.30, p. 26-27, 32-33, 56-57, PRO – CO 733/182/9.

creating a landless class was echoed by the Shaw Commission and Hope Simpson. The notion that Zionism was growing at the expense of the Arab population was politically unpopular in Britain, however, and successive governments and cabinets in London, along with Chancellor's replacement in Palestine, HC Wauchope, endeavored to deflect the reality that the interests of Zionism and the Arab population were mutually opposed.

In truth the colonial regime's reassessments of the situation in Palestine, even by those counseling the need to reign in the dimensions of the Zionist project, only captured part of the picture of social change in the countryside. After a dozen years of British rule much of the rural Arab population was exhausted and financially insolvent. The calamitous state of the rural sphere wasn't much ameliorated after World War I, despite the state's early experience in direct lending from 1919-23, and had on the whole declined further in its aftermath. In disregard of the battered state of the local economy, the British built a modern bureaucratic state, vastly larger than the preceding organs of government known to the country, which relied in part on an extractive and unequal regime of direct taxation that saddled the countryside with heavy exactions which villagers and peasants could ill afford. The enlarged gendarme state that the British built was not only seen by Arabs as regressive and alien, but as in thrall to Zionism. It was nearly constantly at odds with the rural population, seeking to hem in and shrink its land base, and did little to ease the burdens of the *fellahin*, allowing tenants' rents to soar, usury to spread, and preferential customs for Zionist industries to damage rural incomes, while failing to create stable channels of alternative, affordable credit. Save for some notable improvements in health care services, rural areas received little in return for the

privations they suffered. For many the state was an unwanted leviathan that had escalated rural extraction and impoverishment, while turning a deaf ear to the struggles of peasants.

When the tithe collapsed as a basis for state revenue, beginning in 1930, it became clear that the great extent of peasant debt threatened the structure of the rural order, which was itself seen as a key component of stable colonial rule. The coincidence of weak harvests in the early 1930s exacerbated the situation considerably, but emergency lending and tithe remissions did little to stem the crisis. The British were aware that further economic deterioration was liable to accentuate the growing tide of urbanization and political discontent. Yet the state's further motions at remedying the situation, the stingily-funded endorsement of cooperatives and the legal effort to take on the deleterious role of moneylending within the Palestinian community, arrived after the feared withering of the social order was already well in motion.

The growth in Arab landlessness under the first 18 years of the Mandate was one of the signal developments of British rule. Although as noted above there are no precise numbers to track its exact scale, the 1931 census data revealed almost 43 percent of rural households lacked legal ownership of any land, although almost a third of this number (13 percent of households) retained access to land as tenants, predominantly on the estates of larger landlords. The number of Arab landholders shrunk thereafter, and land sales to Jewish concerns boomed in 1934 and 1935. In explaining the situation before the Peel Commission, Arthur Ruppin argued that: "There is no tendency on our part to oust Arab farmers from their holdings. The few cases where Arab tenants were

displaced... by Jewish purchases are negligible in comparison with the much bigger number of Arab farmers who have become landless by foreclosure of their holdings owing to debts to Arab creditors.”²⁵⁰ In a manner of speaking, this was a logical supposition that pointed out that most indebted Arab cultivators were in hock to fellow Arabs, though as reviewed above with respect to the Marj Ibn ‘Amir purchases, Ruppin, like other Zionist spokesmen, dramatically undercounted the numbers of Arabs displaced by Zionist land acquisitions. The key ingredient in the Arab rural order’s deterioration, however, was not who held the cultivator’s debts, but what force or forces caused them to accelerate and reach the point of foreclosure. The answer to that question, in the main, is not the avarice of wealthier Palestinians, though they too must share some portion of the blame, but the disastrous rule of the British occupation regime and its economically invidious and ruinous policies. Indeed, by the time that landlessness emerged as a major object of investigation and concern, popular alienation from the colonial state had already begun to turn, in some quarters, into the unvarnished hostility that powered the Great Revolt.

²⁵⁰ Peel Commission report, p. 241. He went on to falsely claim, in the face of obvious and well-known evidence to the contrary, that Jewish purchasers had avoided the eviction of Arab tenants in the 1930s: “We accept, and have accepted since the time of Sir John Hope Simpson, the formula that in all cases of purchases of land by Jews the Arab cultivators should remain on the land and that their economic situation should not be worse, and I hope it will be better, than it was before.” Absurdly, even after the emblematic case of Wadi al-Hawarith (that ended in 1933), as well as other lesser-known instances of forcible eviction (such as at al-Harithiyya, discussed in chapter 3), this bald-faced untruth was admitted into the Peel Commission report as a good-faith statement of Zionist intentions and conduct.

Chapter 6: The Palestinian peasantry between marginalization and mobilization

In late 1929 when the Shaw Commission traveled through areas of Palestine gathering evidence as to the cause of the uprising in August, it repeatedly encountered peasants who resented and opposed British policy. During its visit to the village of Qabab in the Ramle subdistrict, a local resident, shaykh Sa'id Abu Ghosh, addressed the commission in the following terms:

Trust, your grace Mr. President, that contrary to what you've been told, we understand well what is intended for us by the Balfour declaration [*wa'd*], and we realize the dangers and catastrophes which have befallen us and which will eliminate us. Even if the city-dwellers are silent, we the peasants will resist it with all of our power and we will not be silent. If a peasant sells his land to the Jews, he does so because of the abundance of taxes which are imposed upon him by the government in support of the Balfour declaration and on account of the poor economic condition to which this cursed declaration has given birth. Verily, we have come to reckon our presence [*dhill*] an apparition of the Balfour declaration and to fear it for the great multitude of things which with it has pained us.¹

Although as a shaykh Abu Ghosh was part of the rural elite, his sentiments were echoed by the population. Peasant discontent was evident in the black flags which greeted the commission in some areas, but more commonly in the insistent calls by villagers for the establishment of a representative government and cancellation of the Balfour declaration.² In lodging fierce critiques of the core of British policy shaykh Abu Ghosh and his countrymen upended the imperial conceit that saw peasants and the rural population as mute and inarticulate masses which strove for a simple existence and only rose in rebellion at the instigation of notables and *effendis*. The rural sector and the

¹ Quoted in: al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 228.

² Ibid.

fellahin were not docile, nor puppets of urban politicians, but bearers of their own aspirations and politics.

While Shaw Commission failed to digest the rural opposition to British policy it witnessed, and depicted agency within Palestinian society as the province of elites, to its credit, it did develop a penetrating understanding of the origins of the 1929 rebellion.³ Ultimately, its explanation attempted to split the difference between attributing the rising to incitement by “various Moslem associations” and examining the economic, political and social contexts of the population’s subordination to Zionism and the great fears that this stoked.⁴ While the *effendi* thesis tempered its conclusions, there was no mistaking that, unlike the vast majority of officials in the Palestine government and the Colonial Office, the Shaw Commission was able to discern that Zionist colonization was not greatly advantageous to local Arab society.⁵ The crux of its exploration of the negative repercussions of Jewish colonization was most pointedly captured in its assessment of the situation at Wadi al-Hawarith, where, several years before the final evictions of Bedouin there were completed, it warned that the local tribe might lose its corporate identity entirely and be dissolved by the act of dispersion from its traditional lands.⁶ The

³ The report summarized the general growth of opposition to Zionism thusly: “Step by step the whole Arab people became identified with their leaders in opposition to the Jewish National Home and, in consequence, united with them in a demand for self-government” (p. 152).

⁴ The report’s structure, let alone its substantive findings, roughly follows these twin lines of inquiry. See especially the concluding analysis (p. 150-57) and the sections on immigration, land and the question of self-rule (p. 96-131), the grievances concerning which it regarded as “immediate causes of the disturbances” (p. 96). The unspecified “Moslem associations” gestured to (p. 156) in the concluding section would seem to be an oblique reference to the YMMA’s more radical wing.

⁵ It should be emphasized that the reigning notion among British officialdom which saw Zionism as universally beneficial was, after all, always based more on an ideological notion (originating from Zionist thought) than in empirical examination. Nevertheless, as will be returned to below, it attained the quality of an *idée fixe*, much to the detriment of the Arabs.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

“extreme apprehension” which this situation stimulated already in 1930,⁷ and its conversion into a metonym for the Palestinian encounter with Zionism, was indicative of broader transformations taking place among the peasantry and in the political economy of Palestine.

As the pressures on Palestinian peasants under the Mandate accumulated and an increasing number were pushed off the land, either in consequence of sales by landlords or as smallholders unable to endure the burdens of tax and debt, Palestinian society underwent a set of pivotal transitions. The social compact that had long existed between the upper classes and the bulk of the population engaged in cultivation gradually lost force, unwinding the bonds of peasants to elites and creating the conditions for new horizontal identities to gain traction. The process of devolution was an uneasy one. Many *fellahin* struggled fervently to maintain their access to land and to remain in their rural communities. Their strategies for attempting to ride out what were seen as the encroachments and depredations of Zionism, the colonial state, and wealthy Palestinians varied widely. In some places innovations in land tenure arrangements reabsorbed some of the dispossessed or marginal peasants, helping them to avert urban migration. In other cases peasants resisted evictions and protested Zionist expansion by manipulating the relevant legal statutes as best they could or by resorting to local forms of rural warfare that were largely based in sabotage and the destruction of property. For an increasingly significant number, however, the available means of adaptation and resistance proved insufficient. The result was an ever-growing stream of migration to

⁷ Ibid.

Haifa and Jaffa, the port cities that had become the cultural and economic epicenters of the Arab community. The British generally viewed Arab urbanization as destabilizing and antithetical to their vision of ruling over a passive rural society, but as with the intertwined issue of landlessness, their policies propelled the very outcome they set out to avoid.

In the cities, peasant migrants faced a different set of challenges. The alienation they already suffered from dispossession and the loss of a way of life was compounded by new predicaments. They confronted rising Zionist assertiveness and campaigns for Hebrew labor, often lived in squalor in some of Palestine's first shantytowns, and constantly struggled to find adequate employment and make ends meet. The neglect they had experienced at the hands of the government while in the countryside continued on in their new urban environs. Despite its growing budget surpluses in the first half of the 1930s, the colonial state failed to ensure access to decent housing. Critically, it also refused to acknowledge, much less alleviate, the crisis of Arab under- and unemployment which gripped the cities and the countryside alike. Rural migrants who had been marginal residents of their former village communities found themselves marginalized again in the burgeoning cities. But just as they had struggled against the deteriorating conditions of life in the countryside, the oppressive circumstances of their new surroundings soon proved fertile ground for new solidarities and increasingly militant forms of social and political activism, from trade unionism to clandestine paramilitary organization.

This chapter examines the social, political, and economic transformation of Palestinian society that flowed from the growth of landlessness. In doing so, it endeavors to highlight the ways in which *fellahin*, in both the rural and urban spheres, attempted to negotiate the mounting crises which beset their lives. The subject of peasant politics, broadly construed, has been rather minimally attended to within the existing scholarly literature on Arab society under the Mandate. The treatment it has received has typically reinforced images of peasants as passive, thoroughly subordinated to the notables, or inclined to compromise with Zionism, the British, or both.⁸ Here, in a broad overview beginning with the first decade of the British occupation (during which the landless crisis began to reach fruition) and continuing through the first half of the 1930s, I will suggest that such depictions are misleading and ignore strong currents of peasant antipathy towards British rule and Zionist colonialism. Further, depictions that emphasize peasant quiescence have buttressed the assumption that Palestinian society was almost inherently vertical, and have detracted from our understanding of the shifting dimensions and dynamics of peasant agency. The progressive erosion of the *ancien régime* in the countryside led, on balance, to the amplification of peasant autonomies and to new forms of horizontal self-organization characteristic of the age of mass politics.

This chapter will attempt to put these developments into their broader context,

⁸ Porath, *Emergence*, p. 309; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 52-54; Ken Stein, "One Hundred Years of Social Change," p. 68; Kimmerling and Migdal, *The Palestinian People*, p. 67-101; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*. See also below. Some histories are ambivalent on the issue in the period prior to the revolt, e.g. Farsoun and Aruri, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, p. 57-93. Exceptions to the dominant trend include: Swedenburg, "The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier" and *Memories of Revolt*; Khalidi, "Palestinian Peasant Resistance," and *Palestinian Identity*. Khalidi's subsequent volume, *The Iron Cage*, has little to say on the subject. On Arabic historiography, see the useful discussion in "The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier," p. 26-27.

particularly in their urban setting, and to shed some light on the new subjectivities and political activism to which they gave rise before the Great Revolt.

Peasant politics in the first decade of occupation: a rural peace?

In histories of the British Mandate peasants often feature as marginal actors. As noted above, they have commonly been perceived to be passive vessels, capable on occasion of being roused from their agrarian indifference by social superiors but otherwise disinterested in political questions. Arab villages have been depicted as populated by uneducated men and women whose way of life, usually represented as a timeless, unchanging struggle connected more deeply with the natural environment than with social systems, has often been held, implicitly or explicitly, as somehow responsible for their ostensible apolitical condition. Such arguments are typically vague and trade in broad generalizations bereft of serious empirical evidence or analysis. Tom Segev, for instance, describes rural Arab communities in the 1920s in the following manner:

The daily routine of the Arab village went on in its sleepy way, in keeping with a tradition that was stronger than time.... The cycles of nature and religious ritual would prescribe their days of rest and celebration and mourning... Locals would seldom venture to the city; some never left their villages. National politics reached them slowly, if at all.⁹

Porath, in a somewhat more dressed-up rendition of the stereotype of the *fellah* as existing outside politics, has contended that villagers in the 1920s generally “lacked any

⁹ *One Palestine Complete*, p. 271. Miller offers a similar Orientalist description of the Ottoman period as a time when the “relationship to life was neither active nor passive, but was predicated on the search for harmony with irrevocable conditions” (*Government and Society*, p. 168).

political consciousness” and were “a long way from being able to comprehend” the nation-form. Their purported distance from politics under the Mandate was bound up with their lack of formal education and their presumed ignorance, as well as with the changing intellectual conception of political community that nationalist discourse instantiated: “The ideology of national self-determination anchored in separate historical and linguistic identity was a revolutionary innovation in Palestine in the ’twenties, and it is highly doubtful if it could have been grasped by the less educated section of the community.”¹⁰

Other scholars have similarly depicted the *fellahin* as lacking political sophistication and devoid of the means to identify, let alone organize against, the challenges besetting them. Miller writes that: “What Palestinian Arab villagers sensed but could not articulate was the strain of responding to two very different threats to tradition at the same time,” namely “European government and Jewish settlement.” Her study, the most thorough of British policy towards the countryside, holds that while Arab villagers “may often have been powerless... they did not passively accept loss of control over their own lives.” However, despite this acknowledgement of peasant agency, she concludes that “they did ultimately lose confidence in their ability to control either the nature or the pace of change in their lives.” Consequently, peasants were reduced, over time, to leaning on the state for support, yet their capacities to do so were compromised by the fact that they were “largely illiterate and often inarticulate.” Thus, in a double

¹⁰ *Emergence*, p. 39, 307.

bind, “Villagers found themselves growing more dependent on the Palestine government while they were less effective in communicating their needs to officials.”¹¹

Reading such accounts one runs repeatedly into the notion that peasants, because they were mostly illiterate and without a modern education, were incapable of either adequately assessing their changing situation or of doing anything of their own volition related to political matters. If they were political at all, it was in the most local and “traditional” of senses, pertaining to feuds between families or to the divisions and tensions between the urban centers and the hinterlands.¹² Yet, in stark contrast to such inward-looking portrayals of village life and peasant society, shortly after the occupation began British intelligence pointed to the *fellahin* as a potential source of volatility. In August 1919, one of the heads of the military regime that preceded the civil administration, General H.D. Watson, commander of the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration (OETA), South, noted that: “The antagonism to Zionism of the majority of the population is deep-rooted – it is fast leading to hatred of the British – and will result, if the Zionist programme is forced upon them, in an outbreak of a very serious character.”¹³ Both British and Zionist intelligence sources believed “it was apparent that the peasants were more prone to action and to revolt entailing self-sacrifice than other groups of society.”¹⁴ Religious fervor was seen as one reason for this inclination, but a host of other economic and political matters were named as factors, including the Hebrew labor program, the threat of dispossession and eviction owing to Zionist land

¹¹ *Government and Society*, p. x, xiii, 79, 118.

¹² Stein, “Rural Change,” p. 152.

¹³ Quoted in: Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 72.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

purchasing activity, and the Zionist movement's opposition to an agricultural loan program that the colonial state was considering.¹⁵

British naval intelligence found that peasants and villagers were eager consumers of political news and opinion, listening in public venues (such as cafés) to newspapers being read aloud.¹⁶ Far from displaying apathy, naval intelligence found that *fellahin* perspicaciously argued as early as 1919 that the Zionist movement derived a host of privileges and advantages from the British administration, and that the situation represented a threat to their own existence.¹⁷ Peasants, in other words, critically analyzed the relationship between Zionism and the British from its earliest days, and concluded pointedly – before the Mandate was formally conferred and before the civil administration had come into existence – that the new rulers had effectively become a sponsor of the Jewish colonial movement. Their apperception is hardly a surprise given the constant tensions between Arabs and many Jewish colonies in the late days of the Ottoman empire, surveyed in the chapter 4.

Demonstrating the continued efficacy of vertical bonds and the class order of Arab society in the early years of the British occupation, the peasantry was mobilized by elites in order to add breadth and depth to the new nationalist creed. James Gelvin has illustrated that popular frameworks were always prone to moving in directions that might jeopardize elite power and dominance, and therefore carried great risks to the

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 72-73.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 73; Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 57; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 147; Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, 27.

¹⁷ Kayali, *Palestine*, p. 74.

upper classes.¹⁸ In the period surrounding Faysal's rule in Damascus, it was the younger ranks of the aspiring national political class in what became Palestine that showed the greatest interest in mass mobilization as a tactical means for attaining nationalist goals. The younger politicians, many of them inside the Damascus regime at the time, are credited with orchestrating an attack on British military forces in April 1920 by up to 2000 Bedouin from the Hawran in Syria and the Beisan valley in Palestine.¹⁹ Their hopes of igniting a wider rebellion did not come to pass, but supporters of the Faysali regime in Jerusalem quickly succeeded the same month in turning the annual Nabi Musa festival into a violent display of resistance to Zionism. Rising young politicians like al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni (before his conversion to religious dignitary) and 'Arif al-'Arif gave speeches extolling the Hashemite state in Syria, and were joined in doing such by Musa Kazim Pasha al-Husayni, then the mayor of Jerusalem. The crowds, including peasants from surrounding villages, stirred by the uncertain future of the Arab national regime to the north, rampaged through the Old City and attacked Jews at random. Five Jews were killed in the carnage and another 242 were injured, while police caused the death of four Arabs and wounded another two dozen during their efforts to suppress and control the crowd. The Palin Commission, which investigated the Nabi Musa events, described the position of the population preceding the violence as without exception

¹⁸ Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*.

¹⁹ Muslih, *The Origins*, p. 150. The assault was organized by the Palestine Youth Society (*Jam'iyyat fatat Filastin*), a spin-off of the Palestine Arab Society (*al-Jam'iyya al-'Arabiyya al-Filastiniyya*), itself a grouping in which 'Izzat Darwaza, 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi and Rafiq al-Tamimi all played a part and which derived from *al-Fatat*.

united “in a condition of active hostility at once to the Zionists and the British Administration.”²⁰

As Swedenburg observes, the notables were not keen on mass mobilization, which aside from appearing crude and threatening in method stood in contrast to their preference for diplomacy and belief in the efficacy of cultivating personal relations and influence.²¹ Nevertheless, while they struggled to regroup after the Nabi Musa “riots” and assert their claim to leadership, further collective violence occurred the following year. In 1921 an altercation between Muslims and Zionist May Day marchers in Manshiyya, a Jaffan neighborhood adjacent to Tel Aviv, touched off rumors of Jewish attacks on Arabs which led to further demonstrations and fighting between Arabs and Jews, with British forces intervening to suppress the Arabs. Over a number of days some 48 Arabs and 47 Jews were killed, and 75 Arabs and 146 Jews were injured. Word of the violence at Jaffa precipitated a massive peasant mobilization on 5 May 1921 for an assault on Petah Tiqva, about 16 kilometers from Jaffa. A reported 3000 Arabs gathered to the north of the colony, and another several hundred to the south, but their offensives were beaten back by British forces, which inflicted heavy casualties on the Arabs, killing 60. The colonies of Rehovoth, Hadera, and Kfar Saba were also attacked.²²

²⁰ Swedenburg, “The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry,” p. 477-78; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 75-77. Gerber, in a dissenting account, disputes common views of the violence as an Arab riot and avers that its specific origin is unknown (*Remembering and Imagining*, p. 94).

²¹ Swedenburg, “The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry,” p. 478.

²² Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 92-93; 95-97. Wasserstein gives the former number as total for all casualties (*The British in Palestine*, p. 103).

Although Zionist accounts have ascribed these events to a conspiracy, usually traced to al-Hajj Amin, such explanations are of doubtful provenance since the future Grand Mufti was in exile at the time. Gerber has further incisively pointed out that this argument depicts the Arab public as Janus-faced, at once controlled or instigated by elites yet at the same time pushing elites into radical confrontation and violence.²³ The official assessments of the “disturbances” offered by both the Haycraft Commission (organized to investigate the incidents) and the High Commissioner concluded against any premeditation, and noted that antipathy towards Zionism was widespread.²⁴ HC Samuel went so far as to commend the leaders of the “Arab Nationalist Movement” for their aid in quelling the state of unrest and acting to support the restoration of public order.²⁵ The rural sector, however, was treated quite differently, as it was the 1921 events that gave birth to collective punishment in Palestine.

To check the potential for further insurrection in the countryside and to punish the peasants and Bedouin who mounted attacks on Jewish colonies, a group of towns, villages, and populations were subject to collective fines under a new statute, the Collective Responsibility for Crime Ordinance. Tulkarm, Qaqun, Kafr Saba (the Arab village), and the tribes of Wadi al-Hawarith and Abu Kishk were each hit with colossal levies totaling some £P 6000 per village/population group. The success of these massive fines in stifling further violence caused the provisions for imposing collective fines to be

²³ Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining*, p. 99.

²⁴ Peel Commission report, p. 51; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 97-98.

²⁵ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 97-98.

included in the subsequent Prevention of Crime Ordinance, which became the premier legal instrument used to suppress unwanted political activity in the early 1930s.²⁶

For HC Samuel, the foiled offensives on Jewish colonies and the bloodshed in Jaffa were eye-opening and caused him to revise his view of Arab politics and society. The older Arab elites were in a precarious position, generally looking with disfavor on popular violence and standing on the side of “order,” while at the same time seeking to lead the national movement and society, elements of which were much more willing to express fervent and total rejection of the emergent status quo under the British. Peasants, Bedouin and the bulk of the population were not only politically active and aware, but had found in themselves, as the High Commissioner subsequently cabled to Colonial Secretary Churchill, the ability to hinder colonial policies.²⁷

In the months after the Jaffa events, the Arab countryside became an incipient battleground between the more strident wing of the national movement and the Zionist movement. When the AE delegation that left Palestine after the Jaffa “riots” became bogged down in months of negotiations with the colonial authorities in London, activists and educated nationalists in Palestine surmised that it would return empty-handed. Radical members of the movement believed that this demonstrated the need to escalate the national struggle by organizing further attacks on Zionist settlements. To this end they acted to build links between rural partisans of the national cause and the formal, urban-based leadership. Secret meetings were convened at Tulkarm, Ramle, Hebron,

²⁶ Porath, *Emergence*, p. 132. On the Prevention of Crime Ordinance, see: Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 110-11 and PRO – CO 733/209/17. See also: chapters 1 and 9.

²⁷ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 97-100.

and Lubyā (in the Tiberias subdistrict). The meetings were each attended by small, discreet groups of 30-50 townsmen and villagers, and sought to lay the groundwork for a coherent, integrated plan, to be developed over months, for attacking nearby Jewish colonies. *Fellahin* were to be the backbone of the Arab offensive, and were reported to be (according to Zionist intelligence) weary of political struggle but willing to move forward so long as the Zionist targets were not as well armed as they were reputed to be. In the event, the young militants' initiative was not carried out, but by this time the Zionist movement already perceived a need prior to quash the popular resistance which it had encountered and to spread its own perspectives among the population of the countryside.²⁸

Just after Nabi Musa in 1920, the Zionist Executive in Palestine presented the Zionist Organization with an action plan aimed at squelching Arab resistance to their cause. Its prongs addressed rural Palestine specifically by suggesting that the Bedouin be separated from other Arabs, and that leaders of the Opposition faction, many of whom were not militantly opposed to Zionism and some of whom supported it and sought its financial or political support, should be encouraged and bolstered. The Arab Department of the Zionist Executive, headed by Haim Kalvarisky, first sought to put the plan into motion by allying with local Arab partners to create a foil to the Muslim-Christian Association. The National Muslim Association (NMA), as it was called, was intended to introduce a more sectarian element into the national movement's midst, while appearing to be another national organization. It attacked the MCA and the

²⁸ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 104-06.

Palestinian national movement as unrepresentative of the population in telegrams and petitions to the colonial authorities, and it voiced support for Zionist immigration. Consequently, the NMA, the first formal organization established and led by Opposition figures, was not very popular and was quickly branded a traitorous association and cat's paw for Zionism.²⁹

The second effort to create a viable Palestinian organization that would blunt and redirect the national movement focused expressly on the countryside. Beginning in 1924, a cluster of village shaykhs and notables, in alliance with the Zionist movement, began to form what were called Farmers' Parties (*Ahzab al-zura*). Such parties appeared in different regions, including those around Nablus and Jenin (the hill country north), Hebron (hill country south), and Nazareth (the Galilee), and were invariably led by prominent shaykhs such as Faris al-Mas'ud (of Burqa, Nablus subdistrict), 'Abd al-Latif Abu Hantash (from Qaqun, near Tulkarm), and Musa Hudayb (of Dawa'ima, near Hebron). For the most part, the parties were not animated by issues pertaining to the *fellahin* (such as indebtedness), but rather were driven by shaykhly "bitterness" at their marginalization at the hands of urban notables and politicians, dating back to the nineteenth century. The politics of *resentiment* that they gave voice to brought them in league with urban sympathizers from the Opposition faction and left them searching for means to strike back at the dominant urban elements. Their quest to diminish their rivals led them to the Zionists' doorstep, as Porath explains: "Not infrequently they were willing to express their opposition to the urban élite by supporting Zionism or at least by

²⁹ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 16-19; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 106. See also Porath, *Emergence*, p. 214-16; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 180.

demurring from the anti-Zionist movement [i.e. the nationalist movement] directed against it.” The parties’ programs were in fact partially authored by Kalvarisky and included provisions supporting cooperation with the government on a constitutional basis (in contrast to the AE’s successful 1923 boycott of the first legislative council proposal), retaining a village role in the management of *waqf* (against the statutory power of the SMC), and the reform and development of rural government, such as by building schools and, importantly, canceling the tithe. The parties were backed by the Zionist movement, so much so that when depression struck the *yishuv* in 1926-27 and funds dried up, they ceased to function.³⁰

Though the Zionist Executive had been intent on using the Farmers’ Parties as a wedge with which to divide the Palestinian national movement, the peasantry does not appear to have been much taken in by their appeal. On the contrary, in the hill country around Nablus and Jenin, the party was prevented from including in its platform a clause approving the Mandate precisely because of *fellahin* disaffection from such a posture.³¹ This sentiment, which surely stemmed from the general apprehension over the Balfour declaration and the Jewish National Home policy, hardly seems to have been limited to the northern hill districts, and only two years after the parties ceased functioning peasants across the country assaulted a barrage of Jewish colonies during the bloody events of August 1929.

³⁰ Porath, *Emergence*, p. 227-30.

³¹ Ibid., p. 229. While the peasantry may have been reluctant to lend its favor to the Farmers’ Parties, many shaykhs may have had no such qualms. Cohen cites Haydar Tuqan, a leader of the Nablus-area party, as claiming to have lined up 200 villages behind the new outfit, already in 1924. The claim, as he notes, was doubtless exaggerated and illustrates that the shaykhs were not immune from gaming their patrons while trying to forward their own anti-urban agenda (*Army of Shadows*, p. 20-21).

Despite the early attacks by peasant-based forces on Zionist settlements and British forces, and in spite of their hostility to a variety of state policies, colonial administrators often put the best face they could on matters. For example, in a gloomy report on local affairs in the north that noted seething Arab discontent at colonial economic and political policies, G.S. Symes, Governor of Haifa district, opined that “by showing keen and practical concern for the welfare of the fellahin, we may be able to prevent” their “total alienation” from the state.³² Although Symes saw some prospect of building support amongst the peasantry, his reference to “total alienation” demonstrated that the feared process was already underway. As has been suggested in chapter 5 and will be returned to below, the administration displayed anything but a “keen and practical concern” for Arab peasants and the countryside as a whole, and its policies were variously reviled or disregarded. The state’s tax collectors, for instance, could hardly have been in the dark about rural Arab antipathy and disaffection. Edwin Samuel, a district officer in the 1920s and son of the first High Commissioner, traveled with a retinue of 14 men when he began his duties collecting taxes and acting as a magistrate in the countryside.³³ Laws and policies regulating the land regime were also flouted with great frequency and deeply resented. While its public representation of Palestinian affairs and, at times, its internal imperial communications, downplayed or ignored peasant discontents, some officials were well aware that the rural population did not accept state policies. More to the point, the colonial authorities were seen as alien, and for some, as Naomi Shepherd observes, “The administration... was seen as the

³² Memo by G.S. Symes, 5.2.22, CP 3921, PRO – CAB 24/136.

³³ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 101.

enemy.”³⁴ For much of the 1920s the government preferred to disregard indications that its rule was despised, but in 1929 it was forced to recognize that the “tranquility” it had publicly reported as prevailing in the country masked roiling rural fears about the future of Palestine, the growth of the Jewish National Home, socio-economic displacement, and the survival of the peasantry.³⁵

The peasantry, the notables, and the state after 1929

The impoverishment of the peasantry during the first decade of the Mandate had great ramifications for the politics of the notables. Although Arab elites were slow to fully grasp the magnitude of the changes taking place, as peasant fortunes declined so too did the political standing and powers of representation long enjoyed by elites. Several studies have noted that when peasants became landless and lost access to usufruct in land (i.e. they did not become tenants) or had to seek work in the cities, their bonds to former landlords dissipated.³⁶ Yet it has not been fully appreciated that what was lost as poverty swelled and land alienation continued was much more than the individual ties between discrete groups of *fellahin* and *a‘yan*. The shocks to which the rural order was subjected under the Mandate dealt the already shaky ideological and material foundations of the *ancien régime* profound blows. The entire social edifice of the countryside, and its painstakingly constructed networks of merchants and peasant producers, hung in the balance. Although landlessness was the most visible sign of the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1927*, p. 3 and *Report to the League of Nations, 1928*, p. 6; quote from the latter.

³⁶ Stein, “One Hundred Years,” p. 66; Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 56.

rural order's weakening health, the problematic posture of the notables vis-à-vis the *fellahin* was evident all around: they neither repelled the intensified exactions and crippling trade policies of the British regime, nor offered their peasant partners substantive relief from the debts they held. As notables proved incapable of or unwilling to afford protection to peasants from the manifold crises afflicting their livelihoods, sourness spread among segments of the peasantry, along with distrust in elite intentions. Peasants didn't have to be dispossessed wantonly or everywhere for the impression to grow that the old social compact had begun to unravel and, worse, that some were profiting off of their tribulations.³⁷ The tensions which accumulated between the surplus-appropriating classes and the struggling and the dispossessed exploded during the Great Revolt, but frictions were evident earlier on.

Even before the 1929 uprising, British reports indicate a growing distance between *fellahin* and elites. In 1927 Ronald Symes, the Officer Administering the Government, reported to London that a rift existed between peasants and elites on the national question.³⁸ Though his observations betrayed the hallmarks of the *effendi* thesis, he noted that peasants were increasingly inclined to distinguish between what they perceived to be national and elite interests.³⁹ In subsequent years the uneasy position of the peasantry within the national movement, and the distance of urban

³⁷ As Khalaf observes: "Economic insecurity among a rising number of destitute peasants explains why during the Mandate they held urban landowning interests responsible for their frustrations" (Khalaf, "The Effect," p. 96).

³⁸ While High Commissioners were on leave and during interludes between commissioners, the Palestine administration would be run by an official, often the Chief Secretary, temporarily holding this rank.

³⁹ Miller, *Government and Society*, p. 80. Symes characterized the national movement as led by *effendis* who were interested in following the lead of the Egyptian national movement's tactics, while he surmised that such was less attractive to peasants.

politicians from the rural population and the challenges it faced, became increasingly visible.

The formal leadership of the national movement, overwhelmingly urban in origin, demonstrated little capacity to develop institutions and power-sharing that would encompass and integrate the bulk of the population, which was rural. The AE and what still functioned of the MCA network both represented the urban political class. National politicians also displayed a tendency to exclude rural elements from important national conferences or bodies, such as the delegation to London in 1930, which rankled some of the rural notables.⁴⁰ The rural field was hardly unitary, it is worth recalling, and was split along multiple political as well as class lines. Nonetheless, the weakness of the national leadership's representation of rural interests, including the bulk of the country's population of agricultural producers, led many peasants, like youth, to take their own initiatives after 1929 which betrayed their variance from the urban leadership, politically and tactically.

While some rural notables displayed their continued openness to collaborating with Zionism against their urban enemies,⁴¹ the general trend among peasants in the

⁴⁰ No rural representative was included on the 1930 delegation, nor did the 1931 Islamic Conference feature rural leaders (Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 53, 58).

⁴¹ With the aid of the Jewish Agency, some rural notables from the Jerusalem and Hebron areas who resented both being passed over for posts in the SMC and the all-urban composition of the AE's 1930 delegation tried to resurrect something akin to a Farmers' Party in 1930. The effort, led by former associates of the mufti from the Darwish family (from Maliha, south-west of Jerusalem), members of the Abu Ghosh family (from the Bani Hasan *nahiya*), and others, came to naught after the AE and the mufti mobilized their supporters and took over the group's founding meeting. Although the mufti had previously dispatched a youthful lieutenant, Tahir al-Fitayani, to watch over the Darwishes and to urge them to come to the AE with their grievances, the exercise may have had more to do with intimidation or surveillance than bridging the divide between rural and urban notables, as al-Hajj Amin's much-vaunted Islamic Conference in 1931 repeated the pattern of neglecting rural participation and inclusion. It is worth noting,

period after the *Buraq* revolt was towards increasing opposition to the Zionist movement and British rule. In 1929 peasants turned out in force to attack Jews and Zionist colonies and thereby vigorously and violently express their discontent at the political and economic marginalization they suffered for the sake of Zionism and British policy. After the brutal British suppression of Arab communities in 1929, the rural population, like their urban brethren, increasingly saw the colonial power as a force of oppression and as the Zionists' shield.⁴² The propensity of peasants to use or support violent means of resisting the dual colonial order put them at odds with much of the national leadership, as it had during the 1929 attacks.

An early indication of the growing antipathy of peasants to Zionism and British rule may be seen in the popular support given to the armed band led by Ahmad Tafish after the 1929 events. The core of Tafish's group, *al-Kaf al-khadra* (the Green Hand), was composed of 27 men who had "participated conspicuously" in the 1929 attacks in Safad. The band operated in the Safad and Acre subdistricts and in Safad itself. Police estimated the group's strength at as many as 80 members at times, owing to the avid interest of local villagers and some Druze from Syria in the Green Hand's mission of attacking Jewish colonies in the Safad region as well as the population of the Jewish quarter of the city itself. After its formation in October 1929 the band harassed the Jewish quarter of Safad with sniper fire, later mounting a full-scale attack on it that was repelled by police. The District Commissioner severed the Green Hand from its base of

as Porath points out, that despite their deep anger at the mufti, the rural leaders above did not turn to the Nashashibis as allies, since they saw their patriarch as part of the AE's political machine (Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 52-53, 58; Report, A.H. Cohen to Joint Bureau leadership, 4.3.30, CZA J/1 – 310).

⁴² Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 145-46. See also chapter 1.

support in Safad by threatening its Arab population with collective punishment, but the Green Hand continued to assault police patrols in the Acre subdistrict and, with the aid of “sympathetic” villagers, to outwit the authorities until military reinforcements succeeded in suppressing it in early 1930, dispersing or arresting its partisans.⁴³

In his report on the situation, HC Chancellor suggested that the band’s familiarity with its environs and the popular support it received from area villagers helped it to survive as long as it did. As part of their countermeasures, police and military forces mounted “raids” on a host of area villages. Although the High Commissioner suggested that the Green Hand was a test-case initiated by Arab politicians of the potential for wider guerilla struggle, the band does not appear to have had support from within the primary organs of the nationalist movement, with the exception of possible links to Subhi al-Khadra. Tafish was widely seen as a hero by many Palestinians, and, given the Green Hand’s independence from elites its precocious effort at armed insurrection served as a public reminder of the gulf that had come to exist between many elite nationalist leaders and the rest of the public.⁴⁴

Much as they had after the popular explosion of 1929, elites struggled to keep abreast of popular sentiment in the countryside. While preoccupied in 1930 with the delegation and the White Paper, in 1931 the AE moved to reassert its authority in the rural sphere. Following receipt of a petition (*mazbata*) from *a‘yan* and *mukhtars* objecting to the growth of certain peasants’ associations (some of which may have been Zionist-aligned), the AE agreed in March that it would only recognize those rural

⁴³ HC to Col Sec, 22.2.30, PRO – CO 733/190/5; quotes from p. 2 and 9.

⁴⁴ Ibid.; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 156; Lachman, “Arab rebellion and terrorism,” p. 56.

societies which had earned its stamp of approval.⁴⁵ It is difficult to say exactly what the AE was reacting to, but its insistence on controlling the political representation of rural interests is unmistakable. More sympathetically, in August 1931, after several seasons of disastrous harvests, the AE voiced opposition to the heavy burden of the tithe regime. In a full session that month it passed a resolution calling for the *'ushr* to be cancelled completely and for *werko* assessments to be lowered.⁴⁶ After first considering negotiations with the Palestine administration over the latter's plan to substitute a rural property tax for the tithe, the AE subsequently hardened its position, resolving in early 1932 to demand cancellation of the tithe and to reject the imposition of any substitute.⁴⁷

Although the AE belatedly returned to the issue of agrarian taxation which it had raised almost a decade earlier, there were other signs that urban leaders were aloof from the realities of the countryside. This was so even for populist leaders and those immersed in organizing with new horizontal social forces. The Istiqlal party, for instance, had precious little to say about the peasantry and in spite of the rising prominence of individual and collective dispossession as a major political issue did not make the championing of peasant interests a rhetorical or organizational touchstone.⁴⁸

As we saw in chapter 3, while the Youth Congress and other youth associations involved in land tours and campaigns displayed concern for struggling *fellahin*, they still typically

⁴⁵ AE minutes, 14.3.31, ISA (65) 984 – 5pe; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 53-54.

⁴⁶ AE minutes, 16.8.31, ISA (65) 984 – 5pe. The motion, first suggested by 'Abd al-Qadir al-Muzaffar and seconded by Fahmi al-'Abbushi, came in the midst of debate over the administration's development scheme.

⁴⁷ AE minutes, 17.2.32 and undated session (appears to be March 1932, and may be the 6th), ISA (65) 984 – 5pe. Shortly afterwards, at its 3 April 1932 session, the AE resolved in favor of a tax strike unless the government voluntarily cancelled the tithe and the *werko*, though no action seems to have been taken (ibid.).

⁴⁸ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 156.

did so in a fashion which placed the onus of national responsibility for land sales on those very peasants, rather than on their exploitation by elites and on the corrosive effects of usury. More egregiously, there are reports that lawyers contracted to defend land rights claims and fight legal dispossession and eviction sometimes asked for exorbitant fees from their clients. For example, at Qusqus-Tab'un, where a land claims case was taken to court, the lawyer's payment in the event of a victory was reputed to be half of the lands in question, or over 4600 dunams.⁴⁹

While elites and urban youth began to pay more attention to the countryside and its ordeals, peasants moved in the early 1930s to step up resistance to dispossession and the spread of Zionist colonization on their own terms. The most common means of expressing their discontent were forms of sabotage and trespass that had long been staples of local warfare. In the early 1930s there was a spike in what the colonial authorities called "agrarian crime," which usually meant uprooting trees or maiming cattle. As colonial reports also noted, a pattern emerged in which the familiar peasant mode of petty warfare⁵⁰ through attrition and property damage was aimed at Jewish colonies. This was most marked in the Tulkarm subdistrict, where not coincidentally land sales had picked up and new Jewish colonies were regularly being erected in the coastal region between Tel Aviv and Haifa that was targeted by Zionist purchasing organs. Acts of peasant subversion escalated in 1932, and by 1933 the situation was such that the state subjected the entire subdistrict to penalties under the Collective

⁴⁹ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 110 and ft. 80, p. 264. The size of the stake is calculated from Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 60.

⁵⁰ This phrase is adapted from James Reilly's description of peasant conflicts in the late Ottoman period as "petty wars" ("The Peasantry," p. 91).

Punishments Ordinance. The government explained to the League of Nations that: “The District Commissioner was satisfied that nothing short of scheduling all the villages in the Sub-District [for collective punishment] would provide the means to deal promptly and effectively with this form of destruction of property.” The 206 Arab villages that comprised the area were thus hit with unspecified fines *en masse*. This drastic measure went some way towards the desired end, ostensibly lowering agrarian crime by 50 percent for the year. Examination of the statistics collected by the state on such offenses reveals a significant pattern of peasant protest, tapering off somewhat after the deployment of collective punishment, with 906 cases in 1932, 559 in 1933, 340 in 1934 and 230 in 1935. Noting the phenomenon, the Peel Commission later commented that the years between 1930 and 1933 presented a deceptive appearance of calm, but “under the quiet surface Arab antagonism was still fiercely smouldering.”⁵¹

Peasant resistance precipitated a dynamic with the state that at once crystallized the disparity between the Jewish and the “non-Jewish” populations before the law, and paved the way for further conflict. The state’s draconian response to peasant resistance to colonization stood in diametric contrast to its disinterest in protecting Arab lives. In his unpublished memoir H.P. Rice, who became head of the CID in 1932, offers a useful counterpoint to the collective punishment of the Tulkarm subdistrict in 1933. He describes his surprise at the order of business within the police department on his first day at work thusly:

⁵¹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1932*, p. 4; *Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 7; *Report to the League of Nations, 1935*, p. 7; Peel Commission report, p. 80. In his memoirs, Hugh Foot, Assistant District Commissioner at Nablus, took credit for the collective fine scheme and related it to resistance to “what amounted to a gradual transfer of the fertile [coastal] plain from Arab to Jewish ownership”: *A Start in Freedom* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), p. 45, 47.

I soon discovered that everything of importance got a political 'slant'. Ordinary murders, for instance, did not seem to disturb the situation unduly. These were mainly family feuds.... I remember that on my first day we looked at no less than six murder reports. I was astounded. K.H. [Kingsley Heath] said that this was quite ordinary. In any other country of which I had experience such a state of affairs would have 'raised the roof'.... Killings which were important, however, were those of Jews by Arabs (and there had been a series of these over the last two years before I took over) or the murder of a British resident.⁵²

Similarly, the district officer of Tulkarm reported in late August 1931 that: "The situation of the Sub-District is normal. Two murders took place during the last week."⁵³ The colonial inequity in the state's priorities was plain: the murder of Arabs, so long as it was suspected or known to be attributed to other Arabs, was of little consequence, whereas interference with the mission of promoting "close settlement of the land" by Jewish colonists struck at the state's foundational commitments and could not be brooked.

The manner of the state's response to peasant recalcitrance created a template for what followed during the Great Revolt. What was tellingly called a "punitive police post" was established in the Tulkarm area in 1932 in order to "bring the unruly district under closer police surveillance." This was a billet erected and funded at the expense of villagers, designed as a both a deterrent and a financial disincentive to unwanted behavior. Rather than conduct any investigation, however, such as would occur in the instance of any serious crime, the colonial state escalated the use of collective punishment, first on selected villages in 1932 and then on the entire population of the

⁵² Quoted in: Kolinsky, *Law, Order and Riots*, p. 100; brackets in the original. A.J. Kingsley-Heath was head of the CID prior to Rice's appointment.

⁵³ Political report, Tulkarm area district officer, 31.8.31, ISA (112) 5170 – 4m.

subdistrict in 1933. Peasants and villagers thus saw the legal rights that the Mandate had allotted to them, including the right to defend themselves in court, summarily obviated by collective punishment.⁵⁴ Further, by deploying collective punishment in the early 1930s for property crimes (as opposed to its use in 1921 in response to attacks on persons as well as objects), the state signaled a coarsening in its treatment of the *fellahin*. Implicit in its actions was a view of the rural population as an indistinct and volatile mass, which required surveillance and was best treated through collective and not individual sanctions. This perspective was subsequently generalized and expanded during the revolt, when punitive police posts and collective fines became the order of the day for confronting a rebellious Arab public.⁵⁵

The shift that occurred in the late 1920s and early 1930s towards increasing domestic sales of land to Jewish purchasers, including a growing portion of total transfers alienated by smallholders, was gradually accompanied by a stiffening of peasant resolve to remain on the land and retain its usufruct while resisting Zionist encroachment, by hook or by crook. After a rise in the volume of disputes over boundaries and customary rights between Arabs and Jews the state enacted an ordinance in 1932 designed to quell the increasing signs of friction. The Land Disputes (Possession) Ordinance was meant as a remedy to a spate of violent altercations between

⁵⁴ Palestinians were not unaware of the extralegal aspect of the treatment they received from the state, and sought redress not only from collective punishments, but from the method of their imposition. In one such protest, Sabri 'Abdin, a religious leader from Hebron, contested in mid-1932 the assignment of collective fines on families from the city for the uprooting of trees in its vicinity, arguing that an investigation should be carried out before any such fines were levied. 'Abdin's motion was supported by the AE, but little seems to have come of their protests ('Ovadia reports,' 5.5.32, CZA – J/1 – 205/1).

⁵⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1932*, p. 4; *Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 7; *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 5.

Jewish settlers, Bedouin and other Arabs, some of which involved firearms. According to the new statute, District Commissioners were empowered to determine the disposition of any piece of contested land that was deemed liable to cause a serious breach of the peace. This new power, which circumvented the land courts, was aimed at unlawful trespass, which referred in the main to Arabs. However, there are some indications that the law backfired and encouraged peasants to continue or perhaps expand their claims. According to one account, “Jewish purchasers complained that the Palestinian peasant believed that, if he seized land purchased by Jews, he could somehow manage to keep it; or, failing to keep it, he could at least blackmail the Jewish purchaser for payment to vacate the land.”⁵⁶ Though the state broadcast that the ordinance was instrumental in preventing major eruptions of violence from 1932-34, it does not appear to have alleviated the spread of land struggles and their tendency towards escalation and violence, as discussed in chapters 2 and 3.⁵⁷

But conflict with settlers was not the only or even the primary method through which peasants strove to maintain themselves on the land. In all probability the largest factor in augmenting peasants’ access to land was through an array of tenurial arrangements. The continuing integration of the agricultural sector into the world market, combined with the pressure of Zionist land acquisition and the regressive tax and trade policies of the British Mandate, produced increasing differentiation within the peasantry. This differentiation was visible in the variety of tenancy and sub-tenancy

⁵⁶ Stein, “Rural Change,” p. 159-60.

⁵⁷ *Report to the League of Nations, 1932*, p. 4; *Report to the League of Nations, 1933*, p. 7; *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 5.

practices that came to characterize segments of the country. In the interior hill country, where bonds between lords and peasants remained stronger than in the coastal areas where *bayyarat* and wage-labor had arisen, those with land often employed the landless or those short on land through co-farming or sharecropping arrangements. The content of agreements made between landed parties and subcontractors depended on both the availability of land and on whether they had only their labor power to offer, or whether they supplied stock (seed) or capital. In the most common model of sharetenancy, known as *muraba'a*, the landless or near landless were contracted as ploughmen, turning the soil three times annually and tending to the owner's orchards, receiving in return one-quarter of the net yield. Generally the more assets a sub-tenant could provide the more beneficial the terms they could obtain. Those with seed to contribute could enter into joint-farming (*sharikat muzara'a*) agreements, and in some orchards one variety of joint-farming (*sharikat mugharasa*) actually provided for the eventual redistribution of a share of the land to the subcontractor (see chapter 4). Those with capital as well as seed and labor to employ could engage in share-rent farming and would typically, in a further round of subcontracting, hire a labor force of ploughmen to work a plot.⁵⁸

As Tamari notes, sharecropping was a broad category comprising a wide variety of practices that cut across several different strata within the peasantry.⁵⁹ It was not simply another mechanism for surplus extraction from the rural poor, though its financial benefits did of course accrue differentially. Some sharetenants may have been better off

⁵⁸ Tamari, "From the Fruits," p. 77-78, 80, 82.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 76.

than smallholders.⁶⁰ Others were smallholders themselves, supplementing their incomes.⁶¹ Sharecropping's importance within the rural social order was considerable, allocating labor and resources across a changing distribution of land ownership. As Graham-Brown explains with reference to the Jabal Nablus region, the complex weave of tenancies and sub-tenancies in evidence there afforded forms of "access to land which were instrumental in preventing a large proportion of the Palestinian population from being rapidly converted into either a rural or an urban proletariat."⁶² The welter of sharecropping arrangements acted as a buffer, refracting the tremendous social, political, and economic changes transpiring in the rural order and retaining many of the landless and the less well-off on the land. As a "highly adaptive"⁶³ system for correlating land and labor, it acted as a bridge between the old regime populated by smallholders and the new, more market-driven, more stratified and more unequal order.

Although sharecropping provided a kind of social safety net for part of the rural population in the hill country where it was prevalent, in general the relations between peasants and landlords as classes were embittered by the 1930s and were shrouded in distrust. The position of many was doubtless summed up by one *fellah* quoted by *Filastin* in 1930: "I sell my land and my property because the government forces me to pay taxes on it while I cannot even get the basic needs for my own and my family's

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 75.

⁶¹ According to the 1931 census, roughly one quarter of agricultural earners received incomes from more than one economic activity, and doubtless some of these were smallholders doubling as tenants (Stein, "Legal Protection," p. 236). The Johnson-Crosbie Committee found that 65 percent of landowners performed some manner of labor on lands owned by others (Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy*, p. 286).

⁶² Graham-Brown, "The Political Economy," p. 114.

⁶³ Tamari, "From the Fruits," p. 76.

sustenance. So I am forced to go to the rich people for a short-term loan at 50-per cent [sic] interest.”⁶⁴ Saddled with the state’s exactions and bereft of avenues for procuring affordable credit, smallholders were pushed into repeated rounds of usurious borrowing, until some were compelled to sell as landownership became a net drain on their livelihoods. Since world market integration and the commodification and marketization of land the previous century the moneylenders’ accumulation strategy had been aligned against the long-term interests of the *fellahin* – a reality of which the latter were well aware. The affront that many bankrupted agriculturalists suffered in the 1920s and 1930s was severe. Their way of life was diminishing, and large landowners were often partners to their dispossession. The magnanimity of merchants and elites common to the old regime dwindled and was replaced with something more akin to cost-benefit analysis. The disintegration of the old order of social relations was manifest in the ironic effects of the Protection of Cultivators ordinances (especially the 1933 version), which inspired many landowners to put the screws on their tenants.

The erosion of the social guarantees protecting producer subsistence which had underwritten the *ancien régime* led to the decomposition of the rural order. James Scott has described this process with regard to the ties between sharecroppers and their patrons:

If and when the terms of trade deteriorate sufficiently to threaten these social rights which were the original basis for attachment and deference, one can anticipate that the bond will quickly lose its legitimacy. The patron may still be able to extract services from the client but clients will increasingly consider the relationship unjust and exploitative.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Quoted in Yazbak, “From Poverty to Revolt,” p. 103.

⁶⁵ “Patronage or Exploitation?”, p. 30.

As peasants were pushed off their lands, and as relations between tenants and their lords grew more acrimonious, the large Arab proprietors and the wealthy merchants who still dominated the changing rural scene were more and more likely to be seen in the eyes of the former as agents of dispossession and exploitation.

As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, uproar among nationalist activists and politicians over the danger confronting the embattled peasants did not focus internally on moneylending, onerous debt, or the wealthier classes more generally, but more often on land brokers (*samasira*). Brokers often made their business by aggregating small plots together, simplifying the purchase process for Jewish acquisition bodies while reaping hefty profits from the transactions.⁶⁶ Their emergence as intermediaries in the land market was indicative of the spread of land sales among smallholders, and thus symbolized the further weakening of the rural social order. Land brokers and property speculators were a persistent object of vexation for nationalist activists like Akram Zu'aytir, who enjoined the press in 1932 to go beyond blanket condemnations of land transfers and to publish the names of actual brokers.⁶⁷ The issue of land transfers, and of brokers' roles in the crisis, gained increasing attention over time in the press and arguably also in the representations of the AE and national politicians to the government.⁶⁸ After youth popularized the concept of land tours, some members of the press, such as Munif al-Husayni, the editor of *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*, took part in them,

⁶⁶ Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 178-79.

⁶⁷ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 114.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 115. On the AE's approach to the issues involved, and the state's response, see for instance: Memorandum by the AE to the High Commissioner on immigration and land, 1.12.34, in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 357-59; Official communiqué #39/34, 1.12.34, ISA (2) 566 – 4m; HC to Colonial Secretary, 8.12.34, CZA – S/25 22789.

and the SMC launched its more well-known venture to ostracize land dealers and preach steadfastness on the land among the village population.⁶⁹ For all the invective poured on the *samasira*, ‘Izzat Darwaza later concluded that they were hardly to blame for the *yishuv*’s growth, having only sold a fraction of total transfers, much less of the country’s lands.⁷⁰

The activities of Arab elites and the press, like the youth tours begun before them, do not appear to have done much to slow the ongoing erosion of Arab land holdings. Indeed, remarkably enough Chaim Weizmann himself complained in late 1934 about the exceedingly rapid pace of land acquisitions, and decried the speculation to which this gave rise.⁷¹ HC Wauchope concluded similarly at the time that “the transfer of land is proceeding far too fast,” adding that all things remaining equal it would be left to the state to “put on the drag.”⁷² No such “drag” was forthcoming, however, and registered sales to Jewish parties rose to 135,019 dunams for 1934 and 1935, as compared with 118,453 dunams over the preceding four years, 1930-33.⁷³ The clear escalation in transfers that followed the sustained agrarian downturn in the early

⁶⁹ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 116-118; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 94-98.

⁷⁰ *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 60. From a completely different perspective Joseph Weitz, director of the JNF, wrote that: “Speculators are moving about the villages and the Arabs mock them. They [the Arabs] sell their lands three and four times and in the end don’t hand over their land at all... The Arab waits for a further rise in prices” (quoted in Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 176).

⁷¹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.12.34, PRO – CO 733/257/12. Prices by all accounts rose phenomenally in the early 1930s. Per dunam rates for lands the PLDC and the JNF desired climbed from £P 3-4 in 1931 to £P 15-45 in 1933 (Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 176) which is corroborated by state registration figures showing that the average price per dunam sold was £P 23.16 in 1933, £P 26.53 in 1934, and £P 23.31 in 1935 (derived from: *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 45; and *Report to the League of Nations, 1935*, p. 58).

⁷² HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.12.34, PRO – CO 733/257/12.

⁷³ Figures for 1934 and 1935 are from: *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 45, and *Report to the League of Nations, 1935*, p. 58, while that for 1930-33 is from: Memorandum by the AE to the High Commissioner on immigration and land, 1.12.34, in *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p. 357.

1930s was accompanied by an increase in smallholder sales. From June 1934 until September 1936, 75 percent of transfers to Jewish concerns (2174 of 2781) were for parcels under 100 dunams, the average size of which was 15.5 dunams.⁷⁴

Even before youth and elites took up the issue of land transfers, some peasants had already reached the conclusion that the national movement, and especially the AE, was incapable of going beyond mere rhetoric.⁷⁵ Swedenburg has pointed out in a later context that “The figure of the *fallah* is employed not to rally an actual peasantry to the national cause, but to constitute a unified people-nation and endow it with an authentic history and culture.”⁷⁶ This astute observation pertained to the early 1930s as well, when elite nationalist leaders were forced to acknowledge the seriousness of the crisis confronting the Arab countryside by enunciating a nationalist discourse in which peasants had pride of place, but which bore all of the hallmarks of the familiar paternalism of elites. Though the subject is deserving of closer study, it is unmistakable that national elites clung to their class privilege even as they sought to style themselves as close to “the people.” By the time the peasantry became central to the discourse and concerns of elite nationalists, however, mass dispossession was well under way, and many of the displaced chose increasingly to move to the two coastal ports, where they seeded the growth of new varieties of Palestinian politics.

⁷⁴ Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 180. Conversely, at the same time, about 75 percent of the lands alienated in the period were from the 25 percent of transactions over 100 dunams in size, though some of these were in all probability bundled smallholder stakes, aggregated by brokers. Stein does not clarify the exact source (i.e. which Zionist body) for the data he provides on this point, other than the file number at the ISA.

⁷⁵ See for example, the excerpt from *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya* from 29.10.31 quoted in: Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 182.

⁷⁶ Ted Swedenburg, “The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier,” p. 19.

Urbanization, political economic transformation, and unemployment

As British policy accelerated and intensified political-economic change in Palestine, one of its most prominent effects was the development of selective urbanization. The growth of urbanization, like the spread of landlessness, was an ironic result of British rule, and one which colonial administrators rued considerably.

Although the empire's experiences elsewhere had taught its helmsmen that cities were breeding grounds and focal points for nationalism and political unrest, the ensemble of economic policies and conditions which the Mandate regime set in motion over its first dozen years lent a hand to furthering the trend in Palestine.

The geographic effects of British policies were uneven, and so was the resultant urbanization. The two censuses conducted in 1922 and 1931 indicate that overall Arab population growth was stronger in the countryside than in the cities. The rural population increased by 28 percent, edging out urban centers, which saw a 24 percent bump over the same period. These aggregates conceal highly variable local rates of population growth. Many cities of the central highlands had the lowest rates of increase: Nablus, Hebron, Bethlehem, and Jenin, as well as Nazareth in the north. Gaza alone experienced negative growth. By contrast, Jerusalem, at the heart of the country's mountainous zone, saw its Arab population climb 37 percent over the decade. In the salient between Jerusalem and Jaffa the populations of the citrus town of Ramle shot up a remarkable 43 percent, and its sister city, Lydda, nearly matched it at 39 percent. The greatest spikes in Arab urbanization were, however, in the two dominant coastal port

cities: Jaffa's Palestinian population swelled by 63 percent while Haifa's nearly doubled, increasing by 87 percent.⁷⁷

The distribution of Arab demographic growth under early British rule correlated with the advance of Palestine's integration into the world economy and was affected by the preferential customs and trade policies conferred on the Zionist movement. Trade through the two principal ports formed a major component of the territory's economy, and was important for both the indigenous community and the *yishuv*.⁷⁸ While almost all of Palestine's major towns and cities had benefited from the economic expansion brought by increased trade on the world market in the nineteenth century, under the Mandate internal trade took a back seat to external trade.⁷⁹ This dynamic reinforced and intensified population growth and economic development in Jaffa and Haifa, which had begun in the previous century. Aside from trade, each had additional impulses to growth: the Jaffa subdistrict was a major citrus-growing region, and Haifa was an early industrial hub, filled with local and international companies and home to major public works installations, including the railroad headquarters and associated workshops. Centers of craft industries, such as Nablus and Gaza, did not fare well by comparison.⁸⁰

More broadly, Rachelle Taquu has suggested an inverse relationship between the development of the coastal regions and those of certain interior districts in the period

⁷⁷ Taquu, "Arab Labor," p. 57.

⁷⁸ Owen, "Economic Development," p. 19-20. Foreign trade was equal to 1.35 times the output of local agriculture and industry in 1935, which as Owen notes, implies that "movements in the terms of trade must have played an exceptionally important role in Palestinian economic life."

⁷⁹ The categories "internal" and "external" trade referenced here were of course new designations, reflecting the rerouting of preexisting regional trade relationships. Formerly internal trade between Safad and the Syrian hinterland to the north, now became external and was subject to new burdens of customs, as suggested in the previous chapter. The emphasis on external trade under the Mandate may in part have represented a response to this reconfiguration of trading channels and transaction costs.

⁸⁰ This is despite their nominal promotion by the state. See below.

preceding the Great Revolt. Reports compiled by the Commissioner for Migration and Statistics in the 1930s “consistently indicated unemployment in the Nablus and Tulkarm subdistricts during the period of prosperity in the coastal area.” Nablus and Tulkarm were hardly the only inland centers to suffer as the Arab rural order was buffeted by British policy, the world market, and agrarian blight. As fortunes rose in Haifa and Jaffa while declining for the rural populations of much of the country, the former continued to act as magnets for migration, both temporary and permanent. The burgeoning port cities captured elites who shifted their residences as well as poor *fellahin* searching for means to provide for their families’ daily bread. Haifa, for example, absorbed prominent families from Acre, Umm al-Fahm, al-Tira, Shafa ‘Amr, Nazareth, and Nablus, as well as professionals from towns like Safad.⁸¹ Jerusalem was the major exception to the larger pattern of Arab population movements: it grew not from commerce alone, but rather as the Mandatory government’s administrative seat, and as an effect of its political and symbolic importance.

Labor migration during the early Mandate was centered principally around the citrus sector. As discussed in chapter 4, oranges became a major commodity within Palestine’s export portfolio in the late Ottoman era, and the profitability of citrus as an export led to the conversion of suitable lands in the coastal plains into *bayyarat*. During high season (picking and packing) before the turn of the century, the flow of laborers migrating to the Jaffa region was estimated at 5000, equal to half the town’s population,

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 107; ‘Abbasi, *Safad fi ‘ahd al-intidab*, p. 92.

and exports reached 145,000 cases of fruit.⁸² By the time of the Mandate, approximately 19,000 dunams of Arab orange groves existed, which, with another 10,000 dunams in Jewish hands, produced 830,000 cases of citrus in 1920/21.⁸³ New planting was minimal until around 1925, but the area of citrus then doubled by 1928, before doubling again to total approximately 125,000 dunams in 1931.⁸⁴ By 1930, Jewish owners had outpaced Arabs, giving them the majority of the sector for the first time.⁸⁵ In the 1930s, when the high season workforce swelled to 30,000 or more, Arabs composed something like 75 percent of the total, monopolizing Arab groves and accounting for roughly half the labor in Jewish groves.⁸⁶ This proportion remained fairly constant, although Jewish grove owners faced a series of campaigns for Hebrew labor between 1927 and 1934.⁸⁷

Although masses of Arabs came to labor in the citrus groves between October and March each year, these migrations were largely temporary. The majority did not remain around Jaffa or other citrus towns but returned to their villages during the off-season. By the 1930s the balance of forces changed, and as state and Jewish capital were directed towards development projects and building and construction in the coastal cities while the Arab rural economy fell into deep disrepair, rural-urban migration

⁸² Schölch, "European Penetration," p. 38, 57, 58.

⁸³ Nahum Karlinsky, *California Dreaming: Ideology, Society, and Technology in the Citrus Industry of Palestine, 1890-1939*, trans. Naftali Greenwood (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 13.

⁸⁴ Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 55; *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 105. See also Karlinsky, *California Dreaming*, p. 13, 15.

⁸⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 105.

⁸⁶ Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 55-56. Bein laments that despite an expanding area under cultivation, the Jewish citrus workforce grew feebly from 1933 to 1935, when it reached 6000, less than half of the Jewish groves' total, estimated around 14,000 (*Return to the Soil*, p. 451).

⁸⁷ See Steven Glazer, "Propaganda and the Histadrut-sponsored pickets for 'Hebrew Labor,' 1927-1936," Ph.D. dissertation (Georgetown University, 1991).

intensified.⁸⁸ The British viewed the growth of urbanization as anathema to maintaining the traditional social order they imagined to exist in Palestine, and desired to separate rural areas from “the contamination of urban politics.”⁸⁹ To this end, the state promoted the existing, pre-occupation light industries of the Arab sector under the banner of supporting “village industries.”⁹⁰ Support for “traditional” enterprises, it was thought, would contribute to the country’s stability by building on the preexisting bases of the Arab economy, thereby shielding Palestinian society from abrupt social and economic change. Yet paradoxically, the craft industries, whose capacities to absorb the disruptive effects of ongoing crisis and decline in the rural social formation were overestimated, were not given incentives for investment, nor were they protected from rising competition.⁹¹ In consequence, rather than growing, many pre-occupation industries greatly diminished in output and employment under British rule. At Bethlehem, known for its mementos and souvenirs made with mother-of-pearl, only 150 workers were left in 1937 of what had been a 1500 person workforce in 1925. The soap industry at Jaffa, which had boasted 12 factories at its peak and nearly rivaled the output of Nablus, dwindled to four factories in 1937 while the value of the city’s soap production declined between 1930 and 1935 by 62 percent.⁹² In another of many ironies of colonial rule, the economic bases of the small industries of Palestine were nearly wiped out by state

⁸⁸ Graham-Brown, “The Political Economy,” p. 144-45.

⁸⁹ Miller, *Government and Society*, p. 117.

⁹⁰ Taquq, “Arab Labor,” p. 60.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 61-62.

⁹² Testimony of George Mansur, secretary of the Arab Workers’ Society, before the Royal [Peel] Commission, in *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p. 592. The output of soap factories at Nablus was reckoned in 1930 by Hope Simpson at £P 240,000 (Hope Simpson report, p. 79), while Jaffa’s was put by Mansur at £P 206,259 the same year. In 1935, Jaffa’s product had declined to £P 79,000.

policies while simultaneously being officially advanced as the one site for local Arab development that was deemed politically safe.

As a corollary to the relegation of Arab development and capital to “village industries” the colonial state approved a policy of separate development for Arabs and Jews. While the British Mandate nominally sought the creation of a unified citizenry or polity in Palestine, it condoned and advanced a separatist policy in the economic realm which established different standards for Arabs and Jews. This was reflected in a host of policies and unofficial practices, not least of which was the endorsement of differential wage rates for Arabs and Jews in and outside of government employment, justified by the idea that most Jews in Palestine required a “Western” standard of living that was considerably above that of the “Oriental” natives. Jewish daily wages for unskilled agricultural labor from 1931-33, for instance, averaged 150-200 mils, while those of Arabs remained at 80-120 mils. Skilled labor in the same field during the same period netted Jews 200-300 mils/day, while the comparative rate for Arabs was 100-150 mils. The differentials were yet more acute for unskilled labor in construction, where over the same three years Arabs earned 100-150 mils per day while Jews were paid 250-400 mils. Calculated at hourly rates, the disparities in pay were even larger than these various daily rates reveal, as Jews typically worked 8-hour days while Arabs often worked between 8 and 12 hours.⁹³

Although wages grew in the first half of the 1930s as a heavy influx of Jewish capital from abroad drove local economic growth, even by the government’s debatable

⁹³ Taqqu, “Arab Labor,” p. 74; Glazer, “Propaganda,” p. 27, 30-31.

calculations, real wage growth for Arab labor was minimal, and was significantly outpaced by rises in Jewish real wages in the same industries. An examination of seven types of manufacturing reveals that Arab real wages rose 10 percent in 1934 and 1935 when compared with 1931, before declining 12 percent in 1936 and a further 10 percent in 1937 to below the 1931 level.⁹⁴ Jewish real wages in the same boom period in 1934-35 vaulted up 30-35 percent, and Jewish workers retained a net pay increase by 1937, when economic growth had cooled under the impact of the Arab revolt.⁹⁵

The essential difference purported to exist between Arabs and Jews – crystallized in their supposedly different needs with respect to standards of living⁹⁶ – underwrote discrimination in the state's hiring practices. Informally in employment and contracting Jews were preferred for skilled work, while Arabs were mostly seen as fit for unskilled labor. This disparity was evident across a range of government departments. Although the state buttressed its argument for racial hierarchy by maintaining that it was preserving existing standards of living within the Arab community, Arabs greatly resented the discrimination they encountered in the official labor market, which they saw as blatantly preferential treatment for Zionism.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ These were woodworks, metal works, oil, soap, textiles, tobacco, and cigarettes, although the first two categories also included those involved in building and construction, which were not separately counted.

⁹⁵ Sa'id Himadeh, "Industry" in *Economic Organization*, p. 286. As Himadeh observes, the state's estimate for cost of living adjustment was based in a general index of retail prices rather than an assessment of actual family consumption.

⁹⁶ For an extended discussion of this subject concentrating on the World War II period, see Sherene Seikaly, "Meatless Days," especially chapter three.

⁹⁷ Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 84, 99, 102. A manifold and representative critique of government bias in favor of Jewish workers, which put the onus for the poor state of Arab laborers in the mid-1930s on the state and its management and not on the Zionist movement, was made during the Peel Commission hearings by George Mansur, secretary of the AWS (an Arab union noted in chapter three and discussed below) (Testimony of George Mansur, in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 586-594).

For purposes of cost containment, labor management, and preventing political mobilization, the colonial state encouraged the casualization of Arab labor on public works and in other government departments. The majority of wage-labor among Arabs was already casual, and in the Public Works department, where Arabs were employed on projects in part to mitigate seasonal unemployment, casualization was seen as a wedge against the development of proletarianization and labor organizing. As with other considerations surrounding labor affairs, the state distinguished between the labor organizing of Jews and Arabs, the former being deemed acceptable if not inevitable, while the latter was frowned upon and seen as little more than a front for political agitation. The common incidence of casual labor in government hiring thus had a distinct political connotation. In departments other than Public Works, Arabs could be employed on a casual, renewable short-term basis for years, with no job security. Within Public Works there were two primary categories of work, short-term relief projects, aimed primarily at ameliorating the half year between orange seasons, and longer-term projects and ongoing concerns, such as operation of the port and associated facilities at Haifa. Relief projects often centered on road building, and were casual almost by definition. But many laborers in the more permanent divisions of Public Works responsible for the railroads and ports were also denied long-term employment. Porters employed at the docks of Jaffa and Haifa, for instance, relied on workforces prior to the revolt in which approximately 25 percent and 8 percent respectively were permanent employees, while the rest were daily hires.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 85, 87, 88, 90, 95; on the state's distinction between Arab and Jewish labor

Employment within the Public Works Department represented the state's most significant response to the chronic un- and underemployment experienced by Palestinian wage-laborers in the 1930s. Taking a view that largely equated its short-term relief projects with charity, the state overestimated their capacity to stem social change and political ferment, and underestimated the significance of its acceptance of sizable permanent underemployment among Arab laborers. As mentioned above, work on relief projects was keyed to seasonal unemployment and was seen as a means for averting a "rural exodus." By providing indigent villagers with some measure of income between the growing seasons (for both citrus and other crops), it was hoped that they would see no need to migrate permanently to the cities and that the structure of the rural economy would be left intact. As late as 1932 the government feared that instituting a minimum wage would disrupt "Arab social organization" and bring on a wave of urbanization in search of remunerative wage-labor, well after such urbanization was underway in the port cities. For his part, the Director of Public Works opposed a proposal for a 150 mils/day minimum wage mooted in 1934, and fought wage increases as much as possible, even to the point of slowing down projects in order to deflate wage demands. To further discourage Arabs from following the example of Jewish unionization, hiring for public works projects was conducted through *mukhtars* and clan heads, who garnished the wages of those they recruited while reinforcing the vertical model of social organization that the colonial authorities saw as a hallmark of local Arab society. The

organizing: p. 70, 81. Of up to 400 porters at Jaffa, who were under the Department of Customs, Excise, and Trade, 100 were permanent, while at Haifa demand could hit 760, of whom 60 were permanent (p. 95).

annual sum of workers engaged in relief works fluctuated, but often outstripped those working on the railroads and ports, who numbered some 3000 in the first half of the 1930s. For example, in April 1934 the High Commissioner wrote to the Colonial Secretary that 8000 laborers were in the employ of the Public Works Department on relief details, stressing that unemployment was such that government could “easily get many times that number.”⁹⁹

While the government aimed unsuccessfully at using Public Works employment to palliate the growth of urbanization and proletarianization, its stop-gap approach failed to address the seriousness of Arab unemployment. Indeed, as with the growth of landlessness, which contributed to the swelling pool of wage-laborers, the government demonstrated a penchant for consistently downplaying the significance and scale of Arab unemployment. Hope Simpson tried to sound the alarm that the situation of Arab labor was precarious. His report conveyed that in 1930 district offices “expressed an [sic] unanimous opinion that Arab unemployment is serious and general.” Unemployment at the time was accompanied by falling wages for those professions that were suffering the most, such as stone-dressers and carpenters, skilled laborers whose wages fell by 50 percent that year.¹⁰⁰ Such warnings of spreading malaise – issued at the outset of the four-year agrarian crisis – had little effect.

Again, as with the landless inquiry, government did little to gauge the shortage of employment opportunities for Arabs and the extent of Arab unemployment. Hope Simpson noted the absence of an apparatus capable of tracking and measuring the

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 78, 86-87, 90-92; HC to Colonial Secretary, 14.4.34, p. 7, PRO – CO 733/257/12.

¹⁰⁰ Hope Simpson report, p. 95.

latter.¹⁰¹ Reporting on Arab unemployment subsequently fell to the Commissioner for Migration and Statistics, who for a time produced monthly statements detailing unemployment for Arabs and Jews, though for Arabs especially these were considered rough estimates. Complicating matters further, the state had no accurate assessment of the size of the wage-labor workforce. In 1934, after overhauling its machinery for assessing unemployment (see below), government statistics were based against an impossibly high 214,000 Arab wage earners.¹⁰² Where this hulking number came from is a mystery, as the combined Arab and Jewish workforce five years later in 1939 was measured at 203,900.¹⁰³ One author writing for the Palestine News Service, a Tel Aviv-based center that published economic reporting and analysis, estimated in 1936 that the size of the local Arab wage-labor force was 40,000 (11,000 in agriculture and 29,000 in industry and services), along with another 20,000 seasonal migrant laborers from neighboring Arab states.¹⁰⁴ This appears to be an obvious undercount of Palestinian agrarian labor (and possibly an exaggeration of the foreign Arab component¹⁰⁵), given that the 1931 census enumerated 32,500 rural earners without land, being paid in wages or in kind.¹⁰⁶ Some of these laborers may have joined the urban proletariat in the intervening years, but a return for February 1934 showed 12,500 Arabs engaged in citrus labor, counted another 6050 unemployed agriculturalists, and provided no estimate of

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁰² Calculated from: *Report to the League of Nations, 1932*, p. 76.

¹⁰³ *Survey of Palestine*, v. 2, p. 731. The 1939 count excludes artisans and members of the liberal professions.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in: Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁵ RAF intelligence estimated there were 15,000 Hawranis in the country in 1934 (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 21.9.34, resume of operations (August), PRO – Air 5/1247).

¹⁰⁶ Cited in: Stein, "Legal Protection," p. 236.

those wage earners in the countryside not working in citrus.¹⁰⁷ The *Palnews* tally also discounts state employees and contractors, the former numbering 10,700 and the latter 1300 in 1935.¹⁰⁸ Adding these to the *Palnews* count, and adjusting for the discrepancy in agricultural laborers (assuming a sector, based on the 1934 figure above, of at least twice the original 11,000 estimate) gives a base figure of 63,000 wage earners (including those earning on contract labor).¹⁰⁹ Although this number is hardly exact, it may provide some sense of scale for considering estimates of unemployment.¹¹⁰

As surveyed in chapter 2, official tabulations of Arab unemployment varied widely from 1931-33, between 11,000 and 35,000. The state's definition of unemployment, it must be recalled, originally included the underemployed (those with less than three days of work per week) as well as those altogether without waged income. Data collected by the Department of Migration and Statistics demonstrates that by the early 1930s unemployment no longer corresponded greatly with the citrus harvest, suggesting that the industry's capacity to absorb excess laborers had been surpassed and that the labor market was dependent on a wider array of factors. Between January and April 1934, for instance, straddling the end of the orange season, monthly estimates kept within a fairly consistent range between 13,300 and 15,500, down somewhat from the

¹⁰⁷ Memorandum on employment conditions in Palestine at the end of February 1934, by Commissioner for Migration and Statistics, PRO – CO 733/249/8

¹⁰⁸ Musa, *Thawrat 'am* 1936, p. 49. The author cites figures provided by the Government of Palestine to the Peel Commission.

¹⁰⁹ This estimate does not include those in the liberal professions working outside of government, for which no estimate is available.

¹¹⁰ Working inductively, taking the *Palnews* figure of 40,000 and adding the 12,000 government-related workers and the 25,000 whom George Mansur estimated as unemployed in 1935 gives a higher total of 77,000. There are no reliable figures, but the range of 63-77,000 would appear to be a reasonable estimate. Mansur's figure, given in evidence before the Peel Commission, is cited in: Musa, *Thawrat 'am* 1936, p. 54-55.

same months during the previous year, in which some 16,500 to 18,500 persons sought work. These numbers may well also have been undercounts. In April 1934, when the High Commissioner wrote that Arab unemployment was such that the government's relief works (for 8,000) could be multiplied "many times" over, the official return showed an estimate of 14,000.¹¹¹

As imprecise as the monthly assessments of unemployment may have been, the state subsequently redefined unemployment almost out of existence. Dissatisfied with the fuzziness of the measurement apparatus it had in the Department of Migration and Statistics, the government decided to separate urban from rural unemployment. Urban data would be handled by the Department of Migration and Statistics while rural estimates were left to the Agriculture Department. In his letter to the Colonial Secretary explaining the new system, HC Wauchope seemed to surrender the idea of assessing agricultural employment and unemployment, stressing that "no system can be devised which will approach accuracy or exactness."¹¹² The new assessments provided by the Department of Migration and Statistics, shorn of the ambiguities of measuring seasonal labor flows, presented a dramatically reduced portrait of unemployment. Rather than combining the split assessments from the departments of Migration and Statistics, on one hand, and Agriculture, on the other, the colonial authorities proceeded to present only the former as the new measure of unemployment in official reporting, including to the League of Nations.¹¹³ Where in mid-1934 unemployment returns under the old system

¹¹¹ Monthly memoranda on "employment conditions in Palestine," January through April 1934, prepared by Commissioner for Migration and Statistics, PRO – CO 733/249/8.

¹¹² HC to Colonial Secretary, 23.8.34, PRO – CO 733/249/8.

¹¹³ *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 104.

showed between 13-17,000 individuals without adequate work, the figure for August of that year, the first under the new definition, showed only 3000. Lending further incredulity to the situation, the High Commissioner used the erroneously high estimate for the size of the wage-labor workforce noted above (214,000), arriving at the conclusion that a mere 1.4 percent of Arab laborers were unemployed.¹¹⁴ Rather than find some means of ascertaining the level of unemployed agricultural workers, which as observed above, decreased in elasticity in the early 1930s, the government decided to ignore them altogether.

The timing of the new system for measuring unemployment may not have been coincidental. Just the previous fall (1933) the country had witnessed the furor of the anti-immigration protests – the first Arab protests aimed directly at the state – which had touched off days of insurrection and skirmishes between the Arab public and state security forces. These protests were driven not only by palpable Arab fears of being reduced to a minority, but by the ongoing conflicts with the Zionist movement over land, labor, and livelihood. Although it was not made known to the Arabs, one of the results of the 1933 demonstrations was to undermine support for Hebrew labor at the Colonial Office, which was already declining. By March 1934 the Colonial Secretary had instructed that Arab unemployment was to be considered a factor when drawing up the immigration schedules for Jewish laborers,¹¹⁵ though to what extent was left at the

¹¹⁴ HC to Colonial Secretary, 23.8.34, PRO – CO 733/249/8; *Report to the League of Nations, 1934*, p. 104.

¹¹⁵ Those defined as “capitalists,” bearing £P 1000 or more, gained automatic entry and were not restricted, as they were presumed to be adding “absorptive capacity” to the economy.

discretion of the High Commissioner.¹¹⁶ The consequent reform of the unemployment count may well have signaled the High Commissioner's disinterest in putting any damper on the burgeoning swell of immigration, which he believed was helping to create employment for both Jews and Arabs, while providing a steady stream of revenue to the state (via customs).

The new system for tallying Arab unemployment was not seen as entirely credible even by elements of the British bureaucracy. The Department of Overseas Trade compiled a report on Palestine in July 1935, for instance, that noted previous estimates of Arab unemployment (including the 3000 figure) and the change in definition, before opining that "it is difficult to fix a basis for assessment" and hence, it held, no estimates for Arab employment and unemployment could be furnished.¹¹⁷ Although the Commissioner for Migration and Statistics decried the "statistical bases" for the final assessments under the old system as "most unsatisfactory," their merit declined further in the aftermath.¹¹⁸ In January 1936, while supplying the latest estimate, the Commissioner derided it as without "any statistical value." Moreover, not only was it unsystematic (as evident in part, it was suggested, by a reliance on the estimations of *mukhtars*), but the return only showed assessments for seven cities and

¹¹⁶ Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 28.3.34, CP 95 (34), PRO – CO 733/257/12. The directive to take account of Arab unemployment, the Colonial Secretary pointed out, was written into the MacDonald letter of 1931, but the provision appears not to have been given serious application.

¹¹⁷ *Economic Conditions in Palestine*, July 1935, report by C. Empson (British Commercial Agent at Haifa), p. 76, available in *Palestine and Transjordan Administration Reports, 1918-1948*, v. 5, compiled by Robert L. Jarman (Slough, England: Archive Editions, 1995). The 1935 *Report to the League of Nations* similarly refused to offer any estimate of Arab unemployment (p. 117). In spite of this, an official estimate for early 1935 put the figure at 5565, while claiming unemployment was almost nil at the close of 1934 (Commentary by Foreign Office on 2.5.35 PAP petition to League of Nations, no date, PRO – FO 371/18957).

¹¹⁸ Commissioner of Migration and Statistics, 17.8.34, PRO – CO 733/249/8.

towns and little backing was given to the figures gathered.¹¹⁹ Six years after Hope Simpson's report the government still had no effective system for evaluating Arab unemployment.¹²⁰

As indeterminate and tentative as the available figures are, however, there is no mistaking that unemployment and underemployment for Arab wage-workers were quite considerable, possibly ranging at times up to 50 percent or more of the workforce (e.g. in September 1931), though typically less severe.¹²¹ Core unemployment (i.e. not seasonally-related) was probably in the neighborhood of 20 percent for Palestinian wage workers.¹²² By comparison, at its zenith in 1927 Jewish unemployment during the crisis that afflicted the *yishuv* from 1926-28 reached something on the order of 25 percent.¹²³ Lacqueur notes that in 1927-28 Zionists were "more despondent than ever before" and that "Only a few optimists believed that the movement could recover within the foreseeable future."¹²⁴ Although the state had no precise measure for Arab unemployment, Palestinians appear to have periodically or even regularly endured rates in the 1930s comparable to those suffered by the Zionist movement in 1927.

¹¹⁹ Commissioner of Migration and Statistics to Chief Secretary, 26.1.36, and addendum, Note on the returns of urban Arab unemployment supplied by the district officers, PRO – CO 733/269/6. The *mukhtars* estimates shown in the Note, which are taken to be inaccurate, were, it could be added, often quite a bit higher than the district officers' estimates.

¹²⁰ Indeed in 1946 the government still represented that distinguishing between wage-laborers and other income earners was an insurmountable task, especially given the migrant labor factor. It still had no apparatus for reliably estimating unemployment, contenting itself as it had previously with using Histadrut statistics for the Jewish population and effectively ignoring the Arab sector. See: *Survey of Palestine*, v. 2, p. 731-34.

¹²¹ The September 1931 figure of 35,000 unemployed appears in *Report to the League of Nations, 1932*, p. 77.

¹²² This is in view of the 1933 and 1934 figures pre- and post-citrus harvest, cited above. Estimates from previous years show even higher unemployment during the same time of year. See chapter 2.

¹²³ Bein puts peak unemployment at 8450 of an estimated workforce of roughly 33,800 (*Return to the Soil*, p. 338). Calculation of the total Jewish workforce's size is based on the Histadrut membership for 1927, which Glazer notes accounted for approximately three-quarters of workers ("Propaganda," p. 44).

¹²⁴ *History of Zionism*, p. 315.

In spite of this, Arab unemployment was treated by the British as a given of the economic landscape, almost as if it were a natural feature, the remedy for which was short-term, low-paying relief work, available only to a portion of job-seekers. The official position vacillated between preposterous understatements (the 3000 count of August 1934) and admissions such as that by the High Commissioner that many thousands could be absorbed in relief works, but in general the issue lost what little traction it had as the *yishuv*'s growth exploded. No doubt the dismissal of unemployment owed in part to British images of Arab peasants as hardscrabble by nature, existing on meager means. Probably more importantly, it stemmed from the trickle-down theory that held that Zionist capital imports would inevitably stimulate higher living standards and greater employment among Arabs. The notion that Arab employment would follow Jewish growth proved erroneous, however. During the fourth *'aliya* (1932-36), stimulated by the rise of anti-Semitic regimes in Eastern Europe, capital did pour into Palestine at an unprecedented scale, along with Polish and German immigrants, but Arab employment by Jewish businesses remained modest. In two evaluations based on Jewish sources, between 9500 and 12,000 Arabs found work in Jewish concerns from 1930-36.¹²⁵ The vast majority labored in agriculture in unskilled positions,¹²⁶ with a smaller number, perhaps 1500 though possibly more, in industry.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 58-59; Glazer, "Propaganda," p. 32-33.

¹²⁶ Bein holds that 8000 Arabs were employed in Jewish citrus in 1935 (*Return to the Soil*, p. 451), though an official return for February 1934 showed only 2500 Arabs working in Jewish groves in the Jaffa and Ramle areas and another 1500 in the plain north of Tel Aviv, known in Hebrew as the Sharon (Memorandum on employment conditions in Palestine at the end of February 1934, by Commissioner for Migration and Statistics, PRO – CO 733/249/8).

These figures controvert any claim that Jewish capital could or would provide Arabs with enough employment to meet the needs of the growing ranks of the landless and the destitute. Nonetheless, the colonial administration continued to believe, irrespective of the evidence available to it, that Arab economic prospects were irrevocably tied to the success of the Zionist project. Even obvious countervailing factors, like the intensification of the drive for Hebrew labor – which began in the late 1920s and sparked further polarization between the *yishuv* and the Arab majority – could not disabuse the British of this conception.

Hebrew labor and rising Arab-Jewish contention

The Histadrut, the institutional nexus as well as the muscle of Labor Zionism, was of two minds with respect to Arab labor in the 1920s. On one hand, various parties that constituted its membership, particularly those on the left, were partial to visions of socialism, internationalism, and working class solidarity. On the other, the supervening goal of the federation was to fulfill the Zionist dream of building a self-reliant Jewish society and independent state in Palestine. The historical competition between socialist and nationalist imperatives which played out among the Histadrut's affiliated parties was reflected in the federation's contradictory stance toward Arab labor.

¹²⁷ The figure is from Taqqu, "Arab labor," p. 58. Glazer cites a study which notes that this was in comparison with some 70,000 Jewish employees of the burgeoning industrial base of the *yishuv* ("Propaganda," p. 33).

After years of hedging on the issue, in 1927 the Histadrut voted to organize Arab workers.¹²⁸ The federation's aims were multiple, seeking at once to "liberate" Arab proletarians from the abusive grip of the "*effendis*" who were held to be responsible for Palestinian nationalism, while at the same time reducing inter-communal labor competition by raising Arab wages and helping to "Europeanize the Oriental economy."¹²⁹ Yet the Histadrut was never very enthusiastic about expending its resources to organize workers who were seen as the national competitors to Jewish labor, and although some of its officials and some partisans of the left within the Labor camp (*Hashomer Hatza'ir, Po'alei Tziyon Smol*) continued to struggle over the next decade or so to promote "joint organization" in various guises, the separatist impulses of the labor federation prevented that slogan from having much embodiment.¹³⁰ Consequently, Arabs organized by the Histadrut were not permitted to acquire the full benefits of membership, and rather than being united within one body alongside Jewish workers, were shunted into separate unions and clubs affiliated to the federation. The Histadrut's diffident embrace of what was called "Arab work" left most Arabs nonplussed and affiliated Arab labor unions small and unstable, though on occasion Arab workers still proved willing to try to use the Histadrut's sporadic interest to their advantage in specific labor disputes.¹³¹

¹²⁸ On the preceding period and for general background on Zionist relations with Arab labor, see Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*.

¹²⁹ Quoted in Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 121.

¹³⁰ For the most detailed and nuanced view of the conflicted relationship between the Histadrut and Arab workers during this period, see Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 179-239.

¹³¹ E.g. during disputes with Nesher's Arab subcontractor (Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 207-10).

At the same time, the Histadrut launched a new wave of efforts to institute and spread Hebrew labor. In 1927 it initiated an open-ended campaign targeting the citrus sector's employment of Arabs, calling for them to be replaced with Jews. Within several years, the pickets for Hebrew labor in the citrus colonies gained great prominence within the *yishuv*, much to the advantage of the Labor Zionist camp, whose leadership prospects had been dealt a set-back by the mid-1920s economic depression within the movement.¹³² After years of rolling campaigns in the citrus belt, and as the economic boom that accompanied the fourth *'aliya* attracted labor to the cities, the Histadrut took its pickets for Hebrew labor from the plantations to the mixed urban centers (especially Jaffa and Haifa),¹³³ where they helped catalyze a new spate of Arab labor organizing and, as seen in chapter 3, efforts by Arab elites to tap into and capture the emerging constituency of wage workers.

From the outset, the Hebrew labor upsurge that began in the late 1920s provoked violent confrontations with Arabs. The first groves chosen for the new campaign were in Petah Tiqva and as Jewish picketers attempted to prevent Arab laborers from taking up their work, brawls broke out and the police were called in.¹³⁴ Protests and pickets by Histadrut members didn't always result in violence, but the continuity of campaigns between 1927 and 1934 throughout settlements of the citrus regions nevertheless

¹³² Lacqueur writes that the 1926-28 slump drove the temporary ascent of a business model for colonization in place of Labor's utopian schemes, and led to the resignations of Labor representatives from the Zionist Executive (*History of Zionism*, p. 316). As Glazer observes, the Labor parties looked on the economic contraction, which was tied to increasing urbanization, as an opportunity to promote rural colonization. This necessitated the expansion of employment opportunities in the colonies for Jewish laborers ("Propaganda," p. 61-62).

¹³³ Glazer, "Propaganda," p. 102-03.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

underlined the exclusivism of Labor Zionism, which was understood as seeking to deprive Arabs from opportunities to work.¹³⁵

As the Hebrew labor campaign continued over the years, stimulating conflict, the government became somewhat more equivocal in its position on the issue. The principle of Hebrew labor, including quotas for government employment of Jewish workers, had gained broad acceptability among colonial officials, even from critics of the Zionist movement like HC Chancellor.¹³⁶ Though it was criticized in the 1930 White Paper, the MacDonald letter of February 1931 reaffirmed the colonial authorities' approval of the exclusion of Arabs from Jewish enterprises and served thereafter as the benchmark for policy.¹³⁷ In the disputes at Jewish orchards, the government generally acted to try to ensure the freedom of grove owners to contract employees as they saw fit while preserving the right of Histadrut members to peacefully protest.¹³⁸ Yet over time, the expanding and increasingly popular Hebrew labor campaign came to be seen as a destabilizing force, threatening to ignite wider conflict between Arabs and Jews. Jewish grove owners, who were also subjected to attack and intimidation by Histadrut members, began in 1931 to call for Hebrew labor pickets to be made illegal, and recognized as legally distinct from disputes over wages and conditions of labor.¹³⁹ The Prevention of Intimidation Ordinance, utilized in labor and industrial disputes, was amended and strengthened, but even after HC Wauchope and Colonial Secretary Cunliffe-Lister both

¹³⁵ It should be noted that protestors didn't always or even often actually want to replace the Arab workers whose employment they protested (ibid., p. 20).

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 73-74, 97-98.

¹³⁷ Ibid., ft. 48, p. 98.

¹³⁸ Ibid., chapters 3-4: p. 54-171.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 97. On instances of violence by Hebrew labor partisans against Jewish grove owners and managers: p. 70-71, 80, 82, and other references cited by Glazer.

grew chary of Hebrew labor in 1934, picketing for the cause remained legal so long as it avoided physical confrontations.¹⁴⁰

In 1934, as the *yishuv*'s increasingly urban labor-force showed little lasting interest in acquiring the jobs of Arabs working in citrus groves, the Histadrut turned its campaign for Hebrew labor to the cities. As Glazer describes, the urban phase of the campaign was comparatively brief, petering out in early 1935, but considerably more aggressive and violent. Coercion, intimidation and fisticuffs were the stuff of which the urban 'flying pickets' were made. Pickets targeted construction sites and contractors that employed Arab labor, imploring and threatening Jewish employers, and where this failed to prevail, threatened or assaulted the Arab laborers themselves. The colonial authorities quickly became concerned that the affrays that punctuated the urban push for Hebrew labor, which were reported on by the Arabic and Hebrew media in equally stark terms, would give rise to Arab counter-pickets, as indeed they did, and potentially set off street-fighting. What they didn't anticipate was that the response of Arab trade unionists to the Hebrew labor campaigns could help ignite a full-scale national rebellion.¹⁴¹

Arab labor organizing in Palestine long pre-dated the frenzied contests over construction jobs in Haifa and Jaffa in the mid-1930s, but it was always informed by the activity of the Histadrut and the Zionist Labor parties. Although interconnections remained between Arab workers and the Histadrut up until the Arab general strike in 1936, by the 1930s a dynamic of competition with the Jewish federation and its surrogates came to fuel and propel the small, independent Arab unions and their

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 155-163.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 103, 148, 160-62.

organizing among laborers.¹⁴² In January 1930 the Palestinian Arab Workers Society (PAWS), founded five years earlier by disaffected railway workers, pulled together a congress in Haifa attended by 61 labor organizers whose collected constituencies numbered some 3000. The congress was geographically uneven in its representation: half of the delegates were from Haifa and many major cities and towns, including Nablus, Tulkarm, Gaza, Hebron, and Safad, were not represented at all. Nevertheless, it aspired to create a national network of organized labor. Though the effort was unsuccessful, its resolutions marked the rising tide of nationalism among Arab workers, favoring such positions as independence within a united Greater Syria, while also attending to more direct economic concerns, such as demanding that government employment be based on relative population size rather than, as Zionist arguments had it, on taxation.¹⁴³ In the ensuing years, Arab labor organizing gained in popular legitimacy and efficacy as Arab unions and workers rose to oppose the Histadrut's designs on playing a leading role in Arab labor struggles.

The Histadrut's primary vehicle for organizing Arab laborers and seeking thereby to deflect them from nationalist involvement was the Palestine Labor League (PLL; *Ittihad 'ummal Filastin*), an Arab labor union established and led by the federation. The PLL's organizing among Arab workers met with some success and quickly stimulated independent Arab unions and elite politicians to step up their efforts to command the loyalties of the growing ranks of wage workers. According to Taqqu,

¹⁴² Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 179-239; Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 144.

¹⁴³ Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 180-81; Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 140-41. On the origins of the PAWS, see: *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 145-47.

the PLL provided the impetus for Fakhri Nashashibi's creation of the Arab Workers' Society (discussed in chapter 3) and for the Youth Congress's interest the same year (1934) in organizing port workers at Jaffa. But its greatest opponent was the PAWS. The PAWS took on the PLL as no other Arab party did,¹⁴⁴ and eventually came to derive some of its strength from usurping PLL ventures: "Between 1932 and 1935, the Palestine Arab Workers [sic] Society grew neck and neck with the Histadrut's Labor League. It frequently took over strike efforts and labor organizations which had been initiated by the League." The PLL was handicapped politically by the Histadrut's support for Hebrew labor and the wider goals of the Zionist movement, and practically by strictures from the federation which limited its remit to responding to requests for assistance (rather than actively soliciting new members and constituencies). Under pressure from ascendant independent unions, its core membership in Haifa and Jaffa dwindled by 1935.¹⁴⁵

By 1934 the transformation of PAWS from an organ with outsized aspirations into a budding force among labor was represented in a number of successful organizing drives on its home turf in Haifa: at Shell Oil, the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), the tobacco workers of Qaraman, Dik and Salti Co., and the harbor porters who worked for the Department of Customs.¹⁴⁶ Alongside the AWS in Jaffa, PAWS precipitated a change in the social and political status of Arab workers and ushered in an

¹⁴⁴ At Jaffa, the AWS and the PAWS together struggled to vanquish the PLL, and in particular to bring dockworkers who briefly and loosely affiliated to the PLL into their fold (Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 225-29).

¹⁴⁵ Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 144, 151, quote from p. 144; Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 204-06, 228-29. Lockman also notes the Histadrut and the PLL were badly tarnished by the discovery of arms bound for the Haganah at Jaffa in the fall of 1935.

¹⁴⁶ Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 145.

unprecedented wave of rising labor militancy. Strikes by Arabs had been almost unheard of even in 1930-31, but 13 strikes were launched in 1932, and by 1935 the newly buoyant spirit of Arab labor powered 21 strikes, totaling one-third of all such actions for the year.¹⁴⁷ This was a remarkable feat, given the small size and scanty resources of the Arab unions in comparison with those of the Histadrut. The assertiveness that characterized the protean Arab labor movement in the final years before the revolt was built on the spread and coalescence of horizontal models of social identification and mobilization among laborers, as had occurred among youth. As with the emergence of youth, the arrival of Arab labor as a vital, primarily autonomous force on the Palestinian scene was predicated on changing relations with elites and their vertical modes of organization.

The Palestinian labor movement has sometimes been understood as hamstrung by its continued ties to and dependence on elites and middle class professionals.¹⁴⁸ Though this view exaggerates the role played by these groups, it is true that elite hands did aid the development of the trade union movement. Fakhri Nashashibi's place as the progenitor of the AWS has already been mentioned. While not an elite, the PAWS under the direction of 'Abd al-Hamid Haymur, a veteran of the railroad union, plied a socially and tactically conservative course more amenable to "traditional social networks" and corporatist arrangements with employers than class struggle.¹⁴⁹ The PAWS in this incarnation imagined forging an autarkic Arab economy in which labor

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 148; *Report to the League of Nations, 1935*, p. 120. The latter source notes the proportion of labor actions concerning Arabs, but does not clarify that they were Arab-led, though this is somewhat implied.

¹⁴⁸ E.g. Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 134, 155.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 153. On Haymur, see also Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 145-47.

unions would be flanked by parallel employers' unions, which would act in concert with the working class to drive growth.¹⁵⁰ Its spokesman was a young Haifa-based lawyer, Hanna 'Asfur.

In the 1930s as the Arab labor trend struggled to find its legs, it often made use of elite mediation to resolve strikes and labor disputes. The result was typically the watering down of workers' aims and their acceptance of compromise positions which were wrapped in nationalist rhetoric and invocations of Arab unity.¹⁵¹ Yet despite the involvement of select elites and professionals in Arab union and labor activism, even the critics of these movements recognize that by this point the Arab notables were generally too weak and divided to dominate the representation of workers' political and economic interests.¹⁵² They also had no power over the public sector, which limited their clout and helped prevent the emergence of a patronage model for labor organization.¹⁵³ As Lockman points out, the relative weakness of the Arab labor movement led it to draw whatever advantages it could from the interest of outside parties in workers' struggles, yet without becoming pawns of the latter.¹⁵⁴ Far from holding the movement as a whole back, or placing it in the orbit of elites, Arab labor's escalation of both political and economic struggles before the revolt testify to the strategic nature of its alliances and to the ascendancy of horizontal identities over vertical networks.

The growth of labor into a prominent, if still fledgling constituency within Palestinian politics was consolidated by the emergence of labor as a central arena of

¹⁵⁰ Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 153.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 154.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 136.

¹⁵⁴ Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 205.

national struggle. Although the YMMA and the Youth Congress had each supported Arab unionization and viewed support for laborers as integral to their shared mission of social uplift, their intermittent efforts failed to generate momentum. Neither did the slow ferment of the existing Arab unions themselves receive much public attention. Though the Histadrut's dogged and fiery pursuit of Hebrew labor and the expansion of labor migration and wage work among the Arab population in the early 1930s undoubtedly contributed to raising the national profile of labor, according to Taqqu it was Arab labor's vigorous opposition to the Histadrut that brought the issue widespread social recognition and newfound political importance.¹⁵⁵

With the struggle against the Histadrut, the question of Arab labor organization ceased being limited to the workplace and became an axis within Palestinian politics. As noted above, however, the colonial state looked on Arab labor organizing with a jaundiced eye and, after its growth in the early 1930s did not grant its institutions anywhere near the credibility conferred on the Histadrut, nor did it protect the principle of the right of Arab workers to organize. This left recalcitrant employers the leeway they needed to resist the new assertiveness of Arab laborers, and even to back out of concessions they made during disputes with striking workers. Labor victories, or partial victories, were thus sometimes vitiated by the state's unwillingness to vouchsafe their gains. This was the case during a series of struggles with the Arab quarrying subcontractor for Nesher, the Jewish cement firm, which occurred from 1932-36, and during the momentous strike at the IPC in 1935 by some 600 mostly Arab workers. In

¹⁵⁵ Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 153.

each case, employers were able to wriggle free from concessions gained by the workers during negotiations, at no cost to themselves.¹⁵⁶ This state of affairs helps explain the sometimes fleeting quality of Arab labor organizations, which were prone to appear and disappear rapidly, and whose infrastructure never kept pace with the expansion of the waged workforce.¹⁵⁷

Several other structural impediments contributed to the weakness of Arab labor organizing. The sheer number of unemployed Arabs acted as a check on would-be unions, since activist employees could be fired and replaced with great ease. The common use by both Arab employers and the government of casual labor proved another impediment, posing all the difficulties of organizing among a discontinuous and tenuous workforce. And just as they baffled the government, the itinerancy and migratory character of much Arab labor, in agriculture and even in the urban sphere, also proved obstacles to the nascent Arab labor movement. In sum, the structural constraints that Arab labor activists confronted were formidable in the extreme.

Seen in this light, the growth of the PAWS and the AWS were rather remarkable accomplishments, despite their modest scale. Both organizations grew in size – the AWS boasted 4700 members in 1937¹⁵⁸ – and at least equally as significant, both contributed to shaping a new sensibility among Arab laborers, whose frontline opposition to Zionist pickets in Jaffa, for instance, broadcast the image of a “positive and

¹⁵⁶ Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 207-10, 232-34.

¹⁵⁷ This is a major theme of Taqqu’s work, though she is more apt to chalk the result up to the aforementioned links to elites and middle class elements than to the wider legal and policy terrain that she so conscientiously charts. See: “Arab Labor,” p. 138-39, 150, 152, and citations above regarding British policy and the role of elites and middle class personalities within the labor movement.

¹⁵⁸ Testimony of George Mansur, *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p. 586.

dynamic role” for workers “independent from other classes in Arab society.”¹⁵⁹ In spite of the obstacles in their path, Arab unions, and particularly the AWS under the astute leadership of Michel Mitri, a Christian engineer who took the organization’s helm from Fakhri Nashashibi, instigated a surge of activism in late 1935 and early 1936. More broadly, in assessing the growing weight of Arab labor within Palestinian society and its politics, Zachary Lockman has argued that the multiplying struggles of workers for greater dignity and security in the first half of the 1930s, the overtones of which were increasingly political as well as economic, contributed to “prepar[ing] the ground” for the “explosion of popular energy” which followed.¹⁶⁰

The birth of Palestinian slums

The growing wave of peasant migration to the ports of Jaffa and Haifa, and to the citrus belt, had a transformative effect on the physical and social geography of the two cities and, to a lesser extent on areas like the Tulkarm subdistrict, which were proximate to the orange orchards. Although the port cities and orange groves appeared to offer the greatest prospects for weathering the agrarian crisis of 1930-34, the former were inundated with new residents (both temporary and permanent) while the availability of work and housing consistently failed to grow at the same pace. In addition, rents and property taxes increased as the cities expanded, raising the cost of living in the migrants’

¹⁵⁹ Taqqu, “Arab Labor,” p. 148.

¹⁶⁰ *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 238.

new places of residence considerably.¹⁶¹ Edward Keith-Roach, who became District Commissioner for the North in 1931, placed the spatial and demographic changes taking place at the time in the wider context of the fourth *'aliya*:

Despite intense building activity there was an acute shortage of accommodation in the major towns and Arabs were being steadily pushed out of houses they had occupied for generations. Large areas of shacks made from old petrol tins and sand sprang up. There was a good deal of talk about government improving accommodation, but nothing tangible was started.¹⁶²

The shantytowns which arose at Jaffa and Haifa were the most visible sign of the socio-economic transformation which Arab society was undergoing as peasant dispossession and proletarianization advanced. They were a prominent feature of each of the two cities, and, from the limited data available, appear to have come to comprise a significant portion of their Arab populations. In Haifa the shanty area largely east of the city was known as *ard al-raml* (the sand land); in Jaffa, the several quarters became sites of impermanent hovels: Manshiyya, Saknat Abu Kabir, Jabalya, Shaykh Murad, and 'Arab al-Dawudi.¹⁶³ The population of the shanties at Jaffa was estimated in 1936 by George Mansur, secretary of the AWS, at about 11,000.¹⁶⁴ At Haifa the official estimate the same year was 7-8000, although denizens of the slum put the number at 15,000 in

¹⁶¹ For Haifa see Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 143; Schleifer, "Izz al-Din al-Qassam: preacher and *mujahid*" in Edmund Burke III, ed., *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 172.

¹⁶² *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 143.

¹⁶³ Yazbak, "From Poverty to Revolt," p. 107; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya bayna al-intidab wa-l-Sahyuniyya* (Jaffa: Maktabat Filastin al-Jadida, 1937), book two, p. 98. The remnants of Manshiyya, probably the largest recipient of the new urban poor in Jaffa, are now situated within the municipal boundary of Tel Aviv, where they abut that city's oldest neighborhood, Neve Tsedek.

¹⁶⁴ Taqqu, "Arab Labor," p. 65.

1937, twice the state's estimate.¹⁶⁵ By comparison, the total Arab population of Jaffa, the larger of the two cities, was recorded in the 1931 census at just under 50,000 (approximately 47,600), while that of Haifa at the same time was slightly over 34,000, reaching 50,000 by 1938.¹⁶⁶ The Arab populations of both cities were supplemented further by thousands of migrant laborers from outside Palestine, especially from the Hawran region of Syria, most of whom doubtless lived among their poor Palestinian brethren.¹⁶⁷

As Keith-Roach described it, the shantytown at Haifa was a crowded zone of impoverished migrants and the urban poor, lacking sewerage and water. It was given the English nickname "tin-town," after the discarded petrol cans which were converted into living quarters. Health conditions were, in his assessment, superior in the migrants' home villages, and in 1937 rats suspected of carrying bubonic plague were found there by the Health Department.¹⁶⁸ By the time of the general strike Keith-Roach had come to see the *ard al-raml* as "a disgraceful blot" on the Mandate, signifying the decomposition of the rural social system and the gross neglect of the state in consigning former farmers,

¹⁶⁵ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 224; HC to Colonial Secretary, 1.6.37, PRO – CO 733/351/1. Further indication of the scale of the shantytown at Haifa was provided in 1937, when the government decided to tear down much of the *ard al-raml* and resettle its inhabitants elsewhere. After commencing the operation, designed to move some 3000 persons to grounds near the suburb Balad al-Shaykh, the High Commissioner reported that "900 huts have been removed from the most insanitary quarters," leaving little question that the area had grown quite vast (HC to Colonial Secretary, 11.8.37, PRO – CO 733/351/1).

¹⁶⁶ *Survey of Palestine*, v.1, p. 151; Yazbak, "From Poverty to Revolt," p. 107.

¹⁶⁷ I have found no estimate of Hawranis living in Haifa, but in Jaffa, where they were reported by police to live on verandas and in orange groves, they were believed to number 3-5,000 persons in April 1935, during the off-season for citrus (Deportation of Hawranis, 12.4.35, police [extract], CZA S/25 – 22735).

¹⁶⁸ Ralph Poston (Palestine Govt) to Cosmo Parkinson (CO), 18.5.37, and HC to Colonial Secretary, 1.6.37, PRO – CO 733/351/1.

tenants and plowmen to live in squalor and deprivation.¹⁶⁹ Such a view was not widespread. Paradoxically, the growth of slums populated by uprooted peasants living marginal existences attracted surprisingly little attention within the colonial administration, even as it professed its determination to protect peasant tenants and to prevent tidal flows of urbanization. The High Commissioner continued to profess that unemployment wasn't an issue throughout the period preceding the revolt, and the Peel Commission subsequently glossed the emergence of shanties as indicating "the growth of an urban proletariat" which, it illogically held, betrayed no signs of "destitution or degeneration."¹⁷⁰

The prevailing official attitude of "see no evil, hear no evil" regarding unemployment and the ballooning port slums didn't spare peasant migrants to the cities their share of alienation. In their new urban environs, where they lived in the crudest of abodes with no amenities, their lack of control over their living conditions was paralleled by their distance from the village networks and lifestyle that had formerly supported them. Some returned periodically to their villages of origin or residence. The economic insecurity of the underclass left most dependent on a variety of menial and low-paying jobs, which, by twist of fate, were sometimes obtained through the agencies propelling their dispossession: the colonial state (via the Public Works Department) or Zionist businesses. This was quite likely more so the case for Haifa, where the development and opening of the port in the early 1930s provided new opportunities for labor, alongside

¹⁶⁹ Recommendations on future policy, memorandum by DC Keith-Roach, 30.9.36, p. 6, PRO – CO 733/316/9.

¹⁷⁰ Statement to Arab Leaders, no date (presented on 29.1.36), PRO – CO 733/297/1; Peel Commission report, p. 127.

Shell Oil, the railroad, booming construction and building, and those Jewish enterprises still hiring Arabs. Labor conditions have been largely alluded to above. Workdays were long, sometimes twelve hours or more, six or seven days per week, and the pay was generally low. The government's neglect of the migrants' plight was compounded by the escalation of the drive for Hebrew labor, including for government jobs where Zionists argued for quotas to be reserved for higher-paid Jewish laborers.

While the rolling campaigns for Hebrew labor added salt to the wound of dispossession and charged the already competitive urban milieu with a further sense of embattlement, the culture of the Jewish immigrants presented its own challenges to the conservative mores of peasant migrants. The liberal manners of dress, including women exposing their arms and legs, were scandalous by indigenous standards and doubtless symbolized, in corporeal form, the Arab notion that Zionism was creating an alien and immoral society which stood in contradiction to Arab ethics and social practices, especially those of Muslims.¹⁷¹ Jewish immigrants were often assertive, as was Zionist culture, and this carried over to other aspects of their presence in mixed settings, even down to such prosaic actions as taking public space by walking in the center of roads.¹⁷² If the settlers' culture and deportment wasn't disconcerting enough to the peasant lumpenproletariat, they also had to contend with the scorn and derision with which Arab upper and middle class urbanites viewed them. Although as cheap workers they were accepted into the cities, as villagers they were looked on as country yokels and subjected

¹⁷¹ Recommendations on future policy, memorandum by Keith-Roach, 30.9.36, p. 7, PRO – CO 733/316/9.

¹⁷² Ibid.

to verbal abuse and urbanite disdain as well as exploitative conditions of labor.¹⁷³ The introduction of growing flows of dispossessed and discontented peasants eventually became a “source of disequilibrium” within the port cities, which by the mid-1930s had become “a melting pot and fermenting cauldron for the frustrated and embittered peasant city dwellers.”¹⁷⁴

In spite of the hostile environment in which they found themselves, peasant migrants and the urban poor endeavored to foster a sense of community in their new places of residence, and by doing so, participated in the formation of a new kind of Arab urban culture. Where the state, through its labor recruiting and relief works, sought to reinforce the village identities and *hamula* memberships of migrant laborers (by using *mukhtars*), urban migrants joined together in associations which were not restricted or organized by these corporate forms. While villagers did often retain connections to their places of origin, these did not attain the same importance in their new setting.¹⁷⁵ In Haifa they joined benevolent societies, for example, which cut across *hamula* divisions.¹⁷⁶ They were also, according to Eliahu Agassi, a Jewish organizer with the PLL there, drawn greatly to the growing effusion of youth groups and religious and nationalist associations.¹⁷⁷ Some of these societies were tied to branches of the political and economic elite, and some, such as originally the case with the AWS, were formed

¹⁷³ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 221; Yazbak, “From Poverty to revolt,” p. 107.

¹⁷⁴ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 224. Seikaly speaks only of Haifa, yet it appears safe to assume that the description is similarly apt for Jaffa.

¹⁷⁵ Taqqu writes that on occasion, urban migrants were reminded of their status as villagers by fellow, but more skilled Arab workers of urban background, with whom they engaged in strikes and labor activism (Taqqu, “Peasants into Workmen,” p. 271).

¹⁷⁶ Taqqu, “Arab Labor,” p. 116.

¹⁷⁷ Taqqu, “Peasants into Workmen,” p. 271.

expressly for purposes of garnering the loyalties of the growing numbers of wage-laborers to one or another elite grouping. Yet as previously suggested, the spread of wage-labor, particularly that which was divorced from the land, created a new political constituency. Wage-laborers often continued to be amenable to elite-led organizations, but also sometimes struck out on their own and established organs based in mutual solidarity. Part of the culture of this emergent horizontal sensibility was visible among the urban underclasses in their willingness to organize together without respect to family divisions. To be sure, this change did not mark an effacement of family's socio-cultural importance, but rather its rearticulation as a component of identity and social action. By periodically superseding or bracketing *hamula* and village identities, urban migrants and the poor highlighted their shared class affiliation, which opened the way for increased horizontal affiliation and mobilization.

The extent and rapidity of the transformation of the peasantry within the urban sphere is subject to debate, and by no means occurred uniformly. What is certain is that the intertwined processes of urbanization, the spread of wage-labor, and the development of labor activism that increased significantly in the first half of the 1930s helped create the conditions of possibility for new subjectivities to emerge among peasant migrants and the urban poor. As May Seikaly observes, these subjectivities were the product of migrants' newfound membership in horizontal strata within urban society that was relatively independent from local elites and notables "whose monopoly over the resources crucial to the life of the Arab worker and peasant had come to an end" as the

latter were pushed off the land.¹⁷⁸ The severing of structural links to vertical social networks left the rural and especially the urban dispossessed in uncharted territory, where their marginality left them both prone to continued mobilization by elites, and alternately, open to new styles and modes of political activity. It was this new state of indeterminacy – a compound space of socio-cultural and geographic displacements, class formation, and radical possibility – that afforded the charismatic shaykh, ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam, his *entrée* for launching a campaign of armed struggle.

From the shanties: ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam and his network

‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam, now perhaps most well-known as the namesake for both Hamas’s military wing and its crude rockets, has been the subject of numerous studies and is discussed by essentially every scholar of the Mandate period and Palestinian politics. For my purposes here I will follow the argument of Abdallah Schleifer that the life and work of the famous shaykh “enable[] us to understand better the political mobilization of the Palestinian peasantry and urban migrants.”¹⁷⁹ It is from the ranks of the latter that al-Qassam assembled a clandestine network of *mujahidin* (holy warriors or freedom fighters) that helped propel three tenacious years of insurrection against all odds – the Great Revolt – and with it, the ascent of peasant rebels within the national struggle and movement. Al-Qassam was hardly responsible for the totality of these developments himself, but he was perspicacious in his reading of the problems afflicting the Palestinians and their political movement, and demonstrated organizational ingenuity

¹⁷⁸ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 225.

¹⁷⁹ Schleifer, “‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam,” p. 166.

in shaping his paramilitary underground and in basing it in the social strata that were most negatively affected by the dual colonial order.

Syrian by birth, ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam was the son of a *shari‘a* court judge whose family had connections to the Naqshbandi Sufi *tariqa* (order), which was renowned for its anti-colonial orientation. ‘Izz al-Din studied theology as a boy before leaving his native town, Jabla (in the Ladhakiyya district), for the esteemed halls of al-Azhar in Cairo, where he was a pupil of the *salafi* thinker Muhammad ‘Abduh. Upon his return to Jabla, al-Qassam put his *salafi* teachings into practice, spurring a local Islamic revival centered on regular practice of religious rites and conscientious observance of obligations. As Schleifer notes, ‘Izz al-Din returned from Cairo with “a heightened sense of the threats that faced Islam and of the moral struggle necessary to preserve it.” He saw the struggle of the individual to embody righteousness and vanquish evil and immorality (*jihad al-nafs*) as the keystone of *jihad*. Without personal reformation, he believed, *jihad* in its military context – the wider conflict with colonialism – was impossible. Consequently he strove to exemplify and to attract others to the values that he took to be integral to the proper cultivation of the self: piety, humility, courage, self-sufficiency, and asceticism. From early on he evinced a modest demeanor and an aversion to class hierarchy, choosing to spend his time among the less privileged members of society, who were also receptive to his message of ethical and religious reform.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 166-68, 173, quote from 167.

When Italy attacked Libya in 1911, al-Qassam collected funds and put together a volunteer brigade to assist in repelling the encroachment, but the Ottoman regime declined to deploy the force. After receiving some degree of military training during World War I, he organized the local resistance in Jabla to the French invasion of Syria in 1920, including through the sale of his own property in order to purchase arms for the town. He gained his first experience of guerilla warfare in the ensuing conflict, leading cadres from Jabla in the vicinity of Jabal Sahyun. When the new colonial rulers threatened large landowners who supported the rebels in the area with property confiscation their enthusiasm ebbed, sinking the local insurgency and giving al-Qassam his first cautionary lesson in the fragility of elite nationalism and anti-colonialism. ‘Izz al-Din subsequently threw his lot in with the Aleppan rebel leader Ibrahim Bey Hananu, before that line of resistance was also broken, after which he fled to Palestine. Sentenced to death *in absentia* for his role in the resistance to French rule, he settled in Haifa, along with other exiles from French-occupied *bilad al-Sham*.¹⁸¹

In Palestine al-Qassam joined the staff of the Islamic School (*al-Madrasa al-Islamiyya*), a *salafi* institution connected to the Muslim Society, the premier Muslim social and political forum for Haifa and its hinterlands. He resumed his *salafi* preaching and advocacy, arguing against syncretic and unorthodox practices within the faith. According to one of his closest confidants from his time in Palestine, Shaykh Muhammad al-Hanafi, al-Qassam was inducted in the 1920s into the Tijaniyya *tariqa* by one of its itinerant personalities, Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Malik al-‘Alami. As al-Hanafi

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 168-70.

has related, the handful of locally-based recruits to the Tijaniyya brotherhood (himself included) became the core of the fighting force and secret organization that al-Qassam forged to wage *jihad* in Palestine.¹⁸² Though many accounts see al-Qassam as consistently intent on returning to the path of armed struggle against the colonial regimes of the region, his early years in Palestine do not in hindsight appear to have been consumed with the secret preparations for which he later became famous. His earliest move, perhaps, was to acquire land in the Beisan valley in 1923 on which he established al-Hanafi as a farmer who was to raise money for weapons purchasing while acting as a communications relay for disparate local contacts (future fighters and assets) that would be built up throughout the regions of Palestine. It was not until the formation of the Palestinian YMMA in 1928 and al-Qassam's appointment as a marriage registrar (*ma'dhun*) of the *shari'a* courts the following year that he began organizing cells for a revolutionary paramilitary underground, dubbed by contemporaries and scholars *Ikhwan al-Qassam* (the brotherhood of Qassam, whose followers are known as *Qassamiyun*).¹⁸³

As has been discussed in chapters 1 and 3, members of the YMMA were greatly involved in the ferment that preceded the 1929 rebellion and reportedly resolved secretly at their subsequent annual conference in 1930 to train youth cadres in the use of arms and to encourage the population to acquire weapons clandestinely. While sharing the Arab public's antipathy towards Zionism, al-Qassam frowned upon the 1929 violence as

¹⁸² As discussed below, al-Qassam's notion of *jihad* was infused with nationalist themes and meaning. This blurring of the concept – at once drawing on its theological origins while repurposing it to suit an ideological field increasingly mediated by nationalist discourse – characterized much of the term's usage in the interwar era in Palestine.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 170-71, 175.

disorganized and undisciplined.¹⁸⁴ Instead, he saw a need to slowly and methodically build a network of underground cells, each composed of hardened, dedicated, and pious cadres, who would become the military core of a popular insurrection which would begin only after adequate preparation. A number of sources name the YMMA as the first vehicle through which this endeavor was undertaken, though the details of this are scant.¹⁸⁵ It remains murky whether the secret call to arms issued by the YMMA in 1930 wasn't a reference to al-Qassam, rather than the organization as a whole, since most, or even the overwhelming majority, of the YMMA seems to have had no part in such activities. The *Qassami* Subhi Yasin, relying on the testimony of Muhammad al-Hanafi, treats 'Izz al-Din's role in the YMMA as merely a cover for his surreptitious work.¹⁸⁶ On the other hand, Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, a close confidant of al-Qassam and fellow leader of the Haifa YMMA, claimed that the *Ikhwan al-Qassam* emerged from the YMMA in the aftermath of the 1929 rising, suggesting that the organization was instrumental to the underground's inception.¹⁸⁷ If al-Hajj Ibrahim's assertion is accurate, as several scholars have concluded,¹⁸⁸ only a very small number of individuals were privy to this clandestine component of the society, which appears to have been kept secret even from stalwart nationalist members like 'Izzat Darwaza and Akram

¹⁸⁴ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 213.

¹⁸⁵ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 328; Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 266; al-Hut, *al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 43.

¹⁸⁶ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya al-kubra* (Cairo: Dar al-huna li-l-taba'a, 1959), p. 20. Schleifer partially echoes this idea, though he qualifies it ("Izz al-Din al-Qassam," p. 175-76; and see below).

¹⁸⁷ Al-Hajj Ibrahim, *al-Difa' 'an Haifa*, p. 151. Al-Hajj Ibrahim describes al-Qassam's religious stature within the society as a means for spreading his message of *jihad*, but says little else.

¹⁸⁸ Taggar, Arnon-Ohana, and al-Hut (cited above) are all of this view, and each wrote before al-Hajj Ibrahim's memoirs were published.

Zu‘aytir.¹⁸⁹ Confusing matters more, the paramilitary underground organized and led by al-Qassam was shadowed for some period of time by a parallel grouping that began as a splinter from Qassam’s forces.

In the heated environment that followed the 1929 *thawra*, a debate erupted within the nascent underground between those who saw 1929 as a call to arms in the immediate term, and al-Qassam, who argued that premature action would not yield the desired results. The former breakaway party was led by a future commander of rebel forces in the north during the Great Revolt, shaykh Khalil Muhammad ‘Isa, known by his *nom de guerre* Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir.¹⁹⁰ ‘Isa hailed from the village of Mazra‘a al-Sharqiyya in the Ramallah subdistrict and was one of the first four recruits to al-Qassam’s organization.¹⁹¹ In 1930 the dispute between al-Qassam and ‘Isa resulted in the latter’s defection and his initiation of guerilla-style operations in 1931 and 1932.¹⁹²

Rather than act precipitously, al-Qassam sought, as mentioned above, to carefully build an infrastructure for rebellion. The base of the underground was composed of cells of no more than five individuals, mostly hand-picked by ‘Izz al-Din for their personal

¹⁸⁹ Zu‘aytir, who regales the 1929 revolt specifically and armed struggle more generally in his diaries, gives no indication as to having any knowledge of, let alone having been party to, paramilitary activity within the YMMA (*Bawakir al-nidal*).

¹⁹⁰ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 23.

¹⁹¹ Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 185.

¹⁹² The two also differed in their approach to the population. Where al-Qassam stressed the necessity of maintaining social solidarity and of the *mujahidin* acting with rectitude towards other elements of society, such as the villagers whom it was hoped would join or support rebel ranks, Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir felt that there was no time for that kind of patient accretion of forces and support and held that finances and other necessities should be obtained by whatever means necessary, including force (Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 23). As will be explored in depth in later chapters, the question of rebel relations with the rest of Arab society had a great impact on the course of the rebellion.

dedication and principles (in line with his vision of *jihad al-nafs*).¹⁹³ As related by Ibrahim al-Shaykh Khalil, a *Qassami*, the credo of the underground was simple, “This is *jihad*, victory or martyrdom.”¹⁹⁴ To become a *mujahid* one needed to be willing to die for the cause, fighting the British and the Zionists “for God and country.”¹⁹⁵ Individual sincerity, ethical soundness, and the ability to practically abide by the secrecy and necessities of the underground were seen as key components of *mujahidin*. The selection of recruits was patiently undertaken, with much observation and probing before an individual could be inducted.¹⁹⁶

In addition to the core of *mujahidin*, the underground encompassed several special units that were separately responsible for arms procurement, military training, intelligence gathering, propagating the message of *jihad*, and political communications.¹⁹⁷ Possibly the most exceptional among the special units was that dedicated to intelligence, the likes of which had not been seen before among Palestinian organizations. Its express focus was on developing sources within the police force that could provide useful information on specific police activity, general routines, details on

¹⁹³ Schleifer writes that the oldest recruits to the organization, often dubbed shaykhs, also sometimes served as recruiters themselves (“Izz al-Din al-Qassam,” p. 175). Most other accounts depict the network as stemming from al-Qassam alone, which seems unlikely given the geographic range it attained.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in al-Hut, *al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 39.

¹⁹⁵ Abu Gharbiya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 45. Al-Qassam’s last words, according to *Filastin*, included the phrase “This is *jihad* for God and country,” the latter portion of which subsequently circulated as a slogan of the Great Revolt. The newspaper is quoted in al-Hut, *al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 20-21.

¹⁹⁶ Al-Hut offers a fascinating glimpse of the care with which al-Qassam selected potential initiates within the city. When he found individuals promising, he sent some of his acolytes to work beside them at their places of employment to observe them and “to get to know their concerns and problems,” surreptitiously investigating them in order to judge their suitability for the network (*al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 45).

¹⁹⁷ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 23. Political communications included liaising with representatives of foreign powers that might be able to help supply arms. Little seems to have come of this.

the security arrangements for Jewish colonies, and other items.¹⁹⁸ Little is known about the unit's operations or contacts, but the practices it established and the emphasis on cultivating moles within the state's security apparatuses were carried on into the revolt.

Beyond the talents he displayed for disciplined, painstaking, and sophisticated organizational development, al-Qassam's greatest innovation was to tap into the ranks of the dispossessed and marginal peasants, both in the shanties and those still in the countryside. Where elites, and as we have seen above, skilled workers, were often disdainful of the downtrodden, al-Qassam "loved workers and peasants" and evinced great concern for their lives.¹⁹⁹ Rather than ignore them or seek power over the underclass, al-Qassam desired their uplift. As he had done in Jabla, he inveighed against the immorality which he felt threatened Muslim culture and was credited with dissuading youth from frequenting brothels and gaming and gambling establishments.²⁰⁰ His advocacy of moral and spiritual reform also allowed him to pursue his aim of recruiting *mujahidin* for the underground, which he did while teaching the poor and the illiterate to read by using the Qur'an.²⁰¹

Al-Qassam's choice to organize primarily among the oppressed was probably also influenced by the special character of Haifa as the "cradle" of the fledgling Arab labor movement in Palestine.²⁰² Haifa was the birthplace of the PAWS and, thanks to its industrial base, the preeminent center for rural in-migration, which began earlier than

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Al-Hut, *al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 44.

²⁰⁰ Schleifer, "Izz al-Din al-Qassam, p. 173-74; Events of November in the north, 1.12.35, p. 5-6, CZA S/25 – 22231.

²⁰¹ Al-Hut, *al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 45-46; Schleifer, "Izz al-Din al-Qassam," p. 172.

²⁰² Al-Hut, *al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 45.

elsewhere in Palestine.²⁰³ Al-Qassam became well-acquainted with the emergent working class culture of the Arab migrants and the settled community in his capacity as a preacher at the Istiqlal mosque, a new house of worship located adjacent to the industrial district and the railyards. There he provided spiritual succor to workers and the poor, preached *jihad*, and clandestinely began recruiting for his underground, whose members eventually counted many employees of the railroad and the port at Haifa, along with day-laborers, street vendors, and others.²⁰⁴

In the late 1920s and early 1930s ‘Izz al-Din came to take a larger role in local society, officiating at births, graduations and other celebrations. Both in this capacity and as a marriage registrar he circulated in the city and its hinterlands with great regularity. His involvement with the YMMA, which preceded his appointment as *ma’dhun*, was essential to the more public presence he created for himself in the Haifa subdistrict. As alluded to above, the exact nature of the YMMA’s place in building the *Ikhwan* is not well illuminated by the available sources. It seems unlikely that the YMMA could have plausibly served as a cover for al-Qassam’s secret recruiting, since the society was itself involved in the 1929 rebellion and afterwards came under significant pressure from the state.²⁰⁵ In any case, its offices provided al-Qassam

²⁰³ Schleifer, “‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam,” p. 172; Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 224.

²⁰⁴ Schleifer, “‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam,” p. 171; al-Hut, *al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 45, 60.

²⁰⁵ The Haifa branch in particular was seen as a nest of radicals and was named as the possible progenitor of the first guerilla operations against Jewish targets in the region, which were later revealed to be the work of Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir and his men (The Ahava Yajour [Yagur] Murder, CID memo by DDSP Barker, 9.5.31, PRO – CO 733/204/2). Some sources have pointed to the creation by members of the Haifa YMMA of a branch at Saffuriya, near Nazareth, which was apparently little more than a public front for organizing fighters for the underground (Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 266-68). For all of the suspicions surrounding the Haifa YMMA, it was never shuttered, unlike other branches after 1929. Strangely, Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim writes in his memoirs that the entire YMMA was shut down by the government in 1934 (*al-Difa ‘an Haifa*, p. 155), but this is not the case.

contacts with the radicals within the national movement, particularly those who formed the Istiqlal party, and with like-minded youth.²⁰⁶ It also afforded him a public platform from which to champion those he considered his constituency before the state.

In 1935, as president of the local branch, al-Qassam petitioned the government to desist from its regular demolitions of huts in the *ard al-raml*, which were by then a weekly occurrence and were carried out under the pretext of maintaining sanitary conditions. He succeeded in obtaining an appointment with DC Keith-Roach on the issue, but to no avail. Fines for improper structures continued to be doled out, irrespective of the recipients' abilities to pay, and demolitions continued regardless of their effects on thousands of members of the Arab public.²⁰⁷

While he took the opportunity to approach state officials, al-Qassam was not so naïve as to expect great results, and played a double game of simultaneously encouraging grassroots opposition to the state and to Zionism. Earlier in 1935, for instance, he visited with the 'Arab al-Raml, Bedouin in the vicinity of the shantytown (whose traditional territory stretched between Haifa and Acre on the coast), in order to encourage violent resistance to state policy on land in the area.²⁰⁸ His sermons and public discourse also warned of threats to the Muslim holy places in Palestine and called

²⁰⁶ Al-Hajj Ibrahim, *al-Difa' 'an Haifa*, p. 151; Schleifer, "Izz al-Din al-Qassam," p. 175-76. Schleifer contends that his consorting with the YMMA, the Istiqlal, and radical youth paradoxically made him less suspect by the state, since the former were seen as blowhards (176). As explained here, this view does not stand up to scrutiny.

²⁰⁷ See 1935 correspondence and minutes by state officials in the Haifa YMMA file: ISA (25) – 871/61/141m. The reference to "thousands" affected is from an official note, dated 9.4.35.

²⁰⁸ Arab Bureau information (Zimroni), 24.1.35, CZA S/25 – 22224.

the public to *jihad*, messages which brought him under state surveillance and earned him several official warnings.²⁰⁹

Despite his stalwart inclinations and his fiery castigation of Zionism and imperialism, it was not al-Qassam's organization but Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir's splinter group (universally regarded as *Qassamiyun* in the literature) which first began the armed struggle, albeit in a fashion different from that intended by al-Qassam. For close to two years, in 1931-32, Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir's men, which included several individuals from Saffuriya, carried out a string of attacks on Jewish colonies in the Marj Ibn 'Amir and areas nearby. These assaults, claiming seven lives in all, began with the murder of three near Yagur in April 1931 and ended with a bomb attack that killed two at Nahalal in December 1932.²¹⁰ Although the Jewish Agency thought otherwise, they appear to have been conducted at the will of Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir without external direction.²¹¹ After the attack at Nahalal in 1932, the police arrested one of 'Isa's men, Mustafa 'Ali al-

²⁰⁹ Information (Zimroni), 1.2.35, CZA S/25 – 22224; Schleifer, "Izz al-Din al-Qassam," p. 165; Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 27.

²¹⁰ The targets also included persons or property at Kfar Yehoshua', Netanya, Wadi al-Hawarith, Balfuriya, Kfar Hasidim, and Kfar Yehezke'el (Events of November in the north, 1.12.35, p. 3, CZA S/25 – 22231). Arnon-Ohana, citing the CID, includes another incident in 1930 in which a colonist was killed (*Herev mi-bayit*, p. 268-69). The JA did not, from the documents reviewed herein, connect the 1930 incident to those in 1931-32.

²¹¹ Aharon Haim Cohen at the Arab Bureau believed they were the product of a larger conspiracy ultimately tied to the mufti (Events of November in the north, 1.12.35, p. 3, 5-6, CZA S/25 – 22231). In his survey of Arab underground activity written after Qassam's death at Ya'bad in 1935, he wrote that the 1931-32 attacks were undertaken "on the orders and with the moral support of northern politicians in contact with the mufti and the Husaynis" (Events of November in the north, p. 3). However, Subhi Yasin mentions no such connection between Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir's men and either northern politicians or the mufti (*al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 26), and neither does Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim (*al-Difa' 'an Haifa*, p. 153). Given the more intimate knowledge of the latter and the thinness of Cohen's evidence, which is based on circumstantial links of al-Qassam to others connected to the mufti, it seems safe to conclude that Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir's attacks were independently organized. The subject of al-Qassam's relations with the mufti and other national leaders is returned to below.

Ahmad, who, under torture, admitted to the crime and named his co-conspirators.²¹² Al-Ahmad was put to death and the bomb-maker, Ahmad al-Ghalayini, was given a 15 year sentence. Khalil Muhammad 'Isa and 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam were also arrested with at least two other men, but they were acquitted for lack of evidence. The Nahalal prosecutions put Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir's group out of commission.²¹³

Although the Nahalal-related arrests and prosecutions brought unwanted attention to al-Qassam's organizing, there is no clear indication that they really stymied the underground's growth. By 1935, according to Mahmud al-Salim of the political communications unit (later head of the rebels in Shafa 'Amr during the Great Revolt) and Hasan al-Bayir of the weapons acquisition unit, the *Qassamiyun* numbered roughly 200 cell leaders, with perhaps four times as many subordinate members.²¹⁴ These numbers are in some doubt, however, with competing sources claiming that the organization comprised as few as 100 total men.²¹⁵ Geographically the underground reached all over Palestine, though its membership was greatly tilted towards the

²¹² Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 26.

²¹³ Ibid; Events of November in the north, 1.12.35, p. 6, CZA S/25 – 22231; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 134-35.

²¹⁴ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 23; on al-Salim (a.k.a. Abu Ahmad), p. 48.

²¹⁵ Al-Hut (*al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 47-48) cites confusion over Yasin's division (in another text than the one cited herein) of the underground into two groups for which he provides separate tallies, one for cell leaders and another for cadres. Her alarm concerns Yasin's reckoning (given in the second source cited by al-Hut) that up to 800 members who weren't leaders were part of the underground, although this figure (given as per above by al-Salim and al-Bayir) corresponds with the idea of 200 cells of no more than five persons each. Al-Hut, however, cites two other *mujahidin* who appear to dispute the idea that there were cell leaders, and put the total number of all fighters much lower, at between 100 and 200 men (p. 48). Porath (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 135), cites Zionist intelligence estimates and Yasin's count in *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, which each put the total at 200, though this is a clear misreading of Yasin's reference to cell leaders ("those who were prepared for *jihad*, nay, to lead, reached 200 *mujahidin* in 1935 most of whom supervised guided cells"). Kayyali (*Palestine*, p. 180) reads Yasin's count in *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya* to mean 200 were members of the underground, and 800 were "sympathizers."

country's northern regions, with the Haifa and Jenin subdistricts most heavily represented.²¹⁶

The success of al-Qassam in creating a paramilitary underground and his overarching importance within Palestinian history have led to an assortment of claims about purported ties to different political factions. Several Istiqlalists have maintained that he was a member of the party; similarly Imil al-Ghuri claimed he was a member of the PAP. Neither of these assertions appears to be true,²¹⁷ although al-Qassam did maintain close ties with a number of Istiqlalists, Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim foremost among them.²¹⁸ It is principally through al-Hajj Ibrahim that some Zionist accounts, beginning with that of the JA's Arab Bureau, have contended that there were links between the mufti and al-Qassam. The evidence for secret dealings between the two is minimal, however, and attempts to fold al-Qassam's network into the purported web of the mufti's influence are without foundation, if not tendentious.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 267.

²¹⁷ For instance, regarding the Istiqlal: Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 120; Zu'aytir, *Bawakir al-nidal*, p. 415. Al-Hut discusses and debunks both the claims of the Istiqlalists and that of al-Ghuri (*al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 69).

²¹⁸ Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, *al-Difa' 'an Haifa*, p. 153; 'Ajaj Nuwayhid, *Sittun 'aman*, p. 181; Events of November in the north, 1.12.35, p. 6, CZA S/25 – 22231; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 138; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p.325-26; Schleifer, "Izz al-Din al-Qassam," p. 176.

²¹⁹ Most of the basis for purported ties between the mufti and al-Qassam erroneously reads the shaykh's mere association with figures connected to the mufti as a sign of being under his sway. Aharon Haim Cohen of the Arab Bureau argued in the aftermath of 'Izz al-Din's death in 1935 that he had ties to the mufti via al-Hajj Ibrahim, Subhi al-Khadra, and Ahmad Hilmi Pasha, all of whom were Istiqlalists. In his discussion of al-Qassam's relations with the institutions of the national movement, Cohen admitted that the police had no proof of any material interconnection, though they were sure that al-Hajj Ibrahim aided al-Qassam and that he had made use of Ahmad Hilmi Pasha to contact the mufti (Events of November in the north, 1.12.35, p. 6, CZA S/25 – 22231). By contrast, al-Hajj Ibrahim says nothing of the sort in his memoirs, and 'Izzat Darwaza, a major figure in the Istiqlal and close ally of the mufti, after postulating potential avenues through which the two could have been in some contact, stated that he was unclear as to their relationship but discounted the possibility of al-Qassam's acting in subordination to or on orders from the mufti (*al-Difa' 'an Haifa*, p. 151-55; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 326). Most accounts

As al-Hut observes, “in taking his decision of [waging] *jihad*, al-Qassam was well ahead [*kana... mutaqaddiman khatwat ba‘ida*] of the course of all of the existing political parties and institutions in the country.”²²⁰ Organizing for armed struggle was not a primary activity for even the most strident nationalist associations, with the possible exception of those scout troops that were engaged in military drilling by 1935. Certainly nothing compared to the organization and determination mustered by al-Qassam. The formal organs of the national movement, the Arab Executive and its successors, the family-based political parties, remained intent on the path of diplomacy, even if some experimented with using the threat of violence to gain the attention of the British.

Amin al-Husayni, a state functionary whose political influence owed in part to his operation of a parastatal religious bureaucracy, was no different from the political mainstream on this score. His ascent as the preeminent national figure after the 1929 rebellion confronted him with the dilemma, as Philip Mattar has shown, of opposing Zionism while continuing to serve the British regime. The solution that he devised was to raise the profile of Palestine as a pivotal regional or global issue through diplomacy in the Arab and Islamic worlds, garnering support for the cause while making himself into its foremost international dignitary in the process. His efforts did shore up his credibility

make no mention of any strong relationship between al-Qassam and the mufti, or actively declaim that al-Qassam acted at the behest of any other national personage or party (Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 330; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu‘assasat*, p. 327-28; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 67). Porath, on the other hand, follows A.H. Cohen’s lead and insinuates a substantial if vague connection (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 138-39). However, at least some of the sources which Porath draws on do not appear very trustworthy, and in fact do not directly connect al-Qassam to the Istiqlalists who supposedly facilitated the secret partnership between the former and the mufti (see, for instance, one report cited in *ibid.*, ft. 218, from the Arab Bureau, dated 14.11.34, CZA S/25 – 6964; also available in file 22224).

²²⁰ Al-Hut, *al-Shaykh al-mujahid*.

and stature in the eyes of much of the Palestinian public, and underscored his belief that building diplomatic links and leverage was the best chance the Palestinians had of attaining independence.²²¹

Al-Qassam's approach to the anti-colonial struggle was almost a total inversion of the mufti's: he believed that only by force of arms could Palestine be rid of the British and Zionism. Furthermore, his affinity for the lower classes presented an obvious challenge to the "traditionally inherited social values" of the notables.²²² The political vision which al-Qassam represented was based in local organizing and a model of mass mobilization that elevated the role of the poor and the dispossessed. This stood in sharp contrast to their consignment to the sidelines of elite strategy. Al-Qassam's project was aimed at igniting an insurrection, but in many ways its first objective was to lay to rest the elite fantasy of attaining a negotiated settlement.

In early 1935 al-Qassam began to feel that time was running out. Surveillance of his actions was tightening and, according to some of his comrades, he feared that his network would be rooted out and destroyed before even beginning its mission.²²³ He made one bid to widen the campaign, sending a message to al-Hajj Amin informing the latter of his decision to wage *jihad* and proposing to split the task between them, with al-Qassam responsible for the northern regions of the country and the mufti for the south. The mufti declined the offer, stating that the time was not right for arms and that in view of his favorable judgment of the British the political efforts of the movement were

²²¹ Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 50-64.

²²² Al-Hut, *al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 73.

²²³ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 326.

adequate to the task of securing independence.²²⁴ In the midst of the uproar that followed the discovery of arms bound for Zionists at Jaffa in October of that year, al-Qassam made his move.²²⁵ In mid-November he gathered a small force of ten men and headed to the forests in the area of Shafa ‘Amr. His plan was to spread word that an uprising was underway, hopefully igniting a wider popular response.²²⁶ The party was discovered rather quickly, however, and was soon surrounded near Ya‘bad by a force of some 150 police. Before the clash that followed, al-Qassam allegedly gave two orders: not to shoot at Arab police and that treachery, meaning surrender, would be met with death.²²⁷ After being called on to yield by the police, he was reported to have shouted back: “We won’t surrender – this is *jihad* for God and country,” before turning to his men and adding: “O my comrades, die as martyrs!”²²⁸ As it happened, he and two of his men were slain, and most of the others were captured.²²⁹

News of al-Qassam’s death with his men in battle against the authorities met with a stormy and emotional response from the Arab public, which was already up in arms following the Jaffa weapons discovery. By one estimate al-Qassam’s funeral outside Haifa became the largest public gathering in Palestine’s history. Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim gauged the crowd at 20-25,000, while the Jewish Agency offered a lower count of over

²²⁴ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 21-22.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 25-26.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 27; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 181; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 320.

²²⁷ Events of November in the north, 1.12.35, p. 12, CZA S/25 – 22231; al-Hut, *al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 21. The party had already spared the lives of two Arab police it previously encountered.

²²⁸ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 319-20. As noted above, this quote was circulated in the Arabic press.

²²⁹ The two other men killed were Yusif ‘Abdullah al-Zibawi and Sa‘id ‘Atiya al-Misri. Another *mujahid*, Muhammad Abu Qasim, was killed by police the previous day (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 320).

10,000, which A.H. Cohen noted was larger than the Jaffa demonstration of 1933.²³⁰

The police would not allow the procession to pass through much of Haifa, as was requested, and instead pushed its route largely outside the city, to the suburb of Balad al-Shaykh, where al-Qassam would be buried. Elites from across the country were invited to attend, but the leaderships of the *majlisiyyin* and the Opposition did not show up.²³¹

Local youth forced most Arab stores to close before the funeral.²³² The Muslim Association and local leaders like al-Hajj Ibrahim and Ahmad al-Imam attempted to restrain the throngs which amassed in Haifa on the appointed day, but they were incapable of preventing “a crowd of the lower classes” from stoning the police.²³³

The popular outpouring which followed al-Qassam’s death signaled that there was great potential for conflagration ahead. Al-Qassam became a national hero and his sacrifice and selflessness in the name of the nation and its liberation put national elites and their quietist tactics to shame.²³⁴ As if to symbolically underscore the difference between them, a rumor even circulated that al-Qassam was killed while on his knees praying.²³⁵ The tumultuous mood which smoldered throughout much of the Arab community was seized upon by youth, workers, Istiqlalists, and of course, the *Qassamiyun* themselves. Within months their unrelenting activism set the Great Revolt

²³⁰ Al-Hajj Ibrahim, *al-Difa‘ ‘an Haifa*, p. 155; Events of November in the north, 1.12.35, p. 13, CZA S/25 – 22231.

²³¹ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 30, 33; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 68. The CID claimed that some party leaders were present, but only mentioned representatives from the SMC (CID, 4.12.35, periodical appreciation summary 18/35, PRO – FO 371/20018).

²³² Events of November in the north, 1.12.35, p. 13, CZA S/25 – 22231.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 14; CID, 4.12.35, periodical appreciation summary 18/35, PRO – FO 371/20018. Quote from the latter.

²³⁴ Mattar suggests that this is likely why many declined to show their faces at his funeral (*The Mufti*, p. 67-68).

²³⁵ Events of November in the north, 1.12.35, p. 13, CZA S/25 – 22231.

in motion, during which popular forces upended not only elite national strategy, but established social and political hierarchies as well.

Conclusion

In its periodic report that covered al-Qassam's funeral, the CID offered a telling description of the city in which he lived and worked:

Haifa consists of a large motley crowd of casual laborers or temporary residents from various towns and villages in Palestine and Trans-Jordan, who are prone to trouble and responsive to agitation, and unlikely at times to submit to the influence or direction of political leaders or parties.²³⁶

In light of the massive public show of fury which accompanied al-Qassam's interment, the head of the CID represented the entire city as if it were populated by migrant villagers and poor shanty-dwellers. While this exaggerated depiction no doubt reflected larger imperial fears concerning cities as beachheads for anti-colonial disorder, the portrait nonetheless captured certain dimensions of the rapidly changing Arab face of the city, including the alienation, rootlessness, and refractory mood of its growing slum. Unwittingly the CID's stark sketch succinctly summarized the social and political effects of the ongoing transformation of the peasantry.

Subjected to a multiplying set of financial pressures, the process of peasant dispossession accelerated under British rule. At the same time the fabric of the rural social order was coming apart. As much as we can ascertain, most peasants do not appear to have wanted to leave behind their villages and the rhythms of life in the

²³⁶ CID, 4.12.35, periodical appreciation summary 18/35, PRO – FO 371/20018.

countryside to which they were accustomed, but those without land could not all find adequate tenancies or work. In some locations, probably foremost in the hill country, local potentates or wealthier landowners provided opportunities for some of the landless and the struggling smallholders to continue to stay on the land. In the coastal zones where bonds between landlords and peasants were weaker and where wage-labor had already spread as a new means of mediating local class relations, sales to Zionist interests were more common and large property owners were less inclined to extend any kind of safety net to peasants.²³⁷ The overall decline in the position of the peasantry, coupled with the growing impression that the *ancien régime* and its norms were dying, exacerbated tensions between peasants and the swelling numbers of migrants and urban poor, on one hand, and elites and the middle classes, on the other. The latter came to recognize by the 1930s that the deepening crises of the peasantry and of the rural order were intertwined with the national struggle and its fate, but their attempts to defend the peasantry were generally feeble and largely limited to the symbolic appropriation of the peasant as an image of cultural and national identity threatened by British imperialism and Zionist colonialism. The failure not only of elites, but also of youth and partisans of the new politics, to challenge the internal contradictions of the Palestinian social formation that were crippling the peasantry was critical. The advance of peasant bankruptcy and dispossession was a boon to the Zionist movement, which benefited from the effects of widespread usury and accumulation through debt. Peasants, in turn, were left landless, destitute, and embittered in increasing numbers.

²³⁷ Tamari, "From the Fruits," p. 86-87.

Throughout the first 18 years of British rule, peasants were not unaware of the dramatic changes transpiring in their circumstances or the place of Zionism and British rule in fueling them. From early on under the British occupation, they evinced hostility towards the new colonial regime's sponsorship of the Zionist enterprise and mobilized alongside nationalist elites to violently display their rejection of that alliance. Zionist efforts to court the peasants and attempt to forge a basis for mutual cooperation through the Farmers' Parties bubbled for a couple of years while much of the Palestinian elite was embroiled in factionalist conflict in the mid-1920s, but the shallowness of these ventures was revealed in the explosive violence of 1929, when mass peasant mobilization led to attacks on numerous colonies as well as the carnage that occurred in Hebron and Safad.

Peasant resistance to the colonial order and Zionist expansion was not, however, limited to bouts of collective violence. Nor, contrary to the assumptions of much of the literature on Palestinian politics under the Mandate, was it typically subject to the direction of social superiors. Peasants collaborated with urbanites when the opportunities to do so availed themselves, but otherwise acted in manners which they saw as necessary to defend their interests. As suggested here, over time, as the social system aligning peasants to merchants and landlords crumbled, the *fellahin* grew more autonomous and were more liable to take independent initiative.

Unlike the political engagement of the leading organs of the national movement, peasant politics was generally not bound up with formal protests to the state. In his seminal study of peasant rebellions in colonial India, Ranajit Guha emphasizes the

necessity of apprehending the specific modes of social protest among peasants.²³⁸ In Palestine several methods for expressing opposition to the colonial order – increasingly perceived as a conjoined Zionist-British endeavor – were employed. One was to deny the validity of new land regulations and to resist the colonial state's efforts to reconfigure the land regime. Peasants commonly flouted new land laws, transgressing them or bending them to their favor as much as they could. When overpowered by the material repercussions of British interventions in the land system, they tried to wring from them whatever advantages they could without conceding their claims to rights based in Ottoman law and custom. Similarly the British authorities were unwilling, at least in public pronouncements, to recognize that what they referred to as agrarian crime represented an amplification of peasant resistance to Zionist encroachment. Uprooting trees, maiming cattle, setting fire to buildings and the like were not indications of the sort of passivity that both the Zionists and the British had hoped would prevail. As standard means for prosecuting the region's "petty wars" their mushrooming incidence indicated stiffening resistance to the growth of the Zionist land-base and warned of the potential for persistent and widening confrontation. Finally, peasant resistance to evictions and their support for armed endeavors like the Green Hand and the *Qassamiyun* represented the greatest and most direct expression of their will to reject and evict foreign rule and Zionist settlement. Though comparatively few took part in these two insurrectionary ventures, peasant approval of them was subsequently apparent in the mass support given to the Great Revolt and its peasant cadres.

²³⁸ *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford, 1983), especially chapter three.

The transformation of the peasantry which British rule catalyzed brought many unintended consequences besides peasant resistance. It is difficult not to draw parallels between the state's handling of the interlinked phenomena of growing peasant landlessness, the crisis in employment, and the increasing urbanization of the major port cities. The accelerating development of each underscored the farce of the state's policy of advancing capitalist development, led by the Zionist sector, while 'preserving' the Arab rural order. In each instance the colonial authorities' concerns for the Arab public were overmatched by their investment in the Zionist project. Just as the imperial commitment to the Jewish National Home led British officials at the highest levels to downplay burgeoning landlessness, their faith in the Zionist enterprise led them to make light of the crisis afflicting Arab livelihoods in the first half of the 1930s, on the expectation that Zionist industry and capital, greased with short-term relief measures provided through the Department of Public Works, would inevitably pave the way to a brighter future. Where the state almost willfully blinded itself regarding the scale of landlessness, it repeated the act with respect to Arab unemployment, the apparatus for measuring which, however imperfect, was deformed beyond utility only shortly after being created. In short, despite the hallowed British doctrine of 'dual obligation,' the British regime consistently sacrificed the most elementary structural components of the Arab public welfare. The result was, paradoxically, to breathe life into an image of Palestinian society that British planners saw as antithetical to the occupation: one wracked by landlessness, widespread unemployment, urbanization, and bulging slums, topped off with simmering disaffection.

The social and political effects of the sustained, high rates of unemployment and underemployment, not to mention the resentments stirred by a welter of discriminatory practices regarding wages, conditions of employment, and unionization, were not reckoned by colonial officials to be particularly noteworthy or remarkable until the eve of the uprising, when Arab labor unrest began to catch fire. The question of Hebrew labor was a partial exception to this pattern, particularly after its short-lived urban incarnation quickly raised the prospect of regular inter-communal brawls, but little was actually done about it. The growth of a working class, however tenuous, and with it the emergence of working class culture, labor organizing, and opposition to Hebrew labor helped set the stage for urban centers to play major roles in the beginning of the Great Revolt, during the general strike. The horizontal identities and affinities that were forged in the new urban milieu gathered significant strength from the latter 1920s into the 1930s, as did the accompanying trend towards autonomous worker organization and activism.

Organizationally al-Qassam's underground was also a product of the social transformation of the peasantry. Some have argued that al-Qassam's historical novelty lies in his introduction of the sacred and the "supernatural" into the Palestinian struggle, or focused on the "redemptive" quality of his Islamic populist ideology, even to the point of contending that it was the bridge by which the politics of the notables transitioned into popular politics.²³⁹ Such accounts, while instructive in their insistence on the powerful affective and discursive components of al-Qassam's *oeuvre*, tend to reproduce a binary

²³⁹ Schleifer, "Izz al-Din al-Qassam," p. 177; Johnson, *Islam and the Politics*, p. 47, 54.

dichotomy between religion and nation.²⁴⁰ As Swedenburg has suggested, however, “Al-Qassam’s appeal to religious values was not simply a return to tradition or a retreat into the past, but instead represented a real transformation of traditional forms for revolutionary use in the present.” Al-Qassam’s call for *jihad* was intimately related to the emergent political and symbolic framework of Palestine, a modern administrative creation, and to the specific burdens its Arab population confronted. His network’s recruitment of the urban and rural dispossessed and its religiously-inspired mission of expelling the colonizers reflected the socio-economic and cultural disquiet of peasant society’s uneasy proletarianization. In his hands *jihad* acquired a modern anti-colonial scope – its horizon being national, territorial liberation, not religious liberation. Its foot-soldiers fought not for God alone, but “for God and country,” according to the slogan that subsequently swept through the hills and the plains during the revolt. The constituencies which he first called to arms, marginal peasants and members of the semi-proletariat, were soon the backbone of national insurrection.

²⁴⁰ Ahmad al-Shuqayri, for instance, future first head of the PLO, was struck in meeting those arrested at Ya‘bad that: “the phrases ‘armed struggle,’ ‘the national movement,’ and ‘colonialism and Zionism’ did not flow from their tongues, as, in their simplicity, their expressions issued from a more awesome and elevated fount... faith, and *jihad* for God” (quoted in: al-Hut, *al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 60).

Chapter 7:

The Great Strike: from colonial order to anti-colonial rebellion

On 16 October 1935 port workers at Jaffa discovered that the cargo they were offloading from a Belgian ship contained a substantial quantity of arms. Packed alongside cement in 359 of the shipment's 573 drums were hundreds of small arms, half a million rounds of rifle ammunition, a quantity of pistol ammunition, and other items including 25 bipods for machine guns (Lewis guns).¹ The bill of lading was made out to one Isaac Katan, an individual never located by the Palestine police, but whose name was subsequently found to have been given as the consignee for two previous shipments of cement in 1934.² The arms were destined, as was later admitted, for the Haganah, Labor Zionism's underground militia.³ Adding fuel to the fire, the Jewish Agency refused to publicly dissociate itself from the incident, even after importuning from the Acting High Commissioner, and only days after the discovery authorities uncovered a modest shipment of tear gas in Zionist hands at Haifa.⁴

The Arab community erupted in a firestorm of protest. The disclosure of the smuggling, and the sheer quantity of arms, served to confirm the Palestinians' worst fears that the Zionists were secretly preparing for military conflict and conquest. The Arab press brimmed with furious denunciations of the government and its Zionist

¹ OAG (Hall) to Colonial Secretary, 17.10.35, #270, PRO – FO 371/18965. For a full roster of the smuggled materiel, see: Smuggling of Arms and Ammunition, by DIG-CID (Rice), 19.10.35, Appendix A, PRO – FO 371/18965.

² Progress report #2: Smuggling of Arms and Ammunition, by DIG-CID, 22.10.35, PRO – FO 371/18965.

³ David Ben-Gurion, "Rechesh and Ta'as: Arms for the Haganah 1935-1939" in *From Haven to Conquest*, p. 399.

⁴ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 23.10.35, PRO – FO 371/18965; Progress report #2, DIG-CID, 22.10.35, PRO – FO 371/18965.

protégés, pouring scorn not only on the ill-intentions of Zionism but on British inaction and dereliction of the Mandatory's responsibility to protect the Arab community.⁵

Among leading nationalist activists and political parties the smuggling scandal ignited a feverish new cycle of activity that was characterized by a steady and accumulating stream of public actions (strikes) and mass gatherings. The surge in activity, infused with renewed urgency and gravity, was marked by reinvigorated competition between the national movement's elite and popular wings over its leadership. Represented by the leading political parties and selected religious figures, elites had been preoccupied with the prospect of the long-sought legislative council's establishment, talks concerning which had been reopened in the summer. Arrayed against them was a portion of the national movement's youth wing, often labeled the "independent youth," the Istiqlalists, and the Arab Workers' Society, who opposed the legislative council and favored a course of escalation targeting British colonialism. The contest that ensued was indicative of the new terrain of mass politics in both its political and sociological dimensions, and centered on obtaining the loyalties of the new horizontal constituencies within the political field, especially youth. After a half year tug-of-war the youthful radicals and their allies, with the crucial assistance of *Qassami* peasant rebels, seized the reins of the movement and initiated what would become the Great Strike, the first phase of the Great Revolt. The rebellion spread like wildfire,

⁵ Israel Allalouf, the clerk working the shipment for the porters, was known by the CID to be involved in arms smuggling, though he was apparently not a person of interest to the police: Smuggling of Arms and Ammunition, by DIG-CID (Rice), 19.10.35, Appendix A, PRO – FO 371/18965.

gripping the cities and country alike and giving rise to an unprecedented armed insurrection.

While it has sometimes been maintained that the Palestinian rebellion of the 1930s was a spontaneous outbreak, ample evidence suggests otherwise.⁶ As argued above in the introduction, the Great Revolt was not an event in the ordinary sense, but represented the crystallization of a set of ongoing transformations in the *modus operandi* of Palestinian politics and in its social and associational bases. That is to say, the revolt was intimately and irrevocably tied to the deeper social processes which resulted in the emergence and efflorescence of horizontal identities, affinities, and associations. As May Seikaly puts it: “While the traditional leadership had become ossified in its futile tactics and procrastination, it was being overwhelmed by this new current in which the orientations of the intellectuals, professionals, the lower middle classes as well as peasants and workers had coalesced.”⁷

Paradoxically, in spite of the momentous social changes transpiring in Arab society and the effects these had on transforming the notable-led, diplomatically-oriented political movement of the 1920s into the radicalized, rebellious and multitudinous formation of the 1930s, many historical narratives depict elites as retaining leadership of the movement in the era of the revolt. For the period of the strike this has most

⁶ Accounts which offer some version of the spontaneity thesis include: Kayyali, *Palestine: a modern history*, p. 189; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-al-mu'assasat*, p. 331; Johnson, *Islam and the Politics of Meaning*, p. 47; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 71; Nuwayhid, *Sittun 'aman*, p. 189; Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 67; Black and Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars*, p. 5; Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 246; Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism, and the Palestine Question*, p. 193; Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 235. This notion has been explicitly rejected or critiqued by a number of scholars of differing persuasions: Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 164; Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 238; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 234.

⁷ *Haifa*, p. 157.

commonly taken the shape of accounts which treat the Arab Higher Committee (*al-Lajna al-'Arabiyya al-'ulya*, or AHC) or the mufti as the ultimate authority driving the rebellion.⁸ A variant of this conception sees the Istiqlalists, most of whom were from wealthy prominent families, as its intellectual progenitors and animating force.⁹ When elite supremacy isn't simply presupposed, it has been contended that despite the political field's radicalism a capable new leadership failed to emerge, leaving the AHC, in a relative vacuum, to take charge.¹⁰ Other accounts, beginning with Ann Lesch's, have pointed to the middle classes as the architects or motive force of the strike.¹¹ These

⁸ Porath's discussion in *The Palestinian Arab National Movement* is something of a moving target, beginning with the Istiqlalists as the strike's initiators (163-64), but it moves on, without a clear explanation, to describe the AHC and the mufti as its leaders (p. 172). Musa's analysis is even more slippery, affording leadership roles in turn to the middle classes (*Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 140-41, 170, 194) and the AHC (p. 180), before returning to its partisan narrative of elevating the mufti, who is ultimately held to have superintended the strike (p. 325-26). Cohen effectively follows the JA's view that the mufti and the Husaynis were to blame for the uprising (*Army of Shadows*, p. 106-07), while Taggar only contends that the al-Hajj Amin took charge during the latter half (roughly) of the strike (*The Mufti*, p. 391-92). Other accounts presuming the supremacy of the AHC and/or the mufti include: ESCO Foundation, *Palestine*, v. 2, p. 792-93, 797; Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine*, p. 71; M.J. Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat from the Mandate* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1978), p. 10-31; Shapira, *Land and Power*, p. 220; Kimmerling and Migdal, *The Palestinian People*, p. 111; Segev, *One Palestine Complete*, p. 368; Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 105; Farsoun and Aruri, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, p. 91. As discussed below, the Cabinet in London, the military brass in Palestine, and RAF intelligence concluded that elite leaders were responsible for the uprising, though HC Wauchope disagreed vehemently and continuously with this view.

⁹ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 8, 121, 263.

¹⁰ Barbara Kalkas portrays the AHC as experienced politicians who unified the divided and inexperienced ranks of the national committees ("The Revolt of 1936: A Chronicle of Events" in Ibrahim A. Abu-Lughod, ed., *The Transformation of Palestine: Essays on the Origin and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971), p. 241-42; 245-46). Musa ultimately sees great continuity of leadership between the revolt and the preceding period (*Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 246). In overarching terms his account veers between ahistorical presumptions of elite leadership (p. 253, where it is loosely suggested that the strike was the conscious fruit of former AE leaders) and the notion that the AHC was able to impose itself owing to the weakness of other forces (p. 180). Shades of the leadership vacuum argument also appear in Seikaly's account (*Haifa*, p. 246), though in general her narrative lends more weight to the middle classes.

¹¹ Lesch's argument, like many others, is really an admixture. The origins of the strike, as she has it, is a curiously contorted story in which politicians in Nablus and Jaffa called it into being, but did so in an effort to contain popular outrage and to confine it to peaceful means (*Arab Politics*, p. 115). The daily affairs of the strike, were, on the other hand, run by the NCs and a host of popular groups including scouts, sports associations, labor, and women, in a variety of other capacities (p. 116). Seikaly, akin to Lesch's

accounts highlight the place of radicalized urban politicians and members of the intelligentsia, some of whom found seats on the local national committees (NCs) that formed throughout the country and were responsible for the conduct of the strike in their respective areas. Nonetheless, many such narratives recenter the AHC as the *primus inter pares*. Only a minority of accounts have argued that the strike's leadership – control of its tempo, tactics, and resolve – came from below. In these narratives the elites and middle class elements are generally seen as subject to the commanding influence of a nebulous popular will and the dictates of public perceptions, as much as to discrete social forces like youth and students in the urban sphere and peasants in the rural.¹²

This chapter has several aims. First and foremost it argues that the strike was brought about by the new, radicalized social forces and traces the role of popular constituencies and popular institutions in sustaining and propelling the rebellion. I argue that the ascendance of the popular wing of the national movement did not give rise to a single dominant body or social group, but interrupted preexisting social hierarchies and precipitated the growth in their stead of what might be called revolutionary authority. The assertion of revolutionary authority was manifest both at the level of public opinion

analysis, argues that urban politicians from the newer strata launched the strike while workers and peasants formed its “backbone” (*Haifa*, p. 156-57, 242).

¹² Bayan al-Hut posits that the strike's leadership was popular (*al-Qiyadat wa-al-mu'assasat*, p. 331, 336) and later supplements this by addressing the primacy of the NCs over the AHC (p. 336, 347). Confusing the issue, she later refers to the NCs as subordinate (*tabi'*) to the AHC (p. 351). She also contends, without making much of a case or adducing proof beyond his financial role managing the Central Relief Committee, that the mufti assumed the role of supreme authority over the strike after the NCs congress in early May (p. 338). In a more cursory fashion, Yehoyada Haim also makes the argument that the strike was driven by popular elements against the will of conservative elites (*Abandonment*, p. 34). Haim's account is of further interest for its useful discussion of various Zionist parties' perceptions of the strike and its leadership. Other works acknowledging popular leadership include Tamari, “Factionalism and Class Formation,” p. 194; Khalaf, “The Effect,” p. 96, 107.

and in concrete encounters between elites and the popular classes. The spread of popular revolutionary institutions, from local committees to guerilla bands, anchored and organized the rebellion while ensuring that it spread throughout society. Elites, who did not by and large look favorably upon the uprising, were carried along by the upsurge and compelled to support it. Only at the strike's close were representatives of the elite political class (the AHC) able to regain the upper hand politically.

Second, this chapter examines the colonial state's response to the rebellion. Contradicting accounts that depict the Palestine administration as hamstringing the forcible suppression of the revolt, it points out that the military bid to snuff out the uprising failed in its own right, for a number of reasons. Moreover, as I explore here, despite their differences, the civilian and military officials were in general agreement on the strategic necessity of breaking the strike movement and on the necessary modality of the counterinsurgency.¹³ Confronted with unparalleled mass mobilization, the colonial regime employed an array of collective punishments against Arab communities in an effort to dissipate the rebel movement, break its will, and divide it from the population.¹⁴

Finally, unlike the commonplace narratives that emphasize the failure(s) of the strike (discussed in the conclusion), this chapter argues that its net effects were to bring the national movement closer to its goals, though not by the standard measure. Almost universally the attainment of concessions from the British on the national movement's

¹³ As discussed below, the political and the military echelons of the government were chiefly at odds over the extent and severity of the collective punishments regime.

¹⁴ The tactics used in Palestine against the first phase of the revolt were not dissimilar to the Closed-Border System methods used in the Northwest Frontier Province of India, which combined types of economic punishment and warfare (collective fines, blockades, etc.) with "butcher and bolt" punitive raids. For a brief description of the Northwest Frontier precedent, see Laleh Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgencies* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013), p. 19-21.

desiderata, which were not forthcoming, has been seen as the sole yardstick with which to evaluate the 1936 uprising. In lieu of obtaining gains directly from the imperial power, however, the analysis presented here contends that the rebellion in 1936 nonetheless reshaped dynamics on the ground in Palestine, and in particular slowed the torrent of Jewish immigration. By breaking the sharp upward trend in immigration from 1932-35 (which climaxed at over 66,400 persons in 1935) the rebel movement helped forestall the creation of a Jewish majority in Palestine, which was only finally achieved through war and expulsion a dozen years later in 1948. The rebels were aware of their impact in this respect, and short of tangible political victories delivered by the colonial authorities, their capacity to achieve qualified progress on their aims by impacting conditions on the ground in Palestine became a major motive factor in the rebellion's subsequent phases.

The eve of the revolt

Far from materializing out of thin air in a spontaneous fashion, the rumblings of future political unrest were visible long before the general strike was called on 19 April 1936. As early as February 1935 Air Officer Commanding (AOC) R.E.C. Pierse, the chief military advisor to the High Commissioner, warned that "the universal depression among Arabs caused by increased sale of land to Jews" was a veritable tinderbox, which "might be converted into active hostilities to Government."¹⁵ At the time the SMC's

¹⁵ HC to Colonial Secretary (extract), 11.2.35, PRO – CO 733/278/13. While noting that land sales had spread into the hill districts, the HC deprecated this analysis as inaccurate, putting his stock as usual in al-Hajj Amin, who he reported was disinterested in stirring up trouble with the government.

land campaign was well under way, contention surrounded the transfer of the Huleh concession, and an Arab had just been killed by police at al-Harithiyya during eviction proceedings.¹⁶ The RAF report for the month judged that the feeling was “gaining ground” among Arab leaders and the peasantry that “something must be done about the Jewish menace.”¹⁷

More disconcerting for the authorities was the growth of revolutionary or armed groups. The CID had its eyes on new youth groups like the PAP’s *Futuwwah*, but it was the shadowy *al-Shabab al-tha’ir* that first sent threats directly to HC Wauchope himself. Soon afterwards the CID began to note paramilitary training being conducted by scout troops and warned of a “tendency” of independent youth groups to favor underground organizing in the name of “extremist policy.” Colonial authorities were also at this time keeping tabs on shaykh al-Qassam.¹⁸

As noted in chapter 3, it was within the context of bubbling youth mobilization and radicalization that the proposal to form a legislative council was reintroduced in earnest. The High Commissioner, though nominally supportive, stonewalled for four years before beginning informal talks with party leaders and Palestinian Christian representatives in the summer of 1935.¹⁹ At the same time, *al-Difa’*, the firebrand newspaper run by Istiqlalist Ibrahim al-Shanti that had become the foremost Arabic

¹⁶ These matters are discussed in chapter 3.

¹⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), n.d., monthly summary of intelligence (February 1935), CZA S/25 – 22735.

¹⁸ For more detail, see chapters 3 on youth and 6 on al-Qassam.

¹⁹ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 193-94. It should be recalled that the British government officially backed the establishment of a legislative council in the 1930 White Paper. Nonetheless, without objections from London, Wauchope conditioned the advance of “self-government” (in the form of the council) on the success of municipal council elections held in 1934. The AE pressed for the council until its demise (see: Official communiqué 39/34, 1.12.34, ISA (2) 566-4m; AE, memorandum to HC concerning the land issue and Jewish immigration, 1.12.34, *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p. 357-59).

daily,²⁰ began to urge the political parties that arose after the AE's dissolution to reunite. Leaders from the two most significant groups, the Defense Party and the Palestinian Arab Party, were busy building infrastructures for themselves, forming branches and shoring up popular support, though if the RAF's estimations were accurate, their branches failed to hold much local interest after being opened.²¹ Months later, in early October 1935, the Youth Congress seconded the call for unity. At a special meeting of its executive the assembled agreed on an action plan that called on the Arab political parties to issue demands to the state in conjunction with parallel statements delivered in unison by sundry Palestinian associations, clubs, and religious leaders. If the government would not agree to fulfill the demands, then other means would have to be taken up, though these were not specified.²²

When the arms scandal broke, the YC quickly renewed its call to Arab parties to meet to devise a response to the crisis.²³ At first the PAP and the National Bloc, a minor party led by Nablus lawyer 'Abd al-Latif Salah, called their own independent strikes, but after press criticism and al-Hajj Amin's intervention, they agreed to meet with the other political parties and the YC.²⁴ At the meeting on 21 October, the parties adopted a number of resolutions, foremost among which was to call for the government to carry

²⁰ CID, 16.11.35, periodical appreciation summary 17/35, PRO – FO 371/18957. For background on *al-Difa* ' see also: Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 73-74; Conversation with Kamil al-Shanti, 9.4.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

²¹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 1.8.35, monthly summary of intelligence (July), CZA S/25 – 22735.

²² Najib, 3.10.35, CZA S/25 – 3875. The YC's president was particularly concerned about Jewish attacks on Arabs, such as a peasant killed on disputed land at Tab'un, and Arab workers assaulted by Hebrew labor pickets in Tel Aviv. During the proceedings a diversity of views emerged, with some advocating a course based in diplomacy at the League of Nations and among Arab and Muslim countries and others who foresaw armed conflict.

²³ CID, 30.10.35, periodical appreciation summary 15/36, PRO – FO 371/18957.

²⁴ Ibid; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 2.11.35, monthly summary of intelligence (October), CZA S/25 – 22735.

out a comprehensive search and seizure of Jewish arms, failing which the Arabs should move to arm themselves.²⁵ Under popular pressure – channeled through demands made at the YC headquarters in Jaffa by members of the public prior to the meeting – the assembled also called for a general strike on 26 October.²⁶ To continue their coordination, the parties and the YC also agreed to establish an inter-party committee, with the notable exception of the Istiqlalists.²⁷

On the same day that the parties met, a very different gathering took place in Nablus. Shepherded by Akram Zu‘aytir, then age 26, and fellow Istiqlalists, YMMA activists and other nationalists, the assembled called a public meeting on 2 November, Balfour day, at which a popular campaign of resistance to British rule would be inaugurated.²⁸

By late 1935, then, a contest was underway for leadership of the movement.²⁹ The currency of the conflict, as Yehuda Taggar keenly observes, concerned the standing of the contending parties among youth and students and their capacity to attract and mobilize these constituencies.³⁰ Although various assessments have plotted the contours

²⁵ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 2.11.35, monthly summary of intelligence (October), CZA S/25 – 22735. Comparatively minor resolutions were also passed calling for the government to improve its customs inspections regime, including by expelling Jewish officials in the department.

²⁶ Najib, 21.10.35, CZA S/25 – 3875; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 238.

²⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 2.11.35, monthly summary of intelligence (October), CZA S/25 – 22735. The committee’s members consisted of: Raghīb al-Nashashibi (DP), Hasan Sidqī al-Dajani (DP), Jamal al-Husayni (PAP), Ya‘qub al-Ghusayn (YC), ‘Abd al-Latif Salah (National Bloc), and ‘Isa al-Bandak (Reform Party).

²⁸ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 7. At least five members of the Nablus YMMA were part of the preparatory committee formed for the Balfour day forum: Rashid Abu Ghazala, Hikmat al-Masri, Qadri Tuqan, ‘Adil Tufaha, and Majid al-Qutb. Other members included the popular young poet ‘Abd al-Rahim Mahmud, ‘Adil al-Tamimi, ‘Abd al-Karim Shahin, Khalil al-Khamash, Shafi‘ Sa‘d al-Din, Sadiq al-Asmar, and Tawfiq Tabila.

²⁹ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 361-62; al-Hut, *al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 15; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*

³⁰ *The Mufti*, p. 361-62.

of the leadership question at the time in rather different fashions,³¹ it appears most simply to have revolved around the classic strategic divide during the era of the new politics: to pursue diplomacy or to foster resistance to British rule, including through force of arms. In a manner familiar to the early 1930s, on one side were most elites, who had their eyes set on the legislative council as at least a first step to remedying the national movement's frustration. On the other side were many Istiqlalists and segments of the nationalist youth, who despaired of the British occupation and saw the legislative council as a diversion from the central issues of national sovereignty and the preservation of Palestine as an Arab country. To be sure, the political map was not fixed, nor was it entirely binary, but in general terms, the competition over the movement's future resolved into lines of support for these two primary stances.

The strike on 26 October was widely observed, including among villagers. Presaging the general strike in 1936, youth and students played prominent local roles, not least as enforcers of strike discipline.³² The following week witnessed competing events again on Balfour day. While Akram Zu'aytir's group convened its forum as advertised at Nablus, the PAP, ever ready to promote Husayni dominance, held its own event at Haifa, inaugurating the city's branch of the party. The Haifa meeting was smaller, by official estimate numbering some 300 persons. Its highlights included Jamal al-Husayni publicly declaring that armed struggle was the Arab community's last resort,

³¹ For primary accounts, see: Akram Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 7-38; Najib, 19.10.35, CZA S/25 – 3875; Arab Bureau information, 9.10.35, CZA S/25 – 22231.

³² CID, 30.10.35, periodical appreciation summary 15/35, PRO – FO 371/18957; Najib, 25.10.36 and 26.10.35, CZA S/25 – 3875; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 2.11.35, monthly summary of intelligence (October), CZA S/25 – 22735. RAF intelligence noted that party representatives were distributed throughout the country to help oversee the strike and to keep order.

while Jamal al-Qasim, of the Nablus YMMA, argued that the Palestinians needed their own Haganah. At Nablus the public meeting attracted between 1-2000 persons, and featured representatives from the YMMA, the YC, the AWS, the Istiqlal and the press. The meeting's resolutions, accepted by acclamation, were prepared in advance by the tireless Zu'aytir. In unsparing terms they placed responsibility for the political crisis on British shoulders, analogized British rule with the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (which was condemned), accused the British of seeking to "erase and wipe out the Arab identity of Palestine [*mahu 'urubatiha wa-l-qada 'alayha*]," and claimed that the colonial authorities had connived in the arming of the Zionists, whose weapons were intended "to fight the Arabs and eliminate them." In response, the Palestinians were called on to arm themselves in self-defense, to condemn the High Commissioner as an enemy of the people, and to observe another general strike on 13 November, the date of his return to the country from abroad.³³

Although Zu'aytir solicited the inter-party committee's endorsement, the parties and the YC demurred, provoking an angry riposte from the Nablus organizers.³⁴ Ya'qub al-Ghusayn and Jamal al-Husayni, both advocates of youth mobilization, were reported by the CID to have opposed the strike because it would not be under their auspices and

³³ On the Haifa meeting: RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 30.11.35, monthly summary of intelligence (November), CZA S/25 – 22735. On the Nablus meeting: Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 8-14; Resolutions of the Nablus meeting on the anniversary of Balfour declaration, 2.11.35, *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 392; quotes from the resolutions text. The RAF produced the lower estimate for attendance at the Nablus gathering, while Zu'aytir gave the higher figure.

³⁴ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 15, 18.

control.³⁵ In light of the dissension between activists and elite politicians, the 13 November strike was partial.³⁶ Not surprisingly, it was strongest in two of the greatest bastions of the youth trend, Nablus and Qalqilya.³⁷ Describing the heated climate surrounding the dispute, Khalil al-Khuri claimed that the population was more inclined to the activists “because it views the strike justly [*bi-haqq*] and regards the leaders as traitors.”³⁸ Although the strike was not total, it demonstrated the growing clout of youth groups who, along with workers in the AWS, formed its core supporters.³⁹

Afterwards, the parties’ political stock continued to plummet. In particular, their perpetual recourse to diplomatic entreaties and the submission of petitions was singled out as a barren method.⁴⁰ But the growing rift between elites and much of the public was most plainly illustrated when al-Qassam and his men fell in combat with the British on 20 November. Turning a tin ear to public criticism, party leaders declined to attend the funeral for the rebels and instead met with the administration to deliver a statement of demands.

The 25 November 1935 memorandum, signed by the four parties and the Youth Congress primarily raised the three principal demands that had animated the national movement since the early 1920s: 1) self-determination and the granting of independence;

³⁵ CID, 16.11.35, periodical appreciation summary 17/35, PRO – FO 371/18957. Jamal al-Husayni reportedly ironically explained his opposition to the strike as seeking to preserve party unity (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 30.11.35, monthly summary of intelligence (November), CZA S/25 – 22735).

³⁶ CID, 16.11.35, periodical appreciation summary 17/35, PRO – FO 371/18957; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 30.11.35, monthly summary of intelligence (November), CZA S/25 – 22735; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 243.

³⁷ Najib, 13.11.35, CZA S/25 – 3875; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 243.

³⁸ Najib, 13.11.35, CZA S/25 – 3875.

³⁹ CID, 16.11.35, periodical appreciation summary 17/35, PRO – FO 371/18957.

⁴⁰ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 22.11.35, weekly summary of intelligence, CZA S/25 – 22735; CID, 16.11.35, periodical appreciation summary 17/35, PRO – FO 371/18957.

2) blocking land transfers of any kind from Arabs to Jews; 3) halting Jewish immigration into Palestine.⁴¹ Echoing the party leaders' estimation, the High Commissioner reported to London that short of some victory to publicly proclaim, "[the leaders] will lose such influence as they now possess," paving the way for more radical forces and bloodshed. Although he took a dim view of the national movement's demands, blithely terming its grievances "imaginary," the High Commissioner took the opportunity to urge the establishment of the legislative council as quickly as possible and that London approve a new land ordinance designed, ostensibly, to preserve smallholders.⁴²

In early November the CID took the view that youth and scouts, as well as armed bands like the *Qassamiyun*, posed the greatest threat to public security.⁴³ In a display of bravado that arguably typified the coarsening sentiment among youth, a member of the Abu 'Ubayda scout troop, Sa'di Tufaha, defiantly declared to police that they ruled for the day, but the future belonged to Abu 'Ubayda.⁴⁴ The CID reported that after the 13 November strike a handful of radical youth set themselves to charting a more militant course for the movement.⁴⁵ Akram Zu'aytir, Hamdi al-Husayni, Hashim Sabi', and 'Atif Nurallah were first named as the central figures in this initiative, but a fortnight later the list of ringleaders was expanded to include Michel Mitri, Ibrahim al-Shanti, and Salim 'Abd al-Rahman.⁴⁶ Their aim, according to the head of the CID, was to pressure the

⁴¹ Arab leaders' memorandum to the HC, 25.11.35, CP 3 (36), PRO – CAB 24/259.

⁴² HC to Colonial Secretary, 7.12.35, Secret, and HC to Colonial Secretary, 7.12.35, Secret A, CP 3 (36), PRO – CAB 24/259. First quote from first letter; the following two from the second.

⁴³ CID, 16.11.35, periodical appreciation summary 17/35, PRO – FO 371/18957.

⁴⁴ Najib, 20.10.35, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁴⁵ CID, 4.12.35, periodical appreciation summary 18/35, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁴⁶ Ibid; DIG-CID to Chief Secretary, 14.12.35, Special Report on Political Situation, CP 3 (36), PRO – CAB 24/259.

parties and the YC to adopt a campaign of non-cooperation with the state, and subsequently to create “disturbances.”⁴⁷

RAF intelligence concurred with the CID’s assessment, adding its estimation that preparation for armed conflict was underway, with bands being formed in Tulkarm, Qalqilya, Jerusalem, and Jaffa. A familiar cast of characters from the Istiqlal and the Youth Congress was reputedly responsible for the development: Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, Akram Zu‘aytir, ‘Atif Nurallah, Subhi al-Khadra, Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman, Kamil al-Husayn, Sa‘id al-Khalil, and ‘Abdullah Samara.⁴⁸ In the north, where the *Qassami* network was thickest, the peasantry was reported to be “entirely in sympathy” with armed rebels. Upon further querying from the Chief Secretary, the RAF clarified that at the time, in early December, talk appeared more plentiful than actual preparations. The original report’s author, squadron leader McGregor, added that given the rapid demise of al-Qassam, the radicals’ intention was to be more prepared so as not to be crushed with equal ease. He therefore forecast that bands of a serious nature might appear after several months, by March 1936.⁴⁹

Heeding the warnings produced by its intelligence services, the Palestine administration repeatedly wired London that violence loomed and convened a meeting of top civilian and military officials in early January 1936 which focused on riot control

⁴⁷ Ibid; CID, 30.12.35, periodical appreciation summary 19/35, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁴⁸ Samara and ‘Abd al-Rahman were also PAP members.

⁴⁹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 22.11.35, weekly summary of intelligence, CZA S/25 – 22735; Note from the Chief Secretary, 2.12.35, CZA S/25 – 22735; Note by Mr. Law, 3.12.35 and minute by same, 5.12.35, CZA S/25 – 22735. The RAF repeated its prediction of some form of rising in the spring of 1936 in its next regular intelligence report, where it added emphasis by underscoring its view that unrest would be forthcoming regardless of whatever decisions were taken by the inter-party committee on 15 January (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 6.12.35, weekly summary of intelligence, CZA S/25 – 22735).

and crowd suppression.⁵⁰ Despite the prescient forecasting by intelligence officials of coming unrest and the effort at prudent preparations, however, the attitude of intelligence analysts and high officials towards the restive quarters of Palestinian society remained remarkably diminutive. The CID judged that “there is a lack of cohesion... and a lack of capability” among the youth activists.⁵¹ Ironically it judged that if elite leaders organized their ranks, they could cause the state trouble. By the close of 1935 its reports conflated the ranks of the independent youth with the Istiqlal, which it considered to be animating their activity.⁵² The RAF did not equate independent youth with the Istiqlal as much as with Akram Zu‘aytir, whom it named as their guiding light.⁵³ By contrast, the RAF generally held Palestinian elites in lower esteem than did the CID, regarding them as fearing responsibility and mired in “procrastination and pusillanimity.”⁵⁴ Its vertical presumptions about Palestinian politics were evident, however, in its assessment that the favorable view of al-Qassam among peasants owed to the work of “agitators.”⁵⁵

As popular opposition to the status quo intensified in the Arab community, public gatherings and events multiplied and became arenas in which leading figures and forces variously challenged elites’ quietism, advocated rebellion, and fostered popular mobilization. If the new politics as analyzed by Matthews can be said to have

⁵⁰ HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.12.35, PRO – CO 733/297/1; Notes of a meeting, 2.1.36, CZA S/25 – 22735; HC to Colonial Secretary, n.d. [Jan 1936], CZA S/25 – 22735. It is unclear why the administration did not resort to preventive detention or internal exile (binding over) at this time, though it may be that it lacked any substantive proof that the activists were doing more than turning the heat up on national leaders.

⁵¹ CID, 30.10.35, periodical appreciation summary 15/35, PRO – FO 371/18957.

⁵² CID, 30.12.35 and 22.1.36, periodical appreciation summaries 19/35 and 1/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁵³ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 31.12.35, monthly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁵⁴ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 6.12.35, weekly summary of intelligence, CZA S/25 – 22735.

⁵⁵ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 22.11.35, weekly summary of intelligence, CZA S/25 – 22735.

established a novel repertoire of social action beginning with the armories controversy in 1931, by late 1935 that repertoire's mass, public character had become the predominant medium of local Arab politics.

One of the largest public meetings after the 13 November strike was the annual Jerusalem day commemoration of the British occupation on 9 December. Held at the Apollo theater in Jaffa where the historic meeting on non-cooperation had been held in early 1933, the 1935 commemoration was similarly organized by Istiqlalists, and managed to draw an audience of 2000. Speakers called for the overthrow of the British, bitterly lambasted the Arab leadership, and inveighed against the plans of Jamal al-Husayni and Edmund Rok (PAP/YC) to open a public information office in London as a misdirection of energy and focus.⁵⁶ Later in the month some 800 people, including delegations from Jenin, Tulkarm, Beisan and Nablus, Youth Congress members and scouts, visited the grave of al-Qassam in Balad al-Shaykh.⁵⁷ The customary fortieth day memorial service (*arba'in*) for al-Qassam set off a contest among groups in Haifa seeking not only to honor his memory but to harness the powerful sentiments he had stoked, and pitted Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim and the YMMA on one side against the Muslim Association and the YC on the other. The YC event was backed by the PAP and the DP and gathered a crowd of 500; the Istiqlal and YMMA event was larger, with 1000 attendees.⁵⁸ Notably, at the former event, featuring politicians and aspirants who

⁵⁶ Najib, 9.12.35, CZA S/25 – 3875; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 13.12.35, weekly summary of intelligence, CZA S/25 – 22735.

⁵⁷ CID, 22.1.36, periodical appreciation summary 1/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 31.12.35, monthly summary of intelligence (December), PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁵⁸ CID, 22.1.36, periodical appreciation summary 1/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 31.1.36, monthly summary of intelligence (January), PRO – FO 371/20030. The CID mistakenly refers to

previously refused to attend al-Qassam's funeral, speakers supported the legislative council, while at the larger memorial it was fiercely attacked, most pungently by 'Ajaj Nuwayhid, who declared that such a body represented a form of slavery.⁵⁹

Under the skillful hands of Michel Mitri and other AWS partisans, Arab labor also played a prominent part in the nationalist upsurge. In late 1935 Palestine's economy, flooded with a record 61,854 immigrants for the year, headed into recession.⁶⁰ A run on the banks tightened the credit supply and helped cause a rash of small business failures and bankruptcies, while deflation set in.⁶¹ Growing unemployment among Jews put starch back into Hebrew labor campaigning, which in turn put pressure on the already troubled position of Arab wage laborers. The issue of Arab unemployment had by this time reached a watershed, and according to Porath, its importance within Palestinian press coverage in the winter of 1935 rivaled the perennial concerns of immigration and land transfers.⁶² In response to the economic crisis, Mitri endeavored in early December to lead a march of the unemployed at Jaffa, but was blocked by the state.⁶³ Undaunted, the AWS leader convened a national conference of labor activists in Jaffa, and in February and March 1936 redeployed the Arab labor pickets first used in

the events as memorials for a famed Syrian leader of the 1920 resistance to French occupation, Ibrahim Bey Hananu.

⁵⁹ CID, 22.1.36, periodical appreciation summary 1/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; 'Ajaj Nuwayhid, *Sittun 'aman*, p. 185. Nuwayhid arrestingly declared in his eulogy: "I have found it [the legislative council] an instrument which disarms the Arab of all of his national power and makes him a slave among petty slaves [‘*abayd*] of the English, who say to him: we permit you to sit side by side with the Jews."

⁶⁰ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 39.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 141.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 6.12.35, weekly summary of intelligence, CZA S/25 – 22735; Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 236. Mitri's request to the District Commissioner stated that over 1000 men in the AWS alone were unemployed.

1934.⁶⁴ Whether mimicking the powerful and sympathy-attracting tactics of the Histadrut or simply in reaction to the dire state of his constituency, Mitri also backed clashes with police during ensuing disputes over the pickets.⁶⁵ At the same time, links between labor and the independent youth trend were tightening. In December 1935, for instance, local Jaffan youth were reported to be working with the AWS.⁶⁶

The current of popular assertiveness that emerged in late 1935 was also critically buoyed by uprisings in Egypt and Syria. The regional upheaval began in Egypt in November 1935 when students took up the Wafd's demand for reinstatement of the 1923 constitution which the palace, at British prompting, had suspended in 1930. From the opening of the 1935/36 school year students militantly and tirelessly took their demands into the streets. Consequently, after weeks of violent unrest and after the Wafd's political opponents joined in its central demand, the constitution was reinstated. At almost the same time, Syria witnessed a similar popular rising. In late 1935 leaders of the National Bloc demanded the restoration of the constitution and parliament, which had been suspended by the French in 1933. Within a month, nationalists shifted to press for the unification of Syrian principalities and total independence. A general strike was declared in January 1936 and its observance was punctuated by demonstrations and lethal confrontations with French security forces. After 50 days the French relented and extended an invitation to the Syrian nationalists to negotiate a treaty of independence, which, although it was later refused ratification by the French parliament, was seen in

⁶⁴ See Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 236-37.

⁶⁵ Glazer, "Propaganda," p. 154.

⁶⁶ CID, 30.12.35, periodical appreciation summary 19/35, PRO – FO 371/20018.

Syria and the region as a glowing vindication of steely Arab nationalist activism and leadership.⁶⁷

Faced with the regional anti-colonial upsurge and apprehension in Palestine over the potential for insurrection, the British authorities finally advanced a proposal to create a legislative council. The parameters of the council's constitution and purview bore great similarity to the 1923 council that the AE had rejected.⁶⁸ Despite the proposed council's clear limitations and the ongoing popular ferment, the British initiative fell on fertile soil. The parties debated responses to it for weeks, while notables from a number of districts warmed to it, though mindful of popular sentiment they often concealed their approval from public scrutiny.⁶⁹

Nonplussed, Nablus activists organized a display of public solidarity with the Syrian strike. In late January 1936 a host of Istiqlalists and their allies convened a 600-person meeting which resolved on calling a general strike in Palestine. This time the

⁶⁷ Haggai Erlich, "British Internal Security and Egyptian Youth" in Michael J. Cohen and Martin Kolinsky, eds., *Britain and the Middle East in the 1930s: Security Problems, 1935-39* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 107-08; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 160. Philip Khoury offers the most extensive account of the events in Syria during the strike and the period immediately preceding and following it: *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987), p. 397-481.

⁶⁸ Terms of the proposal are summarized in the Peel Commission report, p. 90. Only 12 of its 28 members would be elected, and the apportionment of seats was to conform to a sectarian division of representation. The colonial administration would retain control of immigration and the High Commissioner would still be empowered to make legislation (ordinances) irrespective of the legislative council, which was also forbidden from challenging the validity of the Mandate. The best official spin that the High Commissioner managed to muster for the proposal was to stress that it had a "large unofficial majority" (Statement to Arab leaders, n.d. [transmitted 29.1.36], enclosure to: HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.2.36, PRO – CO 733/297/1). For general discussions of the legislative council issue, see: Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 179-97; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*.

⁶⁹ DC-Jerusalem, monthly report (extract) and DC-Southern, same, n.d. [January or February 1936], CZA S/25 – 22735; DC-Northern to Chief Secretary, 16.2.36, and sub-enclosure on Northern politicians' opinions, as enclosure IV (and sub-enclosure) to: HC to Colonial Secretary, 9.3.36, PRO – CO 733/297/1. Appreciations of favorable public as well as elite attitudes towards the council appear in the above cited communication of the DC-Northern to Chief Secretary, and RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 31.1.36, monthly summary of intelligence (January), PRO – FO 371-20030.

inter-party committee, again under fire for its tepid attitude, spared itself further embarrassment and endorsed the strike. Nablus activists announced 4 February as the date.⁷⁰ In Jerusalem it took the forces dispatched by the strike committee only 10 minutes to close the Arab regions of the Old City down, and enforcers also sought to close down Jewish areas as well, which precipitated clashes with the police.⁷¹ In Haifa, children as young as 7-10 years of age were reported patrolling commercial areas and compelling shop closures.⁷² A demonstration 1000-strong was held at Qalqilya, and school boys in Haifa and Jerusalem attempted to do the same.⁷³ At Nablus youth stoned the police station and the post office.⁷⁴

As the adulation concerning the mass mobilizations in Egypt and Syria grew, youth in various parts of Palestine convoked a raft of strident meetings. The idea of a prolonged general strike on the Syrian model was under discussion in youth circles by mid-February, if not before.⁷⁵ In early March, youth assembled in Haifa at the home of Dr. Rushdi Tamimi, a local YC leader, decided to call a meeting of their peers throughout Palestine at which a Syrian-style program of action would be organized.⁷⁶ Similar mobilizing meetings, driven by youth from various political backgrounds,

⁷⁰ CID, 18.2.36, periodical appreciation summary 2/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁷¹ Strike intelligence, 4.2.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 26.2.36, monthly summary of intelligence (February), PRO –FO 371/20030.

⁷⁴ CID, 18.2.36, periodical appreciation summary 2/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁷⁵ Arab Bureau information, 16.2.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

⁷⁶ Haifa, 6.3.36, HA 8/35. It is unclear what follow-up transpired and details of the meeting are lacking in the report. For interesting background on Dr. Rushdi, see: Arab Bureau information, 10.2.35, p. 2, CZA S/25 – 22224.

multiplied over the weeks.⁷⁷ At some, the tenor was extremely militant, such as at one Haifan youth meeting in February at which participants advocated the assassination of the High Commissioner.⁷⁸ Numerous reports concerning the organization of guerilla bands and/or launching a ‘terror’ campaign were also collected by Zionist intelligence at the time.⁷⁹

The surge in youth activity renewed the ongoing political competition over horizontal constituencies. In mid-February the PAP debuted its youth wing, the *Futuwwah*, in Jerusalem to a lackluster turnout.⁸⁰ Although the meeting became infamous for Jamal al-Husayni’s remarks lauding Hitler’s accomplishments (see chapter 3), multiple sources also clarify that the mobilization in Egypt inspired *majlisi* plans for youth in Palestine.⁸¹ Jamal Effendi strove in particular to draw away support from Akram Zu‘aytir, whose national stature greatly outmatched his years.⁸² Nevertheless, the *Futuwwah* did not grow into the leading edge of the youth trend, while *majlisi* aspirations to unseat Ya‘qub al-Ghusayn from the presidency of the YC also came to

⁷⁷ For example, Jewish arms smuggling and the perceived inaction of youth were discussed at a meeting attended by ‘Atif Nurallah in Haifa in early February (Haifa report, 12.2.36, HA 8/35). At Rawdat al-Ma‘arif school, controlled by the SMC, students sought the same month to create an organization based on student groups in Egypt (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 26.2.36, monthly summary of intelligence (February), PRO –FO 371/20030). Haifan youth traveled to Jaffa to meet with their peers, including Akram Zu‘aytir and others from Nablus in mid-March (Report, 18.3.36, HA 8/35).

⁷⁸ Haifa, 6.3.36, Top secret, HA 8/35.

⁷⁹ E.g. Conversation w/ Yusuf Francis [of *al-Liwa*], 3.3.36, CZA S/25 – 22231; Arab Bureau information, 13.3.36, CZA S/25 – 22193; Report, 17.3.36, HA 8/35; Arab Bureau information, March survey, 2.4.36, p. 4, CZA J/1 – 4139.

⁸⁰ CID, 18.2.36, periodical appreciation summary 2/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 26.2.36, monthly summary of intelligence (February), PRO –FO 371/20030.

⁸¹ CID, 18.2.36, periodical appreciation summary 2/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; Conversation w/ Yusuf Francis, 3.3.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

⁸² Arab Bureau information, 23.2.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

naught.⁸³ Leading activists of the Istiqlal, by contrast, aimed to forge closer ties with Arab labor, and especially the AWS. To this end, Hamdi al-Husayni and Akram Zu‘aytir attended a gathering of top labor leaders and unionists in Haifa on 10 April.⁸⁴

Presented with a simmering Arab public, the government’s diplomatic offensive nonetheless quickly unraveled.⁸⁵ After months of Zionist opposition to the legislative council, both houses of British Parliament roundly rejected the government’s proposal in February and March 1936.⁸⁶ Even after this rebuff the leaders of the PAP, the DP, and the YC continued to demand the council’s establishment.⁸⁷ Sensing an opportunity to recoup from the embarrassing about-face delivered to his scheme by the parliament, on 2 April HC Wauchope invited the inter-party representatives to parleys in London. Aloof and solipsistic, the parties and the YC accepted the offer, but quickly fell to bickering over the delegation’s composition.

When the lethal inter-communal violence that touched off the revolt began in mid-April, the members of the inter-party committee were at first slow to grasp their significance and remained intent on their diplomatic voyage. As late as 19 April, while

⁸³ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 31.3.36, monthly summary of intelligence (March), PRO – FO 371/20030; Arab Bureau information, 19.2.36 and 13.3.36, CZA S/25 – 22231. Ya‘qub Effendi was reported to be embattled within the organization after he began to refrain from expending his personal funds on the organization and its newspaper, *al-Kifah* (CID, 3.3.36, periodical appreciation summary 3/36, PRO – FO 371/20018).

⁸⁴ Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 238. Matthews reads the Istiqlalists’ move towards labor as both reflective of workers’ increased militancy and as a means through which to help avert the return to barren diplomacy (*Confronting an Empire*, p. 249).

⁸⁵ It is noteworthy that the expectation of widespread unrest repeatedly noted in late 1935 by the RAF in particular is largely absent from its reports in the first months of 1936, though it continued to follow the mobilization of youth, among other topics. See various reports at PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁸⁶ Peel Commission report, p. 91-92. The news that Winston Churchill and Leopold Amery, who as cabinet ministers had supported the first legislative council scheme in the early 1920s, had participated in the proceedings caused much chagrin (CID, 1.4.36, periodical appreciation summary 7/36, PRO – FO 371/20018).

⁸⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 31.3.36, monthly summary of intelligence (March), PRO – FO 371/20030.

the border neighborhoods of Jaffa and Tel Aviv raged with street battles, the Grand Mufti, al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, assured the High Commissioner that the delegation would depart as planned and that no disorder was in the offing.⁸⁸ Amidst the prospect of another delegation whose fate already appeared dashed by the British Parliament, Akram Zu‘aytir evinced his disgust at the politicians’ lack of vision, writing in his diaries that: “The national movement must be liberated from the parties and their leaders.”⁸⁹ In many ways, the upheaval that followed put Zu‘aytir’s proposition to the test, offering youth and other militant forces unprecedented influence to reshape the national struggle and redefine its leadership.

The inception of the general strike

The immediate events which precipitated the Arab general strike of 1936 are well-enough known, if not always properly situated vis-à-vis the ongoing contest over the trajectory and leadership of the independence movement. On 15 April shaykh Farhan al-Sa‘di, a septugenarian *Qassami* leader from Mazar village in the Jenin subdistrict, robbed a number of cars carrying both Arabs and Jews on the Tulkarm-Nablus road with his men. In the process they deliberately killed a Jew and mortally injured another. The next night two Arabs near Kfar Saba were killed in a reprisal attack. Although its motivation was not immediately transparent, the *Qassami* chronicler Subhi Yasin wrote that Farhan’s initial assault was designed to ignite a rebellion and to push the Arab politicians into supporting it. On 17 April, Akram

⁸⁸ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 370.

⁸⁹ *Yawmiyat*, p. 55, entry for 17 April 1936.

Zu'aytir received a letter with a coded signature that declared: "We are fulfilling our duty for God. We've begun and we will be victorious. We have urgent need of ammunition. We took the money for this purpose. We are depending on you." Zu'aytir guessed that the missive could only have come from shaykh Farhan.⁹⁰

The tit-for-tat killings were followed by a series of Jewish provocations and attacks on Arabs. The funeral on 17 April at Tel Aviv of one of the Jews killed by Shaykh Farhan's men turned into an uproarious procession that was, according to the Deputy Inspector General of Police, commandeered by ardent young Revisionists.⁹¹ They tried to make their way to Jaffa to exact vengeance on the Palestinian public, but were repelled by the police and instead set upon Arab vegetable vendors working in Tel Aviv.⁹² The following day again witnessed a number of assaults on Arabs in Tel Aviv, but on 19 April, following the dissemination of rumors that Jews had massacred Arabs, Jaffa and Tel Aviv erupted in widespread, lethal inter-communal brawls. The Jaffan border neighborhoods of Manshiya and Saknat Abu Kabir and adjacent Jewish neighborhoods in Tel Aviv were largely evacuated during the day as fighting raged and the police struggled to regain control.⁹³ Altercations on the 19th and 20th, including with the police, claimed 16 Jewish and six Arab lives and injured over 70 people on each

⁹⁰ Subhi Yasin, *al-Thawra*, p. 30; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 55-56. The Jewish reprisal attack was carried out by members of *Etzel* (*Irgun Tsvai Le'umi*, or National Military Organization), the armed wing of the Revisionist Zionist movement, also known as *Haganah Beth* (Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 251).

⁹¹ Report on the occurrence in Tel Aviv, DIG Foley, 18.4.36, enclosure to: HC to Col Sec, 26.4.36, PRO – CO 733/310/1.

⁹² *Ibid.*; HC to Colonial Secretary, 19.4.36, #123, PRO – FO 371/20032; al-Sifri, *Filastin al- 'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 10-11.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

side.⁹⁴ Tel Aviv's mayor, Meir Dizengoff, stoked tensions further by delivering an address in the aftermath of the riots in which he referred to the Palestinians *en masse* as "a criminal, monstrous community."⁹⁵

News of the violence spread quickly and spawned numerous rumors, which further propelled Arab unrest and mobilization. In Haifa on 20 April, for instance, a rumor alleged that Zionists had killed 75 Arabs in Jaffa and attacked the mosque of 'Umar.⁹⁶ In Jaffa the following day a rumor circulated that al-Hajj Amin's brother and a member of the Abu Kishk clan had been murdered by Jews.⁹⁷ On 25 April word spread among the Bedouin regions in the south that 40 Arabs had been killed.⁹⁸ As Akram Zu'aytir noted, the country was rife with alarmist whisperings and official denials did little to dampen the perturbed atmosphere.⁹⁹

Recognizing that the disquiet presented them with the opportunity they had been seeking, the young radicals and their allies seized the initiative. Almost simultaneously meetings of key youth activists and local politicians at Nablus and Jaffa on 19 and 20 April, respectively, issued calls for a general strike.¹⁰⁰ The Nablus cohort brought

⁹⁴ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 29.4.36, monthly summary of intelligence (April), PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁹⁵ Dizengoff's slur elicited a strong response from Nablus's mayor, Sulayman 'Abd al-Razzaq Bey Tuqan, in which he charged that the Zionist movement sought the expulsion of the Arab population and thus could not be, as Dizengoff claimed, peace-loving. He added that the Zionists hid behind the British, without whom the question of Zionism would have long since been easily dispatched (al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 19-22).

⁹⁶ "From telephone conversations," 20.4.36, HA 8/35.

⁹⁷ Digest, p. 39, 21.4.36, 21:30, HA 8/36.

⁹⁸ HC to Colonial Secretary, 25.4.36, #148, PRO – CO 733/310/1.

⁹⁹ *Yawmiyat*, p. 56.

¹⁰⁰ There is some confusion about the general strike's point of origin, namely whether it was first called in Nablus or Jaffa. The view that it began in Jaffa is mistaken, though repeated in numerous sources: RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 29.4.36, monthly summary of intelligence (April), PRO – FO 371/20030; Report by the AOC (untitled), enclosure to: AOC to Air Secretary, 15.10.36, p. 36, PRO – CO 733/317/1 [hereafter: Report by the AOC (untitled)]; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 16; Darwaza, *Hawla al-*

together a broad spectrum of political persuasions, including Istiqlalists, representatives from the DP, the PAP, and the National Bloc. Alongside Akram Zu‘aytir and Mamduh al-Sukhn were Mayor Sulayman Bey Tuqan and other Nabulsi *mu‘arada* personages, such as the wealthy merchants Ahmad al-Shak‘a and Tahir al-Misri.¹⁰¹ At Jaffa, politicians and activists representing an equally broad range of Arab opinion met at the Youth Congress offices, and four of the nine signatories to the strike call represented youth.¹⁰² The decision to strike was also taken at Jerusalem on the 20th by an assembly of youth meeting at the city’s AWS chapter, led by ‘Arif al-Ja‘uni, a young *majlisi* leader and close associate of the mufti.¹⁰³

Zu‘aytir came to the Nablus meeting prepared with a list of principles of unity and a rough plan of action. The program he put forward proclaimed that: 1) the political parties’ interests could not be allowed to intrude on or impede the national struggle; 2) opposition to the British took strategic precedence (over the issue of Zionism); 3) the national movement’s first goal was to halt immigration; and 4) a general strike on the Syrian model would be declared until, at the very least, that goal was attained. The local committee established at the meeting was charged with urging the formation of parallel bodies, to be known as national committees, throughout the country. These committees would be central agencies for the organization of the revolt and would be endowed with

haraka, p. 122; al-Shuqayri, *Arba‘un ‘aman*, p. 151; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 163; Nuwayhid, *Sittun ‘aman*, p. 190.

¹⁰¹ Events of the national meeting at Nablus, 19.4.36, in: *Watha‘iq al-haraka*, p. 409-10.

¹⁰² Communiqué of the people of Jaffa announcing a general strike, 20.4.36, in *Watha‘iq al-muqawama*, p. 374-75. Hamdi al-Nabulsi (YC), Fakhri Nashashibi (DP), Ibrahim al-Shanti (Istiqlal), Sa‘id al-Khalil (YC) all represented youth. The other signatories were former mayor of Jaffa ‘Umar al-Bitar, Hajj Yusuf ‘Ashur, Raghib Abu Sa‘ud al-Dajani, Alfred Rok (PAP), and Mahmud Abu Khadra. The signatories are indicated in al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 18-19.

¹⁰³ Arab Bureau information, 20.4.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

wide authority in their localities, including the power to levy monies from the public and to conscript individuals for the execution of various tasks. This sweeping program was accepted at Nablus and, in a testament to the revolutionary fervor and orientation prevailing among youth and other popular social forces, strike committees formed on a similar cross-factional basis in the major population centers within days, and thenceforth spread to rural regions.¹⁰⁴

As the first NCs were forming the popular upsurge rippled throughout Palestine. Many laborers and tradesmen ceased work. The Jaffa boatmen were early stalwarts and their resolve helped galvanize the strike and give it its first symbolic victory with the closure of the port.¹⁰⁵ Schools and shops began to close in Nablus, Tulkarm, Jenin, and Haifa on 20 April, in some cases before local strike calls had been issued.¹⁰⁶ Almost overnight, by 22 April, the strike had spread throughout the Arab community, with the notable exceptions of the Haifa port, government employees, and the SMC.¹⁰⁷

In urban centers the strike occasioned a wave of stormy processions and protests which became sites for confrontation with state authorities. Demonstrations were held in the triangle area (Nablus, Tulkarm, Jenin) on the 21st, and in Beisan on the 21st and 22nd

¹⁰⁴ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 61-62; Events of the national meeting at Nablus, 19.4.36, in: *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 409-10; Formation of national committees in the regions of Palestine in response to the call from Nablus, telegrams, 21-23.4.36, in: *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 416-17. Yasin perhaps exaggerates somewhat, given the urban complexion of the strike’s early organizational apparatus, when he writes that within five days the national committees controlled the country (*al-Thawra*, p. 31).

¹⁰⁵ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 18-19.

¹⁰⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 20.4.36, #132, PRO – CO 733/310/1. At Haifa, for instance, stores were reported by Haganah intelligence to be closed on the 20th, though the local NC didn’t issue its call to strike until the following day (Haifa report, 20.4.36, HA 8/35; Resolution of the national organizations in Haifa announcing a general strike, 21.4.36, in *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p 376-77).

¹⁰⁷ *Report to the League of Nations*, 1936, p. 22.

outside the police station.¹⁰⁸ In a departure from dominant patriarchal mores, the protest at Jenin was led by women.¹⁰⁹ In Hebron on 22 April the amassing of crowds caused the British to evacuate the city's Jewish population the following day, in fear of a repeat of the 1929 slaughter there.¹¹⁰ Protests continued on 24 April in the triangle and Beisan and spread to Gaza, while the following day at Tulkarm a demonstration estimated by the RAF at 2-3000 strong was forcibly dispersed.¹¹¹ Just over a week after the outbreak at Jaffa and Tel Aviv, the police began firing on and killing Palestinian protesters. The first such incident occurred at Nazareth on 28 April, where a crowd of 1500-3000 stoned the police, who fired back, killing one Arab.¹¹² Only days later, at Haifa on 1 May, similar events occurred, with the police killing one at a protest after being stoned.¹¹³

Many narratives, including the official British accounts, contend that the strike was primarily an urban affair, but rural enthusiasm and participation were evident in the proliferation of arson and a recrudescence of agrarian crime.¹¹⁴ What the British sometimes referred to as "incendiarism" appears to have begun with Jews setting fire to

¹⁰⁸ HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.4.36, #133, PRO – CO 733/310/1; Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 18, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

¹⁰⁹ Arab Bureau information, 21.4.36, 4 pm, CZA S/25 – 22231. As noted below, women's participation in the burgeoning rebellion subsequently intensified.

¹¹⁰ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 16, PRO – CO 733/317/1. Zionist intelligence reported that Hebron notables had requested the evacuation in order to protect the city's remaining Jews (Arab Bureau information, 22.4.36, 6:45pm, CZA S/25 – 22193).

¹¹¹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.4.36, #144, PRO – CO 733/310/1; Official communiqué 18/36, 24.4.36, ISA (2) 566-6m; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 29.4.36, monthly summary of intelligence (April), PRO – FO 371/20030.

¹¹² RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 29.4.36, monthly summary of intelligence (April), PRO – FO 371/20030; Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 24, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

¹¹³ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 24, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

¹¹⁴ E.g. Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 18, PRO – CO 733/317/1. Reflecting the dominant colonial conception of the peasantry as apolitical, the AOC goes on right after describing the first wave of rural arsons to claim that "there was no immediate repercussion in the country districts or reaction by the fellaheen" to the start of the strike.

parts of Manshiya and Saknat Abu Kabir in Jaffa on 20 April.¹¹⁵ In subsequent days the border neighborhoods in Jaffa and Tel Aviv were set alight.¹¹⁶ In Haifa two major blazes targeted state infrastructure (railroad depots) and Jewish industry (a timber yard), the latter doing considerable damage, and in Acre the railroad was set afire.¹¹⁷ The rash of arsons was more intense in the countryside. In the eastern Marj Ibn ‘Amir crops were “fired” at ‘Ein Harod and Beit Alfa near Beisan.¹¹⁸ Further blazes were soon lit at Tel Yosef (Beisan subdistrict) and Tel Adashim (Nazareth subdistrict), both also in the *marj*.¹¹⁹ To the south, crops and the first JNF forest were set alight at Ben Shemen, near Ramle on 23 April, as were citrus sheds at Hadera on the 30th.¹²⁰ On 30 April the Jewish Agency complained to the administration of fires and tree destruction “night after night” in the Jezreel valley (the *marj*), and that the existing police force was too small to suppress the wave of agrarian crime.¹²¹ Cognizant of the problem, the state had already deployed the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force in the Marj Ibn ‘Amir, “but no contact with the saboteurs was gained.”¹²²

Though public demonstrations and attacks on property were prevalent early manifestations of the strike, the incipient uprising was also tinged with anti-colonial violence. Amid the inter-communal fighting at Jaffa on 19 April Arabs attempted to kill

¹¹⁵ HC to Colonial Secretary, 20.4.36, #128, PRO – CO 733/310/1; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 13.

¹¹⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.4.36, #133, PRO – CO 733/310/1.

¹¹⁷ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 16, PRO – CO 733/317/1; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 29.4.36, monthly summary of intelligence (April), PRO – FO 371/20030; HC to Colonial Secretary, 25.4.36, #146, PRO – CO 733/310/1. The timber lot fire was estimated to have destroyed £4500 worth of property.

¹¹⁸ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 18, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

¹¹⁹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 26.4.36 and 27.4.36, #151 and 152, PRO – CO 733/310/1.

¹²⁰ HC to Colonial Secretary, 23.4.36 and 30.4.36, #139 and 163, PRO – CO 733/310/1.

¹²¹ JA to Chief Secretary, 30.4.36, PRO – CO 733/310/2.

¹²² Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 18, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

the head of local police intelligence, officer Riggs, who had helped crush the 1929 boycott campaign. Riggs fended off his would-be assassins, killing two of them.¹²³ On the 21st, some 1000 Arabs from around Salameh, a suburb of Jaffa, proceeded towards the nearby colony of Hatiqva in the evening, but were repelled by police using firearms.¹²⁴ In perhaps the first of what would become very regular occurrences, the settlement of Ramat Hakovesh, in the citrus country northeast of Tel Aviv, was sniped at on 24 April.¹²⁵ Similarly, the previous day a convoy of cars and lorries under police escort was shot at in Jenin.¹²⁶ In the Tiberias subdistrict, Bedouin assaulted members of Migdal colony on 28 April, stabbing one, and military and police were subsequently deployed to the area.¹²⁷

While shaykh Farhan's men and the successive general strike calls produced a climate of intense ferment and nascent rebellion, key elite leaders, especially al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and Raghib al-Nashashibi, equivocated. After courting by backers of the strike, particularly the Istiqlal and the PAP,¹²⁸ on 22 April the inter-party coalition issued a statement to the public in which it announced the indefinite postponement of the

¹²³ Digest, p. 9, 19.4.36, 1:20 [13:20], HA 8/36.

¹²⁴ HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.4.36, #133, PRO – CO 733/310/1; Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 16, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

¹²⁵ Official communiqué 17/36, 24.4.36, ISA (2) 566-6m. The settlement's name is given as Hakhoreh, which was subsequently corrected in the state's next communiqué. Similar attacks on Kfar Yavitz and Tell Litvinski followed on 26 and 28 April respectively (HC to Colonial Secretary, 26.4.36 and 28.4.36, #151 and 154, PRO – CO 733/310/1).

¹²⁶ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 16-17, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

¹²⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 28.4.36, #157, PRO – CO 733/310/1; Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 25, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

¹²⁸ 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi and Ahmad Hilmi 'Abd al-Baqi, two of the Istiqlal's oldest, most respected leaders, approached the mufti on 20 April, but the latter declined to take a position (Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 371). The same day Jamal al-Husayni promoted a Syrian-style strike with Raghib Bey, who stalled by seeking an inter-party meeting (Arab Bureau information, 20.4.36, 4pm, CZA S/25 – 22193).

delegation and support for the strike.¹²⁹ Echoing resolutions passed by the Nablus NC two days earlier, it stipulated exemptions from striking for flour mills, bakeries, cafés, clinics, dispensaries, and transportation.¹³⁰ In language reminiscent of the AE, the parties emphasized that they wished the public to carry on with “patience, quietness, and determination,” signaling a clear preference for pacific means of struggle.

Given the lack of clarity in most accounts on the formation of the AHC, it is worth underscoring that the established political leadership was pushed into more militant action from below.¹³¹ Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, in his memoirs, describes the initiative for the AHC as coming from the Haifa NC, which sent a delegation to Jerusalem in order to forge a national coordinating body for the strike.¹³² Jaffa and other locales also dispatched representatives for the same purpose.¹³³ Haifan delegates first proposed holding a national congress or a convention of the NCs in order to elect a coordinating committee, but this was not to the liking of the Jerusalemite politicians.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Resolution of the coalition of Arab parties (English translation), 22.4.36, PRO – CO 733/310/1. This was despite the fact that Raghib Bey and Ya‘qub al-Ghusayn still favored the delegation (Arab Bureau information, 21.4.36, 4pm, CZA S/25 – 22231) and following separate promises given to the High Commissioner on 21 April by the inter-party committee and the mufti to oppose “disorder” (HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.4.36, #134, PRO – CO 733/310/1).

¹³⁰ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 65. The Nablus NC was more specific in its instructions for exemptions from striking. For instance, coffee houses were only to open at night so that people could catch up on news and exchange information. Cars and carriages were to obtain permits from the strike committee to operate. Pharmacies were to rotate closing and opening so that only one would be available every 24 hours.

¹³¹ Though it has often been overlooked, numerous accounts make this point: Yasin, *al-Thawra*, p. 31; Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 123; Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 375; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 331, 336; Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 34; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 253. As Yasin stresses, neither the parties, nor the SMC, can be credited with initiating the strike.

¹³² *Al-Difa‘ ‘an Haifa*, p. 161. Al-Hajj Ibrahim names the delegation as comprised of Muhammad ‘Ali Tamimi, Hana ‘Asfur, Mu‘in al-Madi, and himself. Porath gives a somewhat different list which is geographically inaccurate, including Ahmad al-Shuqayri (from Acre), for instance (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 164), while al-Hut confirms al-Hajj Ibrahim’s account (*al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 336).

¹³³ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 164-65.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

As consultations continued, the mufti, in keeping with a pledge given to the High Commissioner, made sure that prayers on the first Friday of the strike (24 April) were mild in tone.¹³⁵ This brought a staunch rebuke from *Filastin* and stirred youth activists' outrage.¹³⁶ The following day, 25 April, when party representatives met to consider founding a supervisory body, their venue was overrun by some 300 youth and students who castigated the leaders' quiescence and passivity.¹³⁷ Amid the rancor and under obvious pressure, the attendees agreed to form the AHC and issued a statement the same day reaffirming the general strike and pledging to secure its stated aims.¹³⁸

The AHC was composed of 10 men representing the political parties, the Youth Congress, and Christian representatives. Istiqlal figures helped bring al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, who remained reluctant, onboard as the chair, and themselves captured the two operational posts on the committee, with 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi becoming its secretary and Ahmad Hilmi Pasha its treasurer.¹³⁹ The smaller parties and the YC were each represented by their parties' leaders: Husayn al-Khalidi for the Reform Party, 'Abd al-Latif Salah for the National Bloc, and Ya'qub al-Ghusayn for the YC. The PAP and the DP were each allotted two seats, one of which was held by a Christian representative: Jamal al-Husayni and Alfred Rok (Greek Catholic) for the PAP and Raghib al-Nashashibi and Ya'qub al-Farraj (Greek Orthodox) for the DP.

¹³⁵ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 372-74.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 373-74. See also: Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 165.

¹³⁷ Arab Bureau information, 25.4.36, 12:30am [on the 26th], CZA S/25 – 22231; Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 374. Abu Gharbiyya, who was at the scene, relates that part of the furor owed to youth demands that Husayn Fakhri al-Khalidi, mayor of Jerusalem, respond publicly to Dizengoff's speech, which he did, though only after the mufti first tried, without effect, to assuage the crowd (*Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 53-54, 56).

¹³⁸ Reproduced in al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 27.

¹³⁹ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 375; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 336.

As Matthews has suggested, the AHC was conflicted from the start. On one hand it was clearly driven by the desire of party leaders to maintain their influence and standing, and to take back some semblance of control over quickly moving events. Yet to do so they had to identify with a bubbling popular revolt for which they were not eager to take responsibility.¹⁴⁰ The result was an awkward embrace. For the duration of the strike, the conservative impulses of many of the AHC's members could be seen in the course it largely attempted to steer between the Arab public and the Mandatory authorities, at once distancing itself from the militancy of the former while trying to convince the latter of the impossibility of perpetually denying fundamental and longstanding Arab political demands. At the same time, just as the elite politicians did not, for the most part, take up the banner of revolt with alacrity, neither did they overcome their own internal fissures, which quickly reemerged, reinserting factionalism back into the center of national politics. For these reasons, stalwarts like Akram Zu'aytir took a decidedly unromantic view of the AHC, declaring to the mufti on 27 April that "we are soldiers watching over [*nataraqqab*] the position of the leadership."¹⁴¹ As will be explored below, the NCs looked to the AHC to fulfill certain functions as the movement's coordinating body and highest representative, but otherwise acted with great autonomy, lending the strike a decentralized character. The advent of the AHC was thus the crowning development of the strike's first week, not because the national

¹⁴⁰ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 254. Swedenburg also makes the point that the AHC was an attempt by elites to recoup their position ("The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry," p. 489).

¹⁴¹ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 77.

politicians retook their place at the head of the national movement, but because they were compelled to adhere to the popular impulse embodied in the strike.

Organizing the rebellion: the national and popular committees

One of the most distinctive aspects of the general strike was its proliferation of popular committees and bodies. Unlike earlier protests and rebellions, the strike stimulated the growth of an expanding, popular grassroots infrastructure. This infrastructure was integral to the strike's organization and sustenance, and to its success as a national uprising. Alongside the national committees arose committees for strike supervision, medical relief, financial support, legal services, and the boycott of Jewish and British goods, along with arbitration and conflict resolution bodies and a host of women's and students' groups. Different regions developed their own specific organs. In Nablus, for instance, a committee on banking and financial affairs was formed to help prevent bankruptcy, and female students established their own body, the first act of which was to organize a demonstration.¹⁴² Like the national committees, these varied bodies appeared with great rapidity. For example, financial relief committees, which distributed aid to needy and impacted families and were vital to maintaining popular support for the revolt, were established in 13 locations, including the central relief committee in Jerusalem, by May.¹⁴³

The plethora of management and directive bodies which sprung up built on preexisting youth, labor, and women's organizations and incorporated their members

¹⁴² Ibid. p. 72, 81.

¹⁴³ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 340.

into new formations or conferred upon them new tasks and functions. In Jaffa the medical relief committee that, among other duties, acted to care for or transport the injured to hospitals, was composed of an interfaith group of scouts from three troops: the Islamic Rovers, the Orthodox Youth Club scouts, and the Islamic Sports Club scouts.¹⁴⁴ Women's committees appeared in "regions of the country that had seen little previous organized activity among women" and played important roles in fundraising for the rebellion, as well as in advancing and even leading numerous demonstrations.¹⁴⁵ In a familiar vein, the Sports Union Club scouts in Nablus took on strike supervision and enforcement, as similar groups of scouts, students, and youth did elsewhere.¹⁴⁶

The strike inspired a far-reaching spirit of voluntarism and self-sacrifice which appealed not only to horizontal social constituencies, but to broad segments of the middle classes and members of the liberal professions who were often eager to contribute their services. Doctors offered to treat those with recommendations (*awraq tawsiyya*) from the NCs free of charge. Lawyers at a conference in Jaffa took a motion not to appear before court except in relation to cases arising from the strike or intended to advance its national demands. Car drivers volunteered complementary services for medical purposes and for the distribution of Arabic newspapers.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ Fleishmann, *The Nation and Its "New" Women*, p. 129; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 173; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 342. Quote from Fleischmann.

¹⁴⁶ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p.71. As will be returned to below, supervision of the strike was soon deemed to require the creation of a revolutionary court within the local NC to adjudicate strike-related matters (such as charges of trading with Jews, for instance), and thus was not left solely in the hands of scouts.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 18, 29. In the case of the drivers, who could be mistaken for breaking the strike, their public functions were certified by the drivers' committee in notices affixed to the cars that explained their activities.

Amid the profusion of organizations and activism, the NCs acted as nerve centers for the movement, responsible for managing affairs in each locality and coordinating action with the AHC and other areas. In line with previous scholars' suppositions, Shahada Musa argues that the NCs were dominated by youth from elite and professional backgrounds.¹⁴⁸ This appears to be a reasonable estimation, though no complete catalogue of the various memberships, which changed over time, exists.¹⁴⁹ Some degree of confirmation about their composition is available from data on several NCs. Youth activists predominated in the first NC at Nablus, clinching four of six seats.¹⁵⁰ At Tulkarm notables and large landowners organized themselves to form the local medical relief committee.¹⁵¹ Khalil al-Khuri, an NC member and JA informant, noted that the notables' effort was intended to mend the strained relations caused by their distance from the strike, indicating that the NC was in younger and more radical hands.¹⁵² In Safad at least 13 persons served on the NC over the duration of the strike.¹⁵³ Of these at

¹⁴⁸ *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 92, 170. As noted above, Lesch intimated that middle class and merchant hands drove the strike, though she doesn't delve into the NCs very closely (*Arab Politics*, p. 217). Al-Hut writes that the NCs were staffed by "known political notables and new notables" (*al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 334). Mattar sees the NCs as dominated by "young radicals" (*The Mufti*, p. 71) while Seikaly considers that the latter were the prevailing influence in Haifa, if not directly within the NC (*Haifa*, p. 247).

¹⁴⁹ Existing archival lists of NC memberships are based on the attendees of the 7 May congress (e.g. List of NC memberships, enclosure to: AHC to HC, 8.5.36, ISA (2) 5076-4m; The strike committees, HA 8/41), treated below. The committees' memberships changed as members were interned or exiled, beginning in late May. They were also larger than their deputations to the convention. Tulkarm, for instance, was represented by five men on 7 May, but its full committee numbered 16 at the end of the month (Najib, 31.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875).

¹⁵⁰ The committee's original members, according to Akram Zu'aytir's personal papers, were 'Abd al-Latif Salah (a recent player in the youth field), Wasif Kamal, Hikmat al-Masri, and Zu'aytir along with two notables, Ahmad al-Shak'a and Farid al-'Anabtawi (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 334).

¹⁵¹ Najib, 14.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

¹⁵² Ibid. Of the five representatives from the town at the 7 May convention, three are identifiable youth activists

¹⁵³ 'Abbasi, *Safad fi 'ahd al-intidab*, p. 218. 'Abbasi counted 12 persons, however, the mufti of Safad, unnoted in his tally, is also listed on the roster of representatives at the 7 May congress of NCs, bringing the total to 13 (List of NC memberships, enclosure to: AHC to HC, 8.5.36, ISA (2) 5076-4m).

least six were youth activists, five of whom were professionals (three lawyers, a journalist and a doctor).¹⁵⁴ ‘Abbasi concludes that the strong role of youth within the committee illustrated “the transfer of leadership and initiative to sons of the new generation” who had previously taken part in the city’s youth organizing.¹⁵⁵

While youth appear to have been a leading influence, committee compositions did vary from place to place. A Shai report from mid-July noted four lightermen were NC members at Jaffa, illustrating the power of labor within the city.¹⁵⁶ Other committees, such as that at Haifa, appear to have been dominated by merchants, whose inclusion was intended to broaden the strike’s appeal beyond its base among popular forces.¹⁵⁷ Yet even in this case, the entrepreneurs of Haifa “were compelled by the militancy of the younger generation and the lower strata to go along with the hardline policy.”¹⁵⁸ From this admittedly incomplete survey, and in light of the NCs’ stalwart attitudes, it seems safe to conclude that youth activists were a prominent element within many of the NCs while otherwise shaping the environment in which they operated.

Beneath the NCs, the network of popular committees and sub-bodies that formed during the strike facilitated the expansion of the political field and erected a broad framework for mass-based political activity. As al-Hut points out, the multiplication of committees and support structures “distribut[ed] work and responsibility among

¹⁵⁴ ‘Abbassi, *Safad fi ‘ahd al-intidab*, p. 209, 218. As suggested here, our knowledge of NC memberships is quite incomplete, and ‘Abbasi’s diligent work in this respect all the more valuable for the insight it sheds.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Report, 12.7.36, HA 8/39. The four are Ihsan al-Jahir, Hamuda al-Kashif, Hajj Sa‘id al-Madhun, and Hassan Abu Shulayh, the head of the lightermen. Only the latter two are listed as attendees to the 7 May congress, along with 11 other representatives, at least four of whom represented youth (List of NC memberships, enclosure to: AHC to HC, 8.5.36, ISA (2) 5076-4m).

¹⁵⁷ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 247.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

numerous committees in [any] one area before the greatest possible number of countrymen” and thus spread the “opportunity of organized participation in the struggle.”¹⁵⁹ The foremost beneficiaries and champions of the new organizational rubric were almost undoubtedly the horizontal social constituencies, whose ranks appear to have staffed and ran most of the popular committees.¹⁶⁰

The ensemble of new organizations produced by the strike has not been given much consideration in accounts of the revolt. Colonial authorities and the Zionist movement alike were prone to conceiving of the rebellion in terms of criminality, banditry, and terrorism. But the organizational apparatus supporting the strike was not simply the stuff of “primitive rebels” or a “reactive collective action,” as described by Eric Hobsbawm and Charles Tilly, respectively.¹⁶¹ With their focus not only on protest, but on reclaiming or reasserting forms of community autonomy, they are more properly understood as the first step in a process of state formation from below embarked on during the revolt.

At first blush the claim that the popular and national committees had anything to do with state formation might appear unfounded, if not absurd. The committees were thoroughly repressed the following year in 1937 and no state ever issued from them.

The basis for my proposition is not, however, the success of the process, but rather the

¹⁵⁹ *Al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 340.

¹⁶⁰ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 116; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 342; Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 247. Our knowledge of these bodies is often even more tentative than of the NCs, but youth, scouts, and women are mentioned frequently in relation to a number of the popular committees, hence I have assumed that many, if not the vast majority, of the members of these bodies were not politicians, or from the wealthy strata. The exception to this presumption would be elite women's conspicuous participation in fundraising on relief committees and through their own committees.

¹⁶¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959); Charles Tilly, Louise Tilly, and Richard Tilly, *The Rebellious Century, 1830-1910* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975).

dynamics inherent within it, and the context in which the committees operated. As Matthews has most clearly articulated, the inception of the general strike brought about the collapse of what he has called Britain's "system of colonial control" in Palestine.¹⁶² The material and symbolic assets and rewards that the colonial state had afforded elites and portions of the middle classes – employment within the bureaucracy and the combination of patronage and religious fiefdom provided by the parastatal SMC – no longer ensured stability. The array of popular organizations that emerged aimed to delegitimize the colonial state and proffered an alternative vision, materialized through everyday practices and struggle. The unifying ideological kernel reflected in this network and in the strike movement's demands was hardly new: that the Palestinian Arabs, as the indigenous majority, rightfully deserved control over all aspects of political life, including core issues like immigration, that the colonial state had monopolized. The organs of the strike attempted not only to assert and defend the community's desire for sovereignty, however, but in some respects styled themselves as protean versions of the institutions of a future state. Assessing their operations and the network they formed accentuates this impression.

The effusion of organizations in each locality, centered on the national committees and their support bodies, arranged themselves as would-be or semi-bureaucracies. They functioned, as noted above, through the assumption of a good deal of authority over the local population, and through a division of labor and distribution of tasks, in which the popular committees played an important role. There is precious little

¹⁶² *Confronting an Empire*, p. 254.

documentation detailing these phenomena. Most British records speak in generalities rather than offering a sustained view of the institutions or dynamics in any particular town or region. Zionist intelligence reports, while certainly more copious in their coverage of local affairs, often lacked a certain degree of precision and tended to concentrate on personalities and themes like factionalism rather than institutional development.¹⁶³ The most detailed and evocative local-level depiction of the emergent organizational apparatus of the rebellion is likely that provided by Akram Zu‘aytir in his voluminous memoirs. Unfortunately Zu‘aytir only scratches the surface, as he was rapidly arrested and interned for most of the strike’s duration, leaving both many questions and a highly suggestive portrait.

The national committee at Nablus worked quickly to extend its authority and implement the strike. On 21 April 1936, two days after it formed, subtending committees were created to deal with strike management and economic relief. Two days after that, on 23 April, the aforementioned committee on bankruptcy prevention came into being. The following day the national committee heard its first “case” as a judicial body, adjudicating the fate of an individual accused of breaking the strike. To coordinate local activities and in order to facilitate surveillance and oversight of the limited commercial activity permitted by the strike, the Nablus NC divided the city into 15 zones. Supervisors for the zones were tasked with monitoring the sales of meat and vegetables that were allowed (which took place at sellers’ homes), and were on guard

¹⁶³ This is a generalization of course, and many reports contain valuable data, including on the operation of the national committees and the activities of strike proponents. On the distortions that Zionist epistemology and interests introduced into intelligence collection, Yehoyada Haim has observed, for example, that coverage of inter-Arab divisions gave the false impression that the rebellion in 1936 was likely to collapse (*Abandonment*, p. 38).

against price gouging. Complementing its management of local commerce, the NC also resurrected the ideal of encouraging Arab autarky by proposing, in coordination with other NCs, to limit or curtail imports.¹⁶⁴

The issue of strike enforcement quickly became a spur for the development of a rebel justice system composed of what were referred to as ‘courts.’ In one of its earliest communiqués, the Nablus NC urged the public to avoid believing in wild rumors, and to take allegations concerning strike-breaking or other types of “error” before the NC for proper investigation.¹⁶⁵ Fearing the chaos, indiscipline, and bloodletting that unrestrained vigilantism could let loose, the national committee asserted that it would serve as the arbiter of disputes and guardian against unpatriotic conduct. On 29 April it began to convene a court with Zu‘aytir and Mamduh al-Sukhn as judges, in front of an audience of onlookers. The NC court’s proceedings consisted of calling witnesses, having them take an oath which combined nationalist and Islamic sacraments, and rendering decisions based on the testimonies assembled. As Zu‘aytir tells it, the court was instrumental in helping to dissuade unnecessary violence and to enjoin the performance of national unity. On its first day he describes the case of a reserve police officer brought forward by a crowd that threatened to kill him. Zu‘aytir averted this outcome by suggesting that the officer resign from the force and openly proclaim his nationalist loyalties, to which he agreed. Other “trials” followed, and though little

¹⁶⁴ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 69, 72-73.

¹⁶⁵ Second communiqué from national committee of Nablus to the people of the city, 27.4.36, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 420. This is actually, according to the documents in the same volume, the third communiqué of the Nablus NC.

information exists on the early revolutionary court system, similar bodies may have been erected elsewhere.¹⁶⁶

The formidable authority which the Nablus NC enjoyed clearly emboldened it. In disregard of all social convention, on 22 April, the third day of the strike, it elected to direct the local *waqf* facilities to focus their teaching and preaching on national issues, and to limit religious instruction to prescribing *jihad*.¹⁶⁷ The boldness of this decision and its form as a directive given to local religious authorities is remarkable both for its obvious assertion of nationalist prerogative over religious authority and for the reversal of the status hierarchy according to which the noted men of religion were more known to offer instructions than to receive them, much less from the younger generation.

In a word, the national committee in Nablus emerges from Zu‘aytir’s account as a site of dynamic innovation and political experimentation. The extent to which this was generally true of the NCs is largely unknown, though there are some indications that the Nablus NC was not alone in this respect. The Haifa NC, for instance, attempted to temporarily reconfigure basic components of local financial life. As bankruptcy threatened to wipe out small and middling merchants and traders, the NC called for the non-payment of rent and encouraged landlords and lending parties not to take legal action or foreclose on debtors. The initiative does not appear to have succeeded, however, and illustrates very real limits to the capacities of the NCs in spite of their imaginative and adaptive inclinations and their great ambitions.¹⁶⁸ The tendency of

¹⁶⁶ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 77, 79-80.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁶⁸ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 112, and ft.55, p. 120. Seikaly provides little detail on this intriguing effort. General rent forgiveness was instituted after the strike ended. See the next chapter.

contemporary observers to speak of them *en bloc* suggests that other NCs were similarly assertive entities in their respective regions.

The independence and freedom of action enjoyed by the NCs was buttressed by their financial autonomy and relative self-sufficiency. Though many British and especially Zionist representatives attributed the rebellion to the machinations and largesse of Italy or Germany, its modest funding was obtained almost completely from local sources.¹⁶⁹ The NCs raised operating and relief funds, in conjunction with relevant popular committees, through individual subscriptions, donations in cash or in kind, and, most lucratively, via regular contributions from non-striking Arab government employees.¹⁷⁰ In the cities and towns they drew on the urban classes which could afford to donate and received support (in both cash and in the form of produce and foodstuffs)

¹⁶⁹ Both the High Commissioner and the AOC were convinced that the strike was receiving serious external subventions (HC to Colonial Secretary, 2.6.36, #320, PRO – CO 733/311/3; Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 59, PRO – CO 733/317/1), but the former later became skeptical of this contention. According to a mid-July report by a secret author trusted by the High Commissioner, total collections in the Arab world were less than £P 5000. Rumors and allegations that Italy had provided upwards of £P 120,000 (another report put the figure at £P 50,000: HC to Colonial Secretary, 20.6.36, PRO – FO 371/20022) were unverified and Nir Arielli's work, using Italian archival sources, confirms that the Palestinians received very little in assistance from the fascist power during the strike ("Italian Involvement in the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-1939," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* v. 35, n. 2 (August 2008), p. 190-91). Indications of sizeable aid were sorely lacking among the NCs, the relief committees, and on the battlefields, where rebels used outdated and dysfunctional arms. The financial crisis that set in among the NCs around mid-summer is further cause for doubting the existence of large external funding. Budgets previous to this point were modest, with the Hebron NC, to take an available example, reputed in early June to have £P 500 on hand (Arab Bureau information, 1.6.36, CZA S/25 – 22231). See: Strike finances (report), 14.7.36, enclosure to: HC to Colonial Secretary, 16.7.36, PRO – FO 371/20022. Khalil Sakakini, a leading Palestinian educator, complained in his diary 50 days into the strike that Italy and Germany mouthed "fine words" for Arab Palestine, but provided no material support (quoted in Segev, *One Palestine*, 411-12). Rumors and contention concerning foreign funding continued to dog the strike, reappearing at the League of Nations in 1937, which elicited another of many denials by the AHC (Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 313-14). Allegations of substantive external funding have been rebutted by some scholarly works (Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 37).

¹⁷⁰ To take the only example provided in the government's most detailed report on the strike's funding, up to the close of June, during 70 days of the strike, the Jerusalem NC's collections were put at £P 4053, but thanks to government employees' pay schedules, it anticipated a significant infusion of £P 2000 in early July (Strike finances (report), 14.7.36, PRO – FO 371/20022).

from surrounding villages.¹⁷¹ Collections appear to have mostly been voluntary early in the uprising, but as the strike perdured and conditions intensified, threats and coercion were employed.¹⁷² State employee contributions were reputedly later raised to half their salaries, by which time they were left with little choice other than to comply.¹⁷³ The NCs managed their own spending and accounts and only turned for assistance to the Central Relief Fund, run by the mufti, when they faced a shortage. In such cases, they were typically offered a single, modest lump sum in support.¹⁷⁴ Villages were even more independent than the urban NCs and did not access the Central Relief Fund, since they were generally self-provisioning.¹⁷⁵

No less significant than the social authority they exercised and strove to project, many if not all of the NCs had links to the rural bands and armed groups operating in the towns and cities. This subject will be discussed below in more detail, but what bears emphasis here is that the NCs were the primary point of contact and coordination between the urban scene and rebels in the countryside, helping to provide the latter with weapons, supplies, and intelligence, and to facilitate the expansion of armed opposition throughout the country.

Compared with the wide powers and jurisdiction established by the NCs, the AHC's writ was limited. Under its first secretary, 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi, the AHC

¹⁷¹ For example, a wealthy resident of Acre, one Subhi Bey, reportedly gave £P 1500 in early May to the NC, while Haifa area villages also donated cash (Digest, p. 2, 2.5.36, and Report, 1.5.36, HA 8/37). On village support see: DIG-CID to HC, 8.6.36, PRO – FO 371/20021 and HC to Colonial Secretary, 16.7.36, and Strike finances (report), 14.7.36, PRO – FO 371/20022.

¹⁷² See below.

¹⁷³ Arab Bureau information, "On the situation these days," 30.6.36, CZA S/ 25 – 22231.

¹⁷⁴ Payments from the Central Relief Committee were generally in the range of £P 50-300 (Strike finances (report), 14.7.36, PRO – FO 371/20022).

¹⁷⁵ HC to Colonial Secretary, 16.7.36, PRO – FO 371/20022.

established a posture built on respect for the autonomy and initiative of the NCs. In his first circular (*ta'mim*) to the NCs, on 25 April, while announcing the responsibility assumed by the AHC for managing the movement's communications, he made plain that the AHC was open to input.¹⁷⁶ This was further facilitated by 'Awni Bey's daily telephone communications with their representatives.¹⁷⁷ The consultative posture and coordinating function established by the AHC bears significant resemblance to the concept of "brokers" explored by some scholars of social movements. As the name suggests, organizations which act as brokers gain influence and position within a social movement by bridging disparate actors and facilitating network "connectedness."¹⁷⁸ By acting as a relay for the NCs the AHC gained influence. But its mediatory function did not give it independent authority. On the contrary, the AHC generally consulted with NC representatives before taking decisions.¹⁷⁹ While some of the AHC's members doubtless wished to be more than brokers, important as the position was, their acceptance of its limited powers stemmed from the recognition that the true authority for the strike resided with the horizontal constituencies that were organizationally represented within the popular committees, but whose reach and breadth were far wider.

¹⁷⁶ Circular from General Secretary of AHC to the NCs of the country, 25.4.36, in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 415.

¹⁷⁷ Decision of the AHC urging continuation of the strike, published in *Filastin*, 27.4.36, reprinted in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 380.

¹⁷⁸ Mario Diani, "'Leaders' or Brokers?: Positions and Influence in Social Movement Networks" in M. Diani and D. McAdam, eds., *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), p. 107.

¹⁷⁹ Nuwayhid, *Sittun 'aman*, p. 191; Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 336. Also see below.

Youth and strike discipline

The advent of the strike and the swell of popular support for militant action which buoyed it have helped to ensconce the uprising within Palestinian nationalist discourse and memory as a time of remarkable, if not unparalleled, social and political solidarity.¹⁸⁰ There is little doubt that in general terms there is much to commend this judgment, yet it has often led to romanticized depictions of national unity that are belied by a more complex reality. ‘Izzat Darwaza’s discussion in his well-known *Hawla al-haraka al-haditha* offers a romantic portrait of struggle while still acknowledging, in brief, the existence of internal conflicts regarding the strike. Darwaza writes that the strike:

lasted six months and [] its completeness, which spread to all manifestations of work [–] commercial, industrial, transportation, agricultural, and school-related activity [–] in all of the cities and villages, corroborated the theory of power in unity [*nazariyyat al-quwa fi-l-ittihad*] magnificently, because the mass of the people... endured the great sacrifice with which it was tested with certified determination until the end.

He goes on to claim that the variety of behaviors that were “deviant in any manner” (*shadhudh fi ayy naw’*) – whether strike-breaking, land-dealing, spying for the British or Zionists, thievery, or other derogation from the nationalist program – were minimal. When they did occur, they “were met with the appropriate, strong and urgent disciplinary punishment [*ta’dib*].” The spirit of unity reigned such that the notorious factionalism of Palestine’s political elite nearly vanished: “almost no antagonism occurred from one [party] towards another owing to motive[s] [to do with] this partyism and its whispering.” In similar terms, the young Jaffan activist ‘Isa al-Sifri offered the

¹⁸⁰ On memory see: Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*.

following gloss of the strike's unity: "this strike was propelled by the nation [*umma*] willfully, not [by] goading or terrorism, and not [by] parties and presidencies, but rather all were equal in the obligation of defending the country. All were serious, generous, and strong in faith, not to be terrorized by [government] force or dissuaded in their determination by threat[s]." Though the strike unquestionably enjoyed broad and deep public support, as testified to in official reports as well as by Palestinian sources, and though it signified a unique new moment in the nationalist struggle, its orchestration did not perforce enjoy universal acclaim. The expanding reach of nationalist principles and social praxis during the strike, as in previous episodes like the 1929-30 boycott campaign, caused significant friction and even polarization.¹⁸¹

To maintain the general strike over what stretched into half a year required extraordinary sacrifice. No less it depended on a system of strike enforcement and supervision to ensure that participation was mutual and in accordance with lines laid down by the NCs and the popular committees. As in other mass anti-colonial mobilizations, the strike occasioned a degree of coercion in its implementation.¹⁸² Forms of violence or pressure were used both to compel the strike's observance and to punish or dissuade strike-breaking. The matter of compulsion was wildly exaggerated by Zionist parties and was a major staple of the Arab Bureau and Haganah intelligence

¹⁸¹ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 124; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 25. Other scholars and accounts, perhaps particularly those by Arabs, also claim that the strike was a time of unique social unity: al-Shuqayri, *Arba'un 'aman*, p. 154; Nuwayhid, *Sittun 'aman*, p. 191; Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 81; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 334; Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 102.

¹⁸² Ranajit Guha discusses the use of coercion in both the Swadeshi movement (1903-08) and the Non-cooperation campaign (1920-22) in India in "Discipline and Mobilize" in *Subaltern Studies VII* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1993), p. 69-120.

reports.¹⁸³ On the other hand, as suggested above, many Palestinian accounts, both by participants and by researchers and academics, downplay the issue or skirt it entirely.¹⁸⁴

The incidence of compulsion within the strike (social or physical) is not primarily important as an index – either positive or negative as rival nationalist historiographies would have it – of the character of Palestinian nationalism or whether or not the strike was a truly popular upsurge. Rather, it represents an effort to overcome internal social contradictions within Palestinian society, and in this respect is analogous to the widespread phenomenon of “pressing.”¹⁸⁵ Pressing is the name given by scholars to the blend of coercion and persuasion exercised by peasants on “the recalcitrants and vacillators within their own community” for purposes of enjoining their participation in an insurrection.¹⁸⁶ As Ranajit Guha has observed, pressing is often intended to forge greater social solidarity rather than as punishment.¹⁸⁷ During the general strike this role was taken up by youth (and later by rural rebels), and conferred upon them broad

¹⁸³ Haim argues succinctly that Zionists were generally loathe to admit that the strike was popular, and contended instead that it was the product of systematic coercion. They believed that it was bereft of rural support and witness to constant violation through clandestine sales of goods and services, so that perhaps only 10% observed the strike voluntarily. In a fashion typical of the *effendi* thesis, elites were seen as ginning up the strike in order to forestall wage increases to workers which they oppressed, while it was held that the elites’ nationalist pretensions were hollow, since they were participants in and beneficiaries from the Jewish National Home’s growth in between periods of tumult (*Abandonment*, p. 34-35). While not as flagrant as Zionist depictions from 1936, subsequent accounts, such as Hillel Cohen’s *Army of Shadows*, have also lent the impression that coercion was rampant; in Cohen’s case this is mainly because his work fails to explicate that the Palestinian revolt was widely and overwhelmingly popular, especially in its first phase. As noted below, this is something which even British colonial sources admitted repeatedly, hence its omission from historical accounts is more indicative of the strength of Zionism’s ideological denial of Palestinian nationalism’s legitimacy and social generalization than of anything else.

¹⁸⁴ Akram Zu‘aytir is a rather significant exception, given the heft of his diary during the revolt years, and numerous entries, perhaps more so after the strike, disclose a range of sanctions used against those deemed outside the national consensus.

¹⁸⁵ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, p. 195-98. As elsewhere in this frequently incisive work, the argument Guha makes in this connection about uneven peasant “consciousness” is teleological and schematic, and is not reflective of the analysis put forth herein.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

influence, including vis-à-vis the ‘higher’ leadership. In other words, strike enforcement became a vehicle for a type of popular, but indirect, leadership. Their role as guardians and guarantors of the national upsurge, paired with the history of elite and middle class quiescence, ensured that youth in urban centers especially acted as a backstop for and source of discipline within the movement.

The necessity of strike enforcement also disclosed important faultlines within Palestinian society. The primary cleavage, as prior to the revolt, split the bulk of the active Arab public, which mobilized to support the uprising, from a significant quotient of merchants and elites who variously opposed the methods of the strike and its interference with their class interests and social dominance. A second division emerged around the AHC’s refusal to call for Arab state employees – who hailed from the middle and upper classes – to join the strike directly. This caused much dissension among rank and file partisans and added to merchants’ complaints regarding the strike’s management and what they saw as its selectivity or lack of comprehensiveness.¹⁸⁸ A third significant cleavage formed geographically around Haifa, where the strike never attained the strength and uniformity that it did elsewhere. Unlike at Jaffa, port workers at Haifa generally refused to strike, fearing the loss of their jobs to permanent Jewish replacements, much to the resentment of workers elsewhere.¹⁸⁹ These three divides were central lines of tension that strike advocates and enforcers ran up against and sought to

¹⁸⁸ The ramifications of this anomaly and the movement’s adaptation to it are more complex than has been recognized in some accounts (e.g. Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*), and are discussed below.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 19; Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 242.

remedy. They affected public morale, the cohesion of the strike, and the aims and priorities of the popular and elite wings of the movement.

Without question youth lay at the heart of maintaining discipline in the strike. Al-Sifri is emphatic on this point: “We can declare that were it not for the control [*al-saytara*] of this element on the present position, the country wouldn’t have been able to devise this new example of just patriotic struggle.” The wide geographic scope of the youth trend was integral to its influence, which was not the product of any particular youth association, but existed in myriad groups dispersed throughout the country (as suggested in chapter three). The omnipresent and nonpartisan character of youth as a social force, al-Sifri underscores, allowed activists to “feed the new patriotic orientation” everywhere “with their bold spirit and their daring ventures [*bi-ruhihim al-wathaba wa-mughamaratihim al-jari’a*].”¹⁹⁰

The vigor of youth within the strike movement was visible from the outset. They were arrested in Jerusalem in its first days for pushing proprietors to close their shops.¹⁹¹ Undeterred, upon his release the same day Jamil Wahbe held a meeting with youth to continue plans for securing shop closures.¹⁹² In Nablus and in Haifa scouts were linchpins of strike enforcement, and in several cities children also took part in this enterprise.¹⁹³ In Tulkarm, for example, children as young as ten years of age were

¹⁹⁰ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 34.

¹⁹¹ Arab Bureau information, 21.4.36, 4pm, and 22.4.36, 12pm, CZA S/25 – 22231; Those detained included members of the strike and boycott committees, such as Jamil Wahbe, a popular youth leader from the *mu‘arada* who served on the Jerusalem NC.

¹⁹² Arab Bureau information, 22.4.36, 12pm, CZA S/25 – 22231

¹⁹³ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 71; Arab Bureau information, 22.4.36, 5pm, CZA S/25 – 22193; Arab Bureau information, 22.4.36, 12pm, CZA S/25 – 22231; Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 128. See also numerous reports on scouts and youth in Haifa at: HA 8/35 and 8/36.

reported in June to be local agents of strike discipline, much to the pique of disgruntled merchants.¹⁹⁴ Needless to say, such bald inversions of the social hierarchy encouraged great resentment on the part of elites, who chafed at the assumption of prerogatives and power by youth. Raghīb al-Nashashībī, for instance, objected on 23 April, before even joining in the strike, to the forceful role of youth in its supervision.¹⁹⁵ Such complaints multiplied with time, but did little to abate the conditions propelling youth influence.

Students were a prominent component of the youth upsurge, taking part in early demonstrations at Tulkarm (20 April), Haifa (27 April), Nazareth (28 April), and Jerusalem (29 April), the latter two of which involved altercations with police.¹⁹⁶ Their zeal distressed the High Commissioner, who commented repeatedly on the subject to Arab representatives as early as 21 April.¹⁹⁷ Less than a week into the strike, he threatened to close all government schools “unless attendance should return to normal.” The administration had already closed the Arab College at Jerusalem, the only institution of higher learning open to Palestinians, and the agricultural school at Tulkarm (the Kedourie school), on account of their students’ “indiscipline” and enthusiasm for the uprising. It informed parents of students in other schools that they too would be shuttered unless order was restored.¹⁹⁸ Nonetheless, the Chief Secretary later reported to

¹⁹⁴ Arab Bureau information, 16.6.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

¹⁹⁵ Meeting of Arab politicians, 23.4.36, CZA S/25 – 22193. Jamil Wahbe is reported to have responded that in his view children need not be involved in the strike.

¹⁹⁶ Arab Bureau information, 20.4.36, 4pm, CZA S/25 – 22193; Haifa reports, 27.4.36 and 29.4.36, HA 8/35; Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 79.

¹⁹⁷ *Report to the League of Nations*, 1936, p. 24.

¹⁹⁸ HC to Colonial Secretary, 25.4.36, #146, PRO – CO 733/310/1.

the League of Nations that almost all of the students in urban schools and something like half of those in rural areas joined the strike after its commencement.¹⁹⁹

Many youth were eager for confrontation and wanted to go beyond the strike and attack Jewish and British targets. The well-known young poet Nuh Ibrahim envisioned youth as partners of the *Qassamiyun*.²⁰⁰ In the immediate aftermath of shaykh Farhan's raid on the Jewish bus in mid-April, youth in Haifa and its suburbs sought sanction and support from elites for armed operations, but were rebuffed.²⁰¹ In May, the hand of youth in armed activity was readily apparent. As well as participating in demonstrations and acting to prevent trade in produce with Jews, the Abu 'Ubayda scouts were involved in bomb-throwing, attacks on British and Jewish traffic, and sabotage of the railways.²⁰² In Jaffa, a new youth association, the National Guard, engaged in a similar range of activities.²⁰³ In Safad members of the Islamic Sports Club and its scout troop, the Muthanna scouts, joined rebel bands in the countryside and fought against the British.²⁰⁴ Other scout troops did likewise, distributing themselves across local bands throughout the country.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁹ Tibawi, "Educational Policy," p. 20-21.

²⁰⁰ Haifa report, 17.4.36, HA 8/35.

²⁰¹ Inside the city efforts were made to procure weapons for arms and approval for attacks from local leaders on 21 and 23 April (Haifa reports, 22.4.36 and 23.4.36, HA 8/35). At Balad al-Shaykh, scout leader 'Atif Nurallah collected the names of 50 youth prepared to undertake armed activity, only to be expelled from the local mosque by community leaders who dissociated themselves from his plans and declared they would turn him in to the authorities (Haifa report, 25.4.36, HA 8/35; see also Haifa report, 21.4.36, *ibid.*).

²⁰² Najib, 18.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875; Arab Bureau information, 31.5.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

²⁰³ On the National Guard, see below. In July the head of Jaffa's Muslim Sports Club was reported to be an important recruiter of youth into the armed bands (Report, 12.7.36, HA 8/39).

²⁰⁴ 'Abbasi, *Safad fi 'ahd al-intidab*, p. 223.

²⁰⁵ Fawzi al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat al-Qawuqji* v. 2, prepared by Khayriyya Qasimiyya (PLO Research Center and Dar al-Quds, 1975), p. 45. Al-Qawuqji is vague on the point, but it appears that some of these troops were those organized by Baha al-Din al-Taba', the Syrian scout leader hired by the mufti.

Although they played myriad local roles, as strike enforcers youth took up the delicate task of manufacturing local compliance with the nationalist consensus. While recent work has argued that the national movement saw strike-breaking as treason, this is an oversimplification.²⁰⁶ Although attacks on those refusing the dicta of the popular and national committees did occur, for the most part discipline was enforced through the use of mundane, if brutish, violence. Information passed on by a merchant at Jericho who was on good terms with the JA describes a situation that was commonplace. Merchants who were opposed to the strike were threatened by one of the national committees (it's unclear whether it was that of Jericho or Jerusalem), while *shabab* ensured that they were unable to transport their goods to market in Jerusalem. To set an example, one of the offending merchants was badly beaten. With an eye to trying to palliate the merchants, the AHC subsequently considered a proposal to allow crops to be collected as usual, but to have their sale controlled by youth at fixed prices. The merchant rounded out his report by complaining that police inaction had allowed youth enforcers to effectively rule the roost throughout the country.²⁰⁷ In other cases, non-striking merchants were publicly shamed by having buckets of muck and filth poured upon them.²⁰⁸ Strike-breakers were also stoned and verbally chastised by students and other youth.²⁰⁹

The popular regulation of commerce entailed by the strike served as an entrée for the reclamation of public spaces, marketplaces, and roads by strikers, who strove to erect

²⁰⁶ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 98.

²⁰⁷ A.H. Cohen to M. Shertok and Y. Ben Tzvi, 3.5.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

²⁰⁸ Arab Bureau information, situation evaluation, 12.7.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

²⁰⁹ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 128.

safe havens for rebel activity and zones of urban autonomy from the state. Jaffa police were frustrated for months by their inability to stamp out what they described as “an intensive campaign of intimidation.” As one report described the scene, “The blocking of streets by barricades, nails or bottles and the beating up of hawkers of vegetables and village carts bringing in provisions were the main activities.”²¹⁰ The well-coordinated effort was organized by the National Guard (*al-Haris al-watani*), which was led by two NC members (Ibrahim al-Shanti and Jawdat al-Habab), a clutch of young men from prominent families, and a number of other youths.²¹¹ As al-Sifri zealously describes, their efforts “to superintend over the nation’s resolutions” entailed producing “soldiers” who would “fill the squares” and be thrown in prison, only to be replaced by new ranks.²¹² The National Guard’s militancy became quite famous and was regarded by the Arab Bureau of the JA as vital to the strike in Jaffa.²¹³

Elsewhere, the implementation of the strike encountered significant resistance. The most concerted opposition was in Haifa, where many Christian merchants rejected its imposition. They were led by Emile Boutagy (Imil Butaji), a wealthy importer, retailer and Anglophile, proud of his longstanding trade links to Britain, who issued two early manifestos against the strike on 24 and 25 April.²¹⁴ On the 25th he and a group of

²¹⁰ ASP-Southern (Foley) to IG-Police, n.d. [18.7.36 or after], HA 8/39. Both quotes.

²¹¹ The other members of the body’s council were: Ghalib al-Khalidi, Muhammad Zuhdi al-Dajani, Rabah Abu Khadra, Mamduh al-Nabulsi, Yusuf al-Sayigh, Jawdat Habib, Na‘im Abu Dabah, Hasan Khalaqi al-Dajani (al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 36). As noted below, the National Guard was suppressed in July, but the model of militancy it pioneered continued on in the city.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²¹³ Arab Bureau information, situation appreciation, 26.7.36, CZA S/25 – 22231. Akram Zu‘aytir refers to the National Guard as “the best of [Jaffa’s] youth, supervising the course of the strike” (*Yawmiyat*, p. 117).

²¹⁴ Seikaly, “Meatless Days,” p. 51; Haifa reports, 25.4.36 and 25.4.36, 7:40, HA 8/35. Butaji’s second leaflet defiantly called on shopkeepers to open, asserting that merchants were the only members of society being hurt and that the strike was not being consistently applied, with the Arab Bank a major exception.

disgruntled merchants took their case to the Muslim Association, where the NC had its base of operations.²¹⁵ Boutagy argued that local importers and merchants had links to European and local banks and could not afford to jeopardize their standing or finances. Though at least four members of the Haifa NC were merchants, the plea for an exemption was rejected.²¹⁶ Afterwards, reluctant Christian merchants continued to deprecate the strike's leadership and bemoan the strenuous and aggressive exertions of youth enforcers.²¹⁷ For his obstreperous attitude, Boutagy's store was hit with a homemade bomb on 28 April.²¹⁸ The vitriol which obstinate merchants ignited was not reserved to Haifa. After the strike's first week, bombings or attempts were made on the shops of recalcitrant merchants in Tiberias and Tulkarm, and possibly in other locales, as well.²¹⁹

Greatly worrisome for strike proponents was the situation at Haifa port. A portion of the porters employed there had gone on strike in April, and they were rapidly replaced by Jews and Hawranis.²²⁰ Neither aid from the local NC nor importuning visits by Arab politicians were able to persuade port workers thereafter to join the strike, and they only did so briefly in August, following "a sustained campaign of pressure and threats" by strikers.²²¹ The ensuing strike by laborers from the port, the railways, the

²¹⁵ This headquartering arrangement is indicated explicitly in: Digest, p. 10, 9.5.36, HA 8/37. May Seikaly provides information that contradicts this report, stating that the national committee had two local bases, one near the Istiqlal mosque and the second at a building on Allenby Street (*Haifa*, ft. 55, p. 120).

²¹⁶ Haifa report, 25.4.36, HA 8/35. Merchants on the committee included Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, Hajj Khalil Taha, Ibrahim Sahyun, and Mikha'il Tuma (List of NC memberships, enclosure to: AHC to HC, 8.5.36, ISA (2) 5076-4m). Their backgrounds and activities are covered in: Seikaly, *Haifa*.

²¹⁷ Haifa report, 27.4.36, HA 8/35.

²¹⁸ Haifa report, 28.4.36, HA 8/35.

²¹⁹ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 24.

²²⁰ Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 242.

²²¹ Ibid; Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 90, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

Iraq Petroleum Company, Shell Oil, the Public Works Department and the municipality was broken about a week later by the British military, which considered the development “dangerous” and dispatched “All available reserves” to restore the *status quo ante*.²²² The contractor for Arab workers at the port, ‘Abdullah Abu Zayid, who had secretly been on the Histadrut’s payroll, fled the country after receiving death threats, which were also visited upon reluctant labor leaders.²²³ Although the strikebreaking at Haifa port caused great discomfiture and anger among popular constituencies, it was an anomaly, even within the city itself, where the strike was more generally “widespread.”²²⁴

In general, the enforcement campaign directed by youth proved quite effective. As the Peel Commission observed, in May and June 1936 “Those few Arabs who kept their shops open or otherwise abstained from striking were soon won over or intimidated by representatives of the National Committees, which, staffed largely by younger Arabs, kept a highly efficient watch on the conduct of the strike.”²²⁵ The large-scale interruption of commerce was vexing and embarrassing for the colonial state, which endeavored to force shops to reopen and to arrest strike agents responsible for maintaining discipline. By mid-June apprehensions of Arabs for “intimidation” easily outstripped that of any other class of offense, with 455 arrests and 237 convictions.²²⁶

²²² Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 242; Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 90, PRO – CO 733/317/1. Quotes from the latter.

²²³ Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 242; Haifa report, 6.8.36, HA 8/40.

²²⁴ *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 14-16.

²²⁵ Peel Commission report, p. 98.

²²⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.6.36, #385, PRO – CO 733/310/3. By comparison, 254 arrests were made for illegal weapons possession, with 184 convictions, and 360 arrests with 331 convictions for curfew

Still, as even the Colonial Secretary was brought to admit on 19 June: “intimidation... is responsible only in a very small measure for the continuation of the strike which clearly has the full sympathy of all too large a part of the Arab population.”²²⁷

As time passed, however, strike-breaking engendered fiercer responses. In spite of the strikers’ fervent hopes, pockets of merchants still endeavored to resist or circumvent the national upsurge. Merchant noncompliance was not solely self-interested; rather, after two months of closure or partial closure, many small and mid-size businessmen faced potential bankruptcy and ruin. Nonetheless, as economic concerns about the effect of the strike began to gain the ear of an increasing number of Arab politicians (discussed below), the revolt’s partisans hardened their position. In July, the enforcement campaign was ratcheted up, closing down some of the businesses which had clandestinely remained semi-open in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Haifa.²²⁸ Death threats began to be made against strike-breaking. In late June Jad Swaydan, a non-striking merchant in Haifa, was allegedly informed by the city’s NC that his life was in danger.²²⁹ A month later rebels spoke more generally of killing any town-dweller breaking the strike or so much as opening a warehouse.²³⁰ Earlier in July a colleague of

breaking. Figures for early July were similar, with intimidation remaining the predominant offense among arrestees (503 of 1706 total arrests, with 261 convictions) (PRO – CO 733/310/4).

²²⁷ *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 25-26.

²²⁸ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 66, PRO – CO 733/317/1

²²⁹ Haifa report, 24.6.36, HA 8/38. In Jaffa death threats were later made against cafés and shops in ‘Ajami quarter that had reopened (Division of acts of terrorism in [the] area [report by an Arab informant], 15.8.36, HA 8/40).

²³⁰ Najib, 20.7.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam, shaykh Muhammad Taqruri, sought Islamic sanction for killing (literally “taking revenge upon”) strike-breakers and traitors.²³¹

As internal tensions over the strike’s observation rose, clandestine groups calling themselves the Black Hand (*al-Kaf al-aswad*) sprang up in different urban centers and sent wayward merchants letters calling on them “to wipe out the shame [*al-‘ar*]” of their deviance from the national consensus by closing their businesses, donating to widows of the rebellion, and otherwise upholding the cause of the strike.²³² These groups appear to have been unaffiliated with one another, but took the same name out of common purpose.²³³ In Haifa, where conflict around strike discipline was particularly acute, the Shai contended that the local Black Hand was the organizational fruit of the PAWS, and specifically of village migrants from the Nablus area.²³⁴ Although in practice lethal intra-Arab violence was mostly restricted to alleged informers and Arab police active in suppressing the uprising, merchants understandably took the semi-anonymous threats by the Black Hand at face value.²³⁵ The sons of ‘Aziz Khayat, a prominent Haifan merchant, told the Shai that because of such letters, they each began carrying firearms.²³⁶

²³¹ Haifa report, 11.7.36, HA 8/39. Citing the same source Cohen says that a *fatwa* was issued, but this report says only that notices were affixed to mosques in Haifa demanding such, without confirming that a ruling was issued (*Army of Shadows*, p. 101). Interestingly, Taqruri’s notice highlighted Damascenes resident in Palestine as the most egregious strike violators, many of which, sensing which way the wind was blowing, began to evacuate their families (Haifa report, *ibid.*)

²³² An undated sample is available in Arabic (though it appears to be a rewrite of the original) at: HA 8/40.

²³³ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 103-04.

²³⁴ Report (S.G.), 11.8.36, HA 8/40. Subsequent Zionist intelligence inconclusively connected Haifa’s Black Hand with its NC (see below).

²³⁵ This is a shortcoming of Hillel Cohen’s work, which often reproduces the various reports of Haganah intelligence and other Zionist sources as adequate descriptions of events, without examining whether specific threats and resolutions were actually carried out (see *Army of Shadows*, p. 95-120). From my research I have concluded that the range of situations in which rebels actually used lethal force against other Arabs was considerably more restricted than those in which they threatened to do so.

²³⁶ Haifa report, 21.6.36, HA 8/38.

Important and persistent as militant or coercive practices of enforcement were for attaining near universal observance of the strike, and, less recognized, for elevating the power and stature of youth within the movement, the exercise of force was the exception and not the norm.²³⁷ Besides menacing letters sent by small underground groups and roughing up those who tried to continue to sell goods (whether merchants or peddlers), strike enforcers also mobilized discourses of admonition, for instance affixing notes to businesses calling on them to rejoin the insurgent national consensus.²³⁸ Even the threat letters themselves were intended to induce errant elements to come back into the fold. In other words, they held out the potential for nationalist repentance, and for reintegration into the good graces of the community. This was in keeping with the strike's objective of manifesting a united national front and in line with the older, intermittent and uneven process of reorienting commercial activity to support the national movement's aims, such as was attempted during the 1929 boycott campaign.

Embarrassed by the strike's display of Arab solidarity and opposition to British policy, and by its disruption of the colonial everyday, the administration tried to undermine the rebellion by compelling shops to reopen and by protecting Arabs wishing to conduct business and trade as usual. The effort to use emergency regulations issued

²³⁷ The Haganah's copious reporting on Haifa might understandably be taken to lend weight to the opposite conclusion – that force was the primary buttress of the strike – but it needs to be remembered that the notes the Shai collected focused on discernable cases of tension and strike-breaking, rather than on the relative sea, by comparison, of compliance. The pervading norm of strike observance cannot sensibly be interpreted as the product of coercion and intimidation, though these no doubt weighed on a segment of the mercantile classes.

²³⁸ Haifa report, 27.6.36, HA 8/38.

on 4 June to force shops to open came to naught.²³⁹ Similarly, when the colonial state amplified its police and military presence in Jerusalem in order to protect small vendors and villagers selling their produce, rebels simply shifted their focus to interdicting commercial traffic on its way into the city, spoiling ‘illicit’ produce and even killing animals used to cart it to market.²⁴⁰ In Jaffa, even after the city’s reconquest by the military in June (see below), similar efforts only produced a modest weakening of the strike’s observance.²⁴¹

Towards the non-payment of taxes

From its outset, the strike was joined by motions for the escalation of struggle. The AHC initially attempted to act as a brake on the swelling current of stridency. In doing so, it reflected the divergence between elites and the popular wing of the national movement concerning strategy. Elites, represented foremost in the AHC, envisioned using the struggle as the means to diplomatic ends, and thus maintained an interest in keeping it primarily pacific. On the other hand, popular forces, which often acted of their own accord, elected to widen the rebellion and directly attack British authorities and the *yishuv* in hopes of weakening both and of halting or reversing the latter’s recent dramatic growth. Disagreement over the rebellion’s aims and its character persisted throughout the strike, causing friction within the movement and at times introducing into it a degree of incoherence. The outcomes of the first two efforts at expanding and

²³⁹ Kalkas, “The Revolt of 1936,” p. 250; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.6.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

²⁴⁰ *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 15.

²⁴¹ DSP-Southern (Foley) to IG-Police, n.d. [18.7.36 or after], HA 8/39.

deepening the strike, consisting of calls for the inclusion of government workers in the strike and for the non-payment of taxes, illustrate the dynamic contest within the movement over its direction.

Proposals for Arab government workers to walk out or resign were made as early as the AHC's founding meeting on 25 April. One was mooted by Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani, head of the Drivers' Committee, and another put forward by Jerusalem's NC, under its acting chairman, Fa'iz al-Haddad.²⁴² In perhaps its greatest show of strength vis-à-vis popular forces during the strike, the AHC rejected the motion, and continued to block successive calls in subsequent months for the same, although popular interest in it remained high. Instead the AHC opted to allow government employees to remain at their jobs while donating a portion of their incomes to fund the strike.²⁴³ Although this stimulated the resentment of strikers who endured material hardships and lost incomes, rebels later turned the situation to their advantage, procuring weapons and valuable intelligence, such as on military and police movements, through Arab police and other sources. The notion persisted, however, that the wealthy and even the well-to-do middle classes that staffed the bureaucracy were not paying their fair share or partaking in the sacrifices made by the masses. This perception filtered into the thicket of inter-class tensions that bedeviled the rebellion's organization and, particularly, its funding.

By contrast, the AHC did not initially take a stance on the call for a tax strike, which quickly gained much support. The first call for the non-payment of taxes came in

²⁴² Arab Bureau information, 25.4.36, 8:30am, CZA S/25 – 22193, and 25.4.36, 12:30am [26.4.36], CZA S/25 – 22231.

²⁴³ CID, 6.5.36, periodical appreciation summary 9/36, PRO – FO 371/20018. The initial sum demanded of government workers was 10 percent of their salaries (HC to Colonial Secretary, 4.5.36, #180, PRO – CO 733/310/1), though this later rose.

late April in a statement issued by a group of over 150 activists, intellectuals, and notables from Jerusalem, including Dr. Khalil al-Budayri (a local physician and later Communist activist), Hamdi al-Husayni, ‘Ajaj Nuwayhid, Fahmi Nashashibi (brother of Raghib), Shukri Qutina, Rashad Abu Ghazala, ‘Abd al-Hamid Shuman, George Mansur, Hashim al-Sabi’, and others.²⁴⁴ Borrowing the inimitable slogan of the American revolution, “no taxation without representation,” the cross-class, cross-factional appeal was met with enthusiasm, and was followed by a communiqué on 2 May from the Drivers’ Committee demanding the withholding of taxes and urging government workers to strike.²⁴⁵ The same day ‘Awni Bey, the AHC’s secretary, solicited the opinion of the NCs on the tax strike, at least several of which registered their approval.²⁴⁶ Public rallies and meetings in Ramallah, al-Bireh, Bethlehem, the Nablus area, and Jerusalem backed the motion.²⁴⁷ The colonial authorities responded by raiding and trashing the Drivers’ Committee office, confiscating its papers, and arresting al-Dajani and vice-president Salih ‘Abdu for incitement. The arrests spurred two days of riotous altercations between drivers and police, and the Drivers’ Committee leaders were each fined £P 25, but the repression failed to stanch the tide of popular support.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ The text is available in *Watha’iq al-haraka* (Communiqué of the people of Jerusalem calling for cessation of paying taxes, p. 426-27) though its date, 6.5.36, is incorrect, as both Zu‘aytir’s diaries (*Yawmiyat*, p. 82) and Porath’s *The Palestinian Arab National Movement* (p. 168-69) make clear.

²⁴⁵ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 169; *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 24.

²⁴⁶ Secretary, AHC to Nablus NC, 2.5.36, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 426; Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 85-86; Kalkas, “The Revolt of 1936,” p. 246.

²⁴⁷ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 254.

²⁴⁸ Arab Bureau information, 5.5.36, 2pm+, and 6.5.36, CZA S/25 – 22193; *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 24.

The mufti, who at the time remained noncommittal as nominal leader of the strike, apprised the High Commissioner on 4 May of the potential tax protest.²⁴⁹ By this point HC Wauchope was aware that the familiar notable interlocutors were not really in command of the movement, writing the same day to the Colonial Secretary that “The hands of leaders are being forced by extremists and by the fact that the whole of the Arab population is behind the general strike, which is in reality a protest against immigration etc.”²⁵⁰ The next day he again telegraphed that the AHC was in an “impossible position,” as it was incapable of backing down in the face of popular radicalism, while adding that in his view the government would look weak if it offered any concession on the immigration schedule.²⁵¹ Lacking a plum to offer, he nonetheless beckoned the Palestinian leaders to an audience on 5 May in which he called on them to send the previously agreed-on delegation to London in lieu of continuing the strike.²⁵² In a statement delivered at the meeting, the High Commissioner issued a series of threats regarding the proposed tax strike, the debate over calling for government employees to strike, and the AHC’s planned tour of the country, at the close of which he demanded that the assembled collaborate with the colonial authorities:

I urge you, gentlemen, to remember your responsibilities as members of the Supreme Arab Committee [AHC] and set your face against all illegal acts whether of murder, arson, or any form of civil disobedience *and assist Government in the measures they are taking and will take to restore security and good order throughout the country.*²⁵³

²⁴⁹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 5.5.36, #185, PRO – CO 733/310/1; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 74-75. The HC was not aware of either of the leaflets calling for a tax strike until the same day, 4 May (Statement by the HC [no label], 5.5.36, ISA (2) 5076-4m).

²⁵⁰ HC to Colonial Secretary, 4.5.36, #180, PRO – CO 733/310/1.

²⁵¹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 5.5.36, #185, PRO – CO 733/310/1.

²⁵² Statement by the HC [no label], 5.5.36, ISA (2) 5076-4m.

²⁵³ Ibid. My emphasis.

The AHC responded the same day with a memorandum which succinctly laid out the context of the uprising and highlighted the danger felt by the Arabs concerning immigration in particular. It averred that the strike was “peaceful” and defensive in nature, and rebutted official charges that it would cause economic ruin, emphasizing that on the contrary, the state’s policy “will culminate in the impoverishment of all classes of the Arab people and will ultimately compel the Arabs to evacuate their country and... lead them to extermination.” The AHC was then summoned for a second interview with the High Commissioner later that day, during which ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi lamented that whereas in Egypt and Syria genuine struggles for independence were underway, in Palestine the Arabs were reduced to fighting for “bread.” He went on to attribute the demands for non-payment of taxes and for a government employees’ walkout to the “younger element of the Arab population,” but affirmed that the “older and more thoughtful people,” represented in the AHC, had been left with few alternatives. More bluntly, Raghib al-Nashashibi declared that the people were leading the leaders and not the other way around. Terminating the strike was simply not within the AHC’s power.²⁵⁴

The AHC’s caution before the High Commissioner was well-founded. Amid the ongoing waves of demonstrations, property attacks, skirmishes and assaults, numerous individuals and popular bodies issued statements favoring militant action and intoning

²⁵⁴ ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi (for AHC) to HC, 5.5.36, p. 4-5, and Minutes of a meeting, 5.5.36, p. 4-7, both enclosures to: HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.5.36, PRO – CO 733/310/2.

against compromise. The Arab Women's Association of Jerusalem, for instance, published a communiqué in *Filastin* on 30 April exhorting the public:

O noble nation [*umma*], you are responsible before God and the coming generations if you are slack in preserving your rights. Let it suffice to have lost 18 years in which the country was misled. O nation in the right [*al- 'azim fi haqqihi*], make this strike the final battle between you and the enemy. Persevere and be ready for all types of sacrifice in order to attain victory. May God guide your step and let your direction be only [this] path.²⁵⁵

The previous day Akram Zu'aytir editorialized in *al-Difa'* that Gandhi's plan for civil disobedience should be the Palestinians' model, while on 28 April the Union of Arab Students called for continuation of the strike.²⁵⁶ In Jenin a communiqué proclaimed that no single group, be it a party or the AHC, had the right to change the movement's course unilaterally, without prior national consultation.²⁵⁷ The AHC's hand was rapidly forced after the administration publicized the High Commissioner's statement on 5 May, including the demand for the AHC's assistance in quelling the uprising. The NCs feverishly insisted that a national forum be convened, and, under widespread pressure, the AHC complied, calling a congress of national committees in Jerusalem on 7 May.²⁵⁸

The NCs' convention was attended by representatives from 22 cities and towns, the region of Huleh, the Drivers' Committee, students, and the AHC.²⁵⁹ It took two principal resolutions, the first affirming the continuation of the strike until colonial

²⁵⁵ Communiqué of the Arab Women's Committee [AWC] urging the strike and steadfastness, n.d., in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 384-85.

²⁵⁶ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 80; Call by Union of Arab Students to students, n.d., in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 381.

²⁵⁷ Kayyali, *Palestine: a modern history*, p. 192.

²⁵⁸ Official communiqué 36/36, ISA (2) 566-6m; Arab Bureau information, 5.5.36, 2pm, CZA S/25 – 22193.

²⁵⁹ The AHC also invited notables to the congress, possibly in an effort to bolster the hand of the elder leadership, though, in the event, this had little effect (Arab Bureau information, 5.5.36, 2pm, CZA S/25 – 22193).

authorities undertook a “fundamental change” in policy, which was to be made apparent through halting immigration, and the second approving a tax strike effective 15 May in the event that government refused to alter its policy. Notably, both were accepted unanimously, indicating that the popular preference for radical options had eclipsed elite wrangling and forged the basis for a consensus position.²⁶⁰ The congress also tasked the AHC with rectifying the situation at the Haifa port, and voted to impose a boycott against the Jews in Palestine. As al-Hut argues, the convention confirmed the status of the NCs as essential “bases of struggle” (*qawa'id nidaliyya*) without which the AHC was incapable of taking major national decisions.²⁶¹

The NCs congress was followed by a clutch of mass public meetings. A congress of students' committees was convened at Jaffa on 10 May at which a host of resolutions surpassing those of the NCs convention were accepted.²⁶² Participants planned to conduct public meetings in rural areas and form student committees throughout the country whose tasks included fundraising for the impacted and for sporting activities, which may have been code for paramilitary mobilization. Two more

²⁶⁰ Mattar writes that the *majlisi* camp's opposition to the non-payment of taxes folded when it was confronted with the overwhelming support for the measure (*The Mufti*, p. 75). More broadly, many discussions of both the government employees and tax strike issues suggest that they were advanced by the Opposition as a means to embarrass the mufti, head of the non-striking SMC, and Husayn F. al-Khalidi, his ally and the mayor of Jerusalem. Certainly there is little doubt that this is what Raghīb al-Nashashibi, himself no proponent of anti-British militancy, had in mind when he supported both motions, which were each opposed by al-Hajj Amin and Jamal al-Husayni within the AHC (CID, 6.5.36 and 21.5.36, periodical appreciation summaries 9 and 10/36, PRO – FO 371/20018). What is elided in assessments highlighting resurgent factionalism is the fact that elite quarrels did not play out in a vacuum, and were overshadowed by an increasingly vocal and assertive public.

²⁶¹ *Filastin*, 8.5.36, reprinted in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 428-30; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 338.

²⁶² The assembly called for all “political prisoners” taken from 1929-36 to be released; for the cancellation and reversal of all land sales to Jews made in the previous five years; for the collective punishments law to be abrogated and all scheduled fines to be nullified; and for Jews to be disarmed and their secret paramilitaries to be dissolved (*Filastin*, 12.5.36, reprinted in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 395-98).

meetings were held the following day, 11 May, by women at Jaffa and by villagers in Nablus. The former met at the Orthodox Patriotic School under the stewardship of Adil ‘Azar, and resolved to support the AHC and continue with the strike until Arab rights in the country had been won.²⁶³ The congress in Nablus, held at the Islamic Sports Union Club, brought together representatives from 17 area villages who affirmed the tax strike resolution while adding that they were prepared for the “greatest sacrifice” (*li-tadhiya ila ab‘ad hududiha*) – in other words, for armed struggle – if immigration was not halted.²⁶⁴

The AHC acknowledged the public’s resolve in a communiqué issued on 9 May, the 20th day of the strike. The statement depicted the population as in virtually perpetual rebellion against British policy for the previous 18 years. Notably, it not only praised the willingness to make “every sacrifice in blood and treasure” (*fi-l-mal wa-l-nafs*), but also recognized that popular rage against the colonial order and the prospect of the country’s Judaization fueled the strike.²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, elites remained chary of the course of escalation and continued to try to leverage the strike into a political victory that could restore legitimacy to diplomatic negotiations. In private communications with HC Wauchope the AHC continued to show an interest, as late as 12 May, in sending a delegation to London, but insisted on a cessation of immigration as the necessary prerequisite.²⁶⁶ The colonial authorities responded by instead offering a Royal Commission charged with investigating the causes of the rebellion, which the High

²⁶³ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 29; in *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p. 399.

²⁶⁴ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 98; Big village meeting and important resolutions, 11.5.36, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 419. Many villages in the Nablus area were already actively organizing prior to this date, as discussed below.

²⁶⁵ Communiqué of the AHC obligating continuation of the strike until the demands of the people are realized, in *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p. 393-94.

²⁶⁶ AHC to the Chief Secretary, 12.5.36, ISA (2) 5076-4m.

Commissioner communicated to the AHC on 14 May, the eve of the tax strike. Again he was told that it was not in the power of the AHC to stop the general strike, or curtail the growing tendency towards violence and resistance, short of obtaining at least a temporary cessation of immigration.²⁶⁷

Though attempting to leave their options open, members of the AHC were not impervious to the surge of popular sentiment propelling the rebellion, or to the adulation they received from aligning themselves with it. At Jenin, during the AHC's tour in the central highlands and the north, a reporter from *Filastin* described the effect of the warm welcome thusly: "I saw Alfred Rok... with tears of emotion in his eyes, and I also saw Raghib al-Nashashibi and Jamal al-Husayni, who were very excited."²⁶⁸ Similar receptions greeted them elsewhere. Still, for many activists the AHC – even after the congress of NCs – remained too distant from the uprising and too equivocal in its stance. In Nablus, Akram Zu'aytir and other youth drafted a communiqué for the AHC's local visit, calling on the higher leadership to declare its full-throated support for civil resistance.²⁶⁹ At Haifa, where activist youth distrusted leaders whom they saw as too conciliatory, Subhi al-Khadra declared that even if leaders capitulated, the youth would continue the struggle.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ AHC to HC, 14.5.36, ISA (2) 5076-4m; Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 378. Inside the AHC Ahmad Hilmi Pasha and Alfred Rok urged that the strike be wound down and the Royal Commission welcomed. They worried that the strike's effects on the Palestinian economy would spell further weakness and deliver advantages to the Zionists, but as Husayn Fakhri al-Khalidi tellingly countered, youth would never accept that the uprising should be traded away for such paltry results (Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 75; Arab Bureau information, 15.5.36, CZA S/25 – 22231).

²⁶⁸ Quoted in Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 159.

²⁶⁹ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 98-99.

²⁷⁰ Haifa report, 15.5.36, HA 8/37. After the AHC's visit Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim continued to seek clarification from 'Awni Bey about the ongoing discussions between the formal leadership and the government, which obviously concerned youth partisans in Haifa.

The tax strike was ushered in with raucous demonstrations on 15 May. ‘Isa al-Sifri provides estimates of the crowds that day which, if accurate, suggest that it witnessed some of Palestine’s largest demonstrations ever. At Jaffa he claims some 7000 assembled; at Nablus 10,000; and at Acre a protest designed as a mock funeral for “British justice,” complete with a casket, drew participants from the subdistrict.²⁷¹ Official estimates, which were broadcast via government communiqués and thus may have intentionally diminished the size of the protests, were much lower, putting the Jaffa crowd at 1000, for instance.²⁷² Demonstrators at Acre and Jaffa both attacked the police, who responded in the latter with lethal force, slaying one protestor.²⁷³

Both the CID and RAF derided the tax strike as not particularly relevant, since at the time little tax was actually due.²⁷⁴ Porath’s treatment of the subject echoes this opinion, noting that the majority of tax receipts were derived through indirect taxation.²⁷⁵ Empirically sound as these judgments are, they miss the importance of the motion’s success as emblematic of the growing tide of radicalization. They also omit attention to interactions between the uprising’s stalwarts, the general public, and elites. Where elites hesitated to take the step and further distance themselves from the British regime, popular forces and their allies zealously pressed on, overwhelming the wavering leadership and effectively imposing the tactic on it. The popular consensus on strategy,

²⁷¹ *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 49-52.

²⁷² Official communiqué 48/36, 15.5.36, ISA (2) 566-6m. The same number for Jaffa was later circulated by the Air Officer Commanding in an internal report (Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 26, PRO – CO 733/317/1).

²⁷³ Official communiqué 48/36, 15.5.36, ISA (2) 566-6m. Al-Sifri doesn’t give a death toll for Jaffa, but states that “many were killed and injured” by police (*Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 51).

²⁷⁴ CID, 21.5.36, periodical appreciation summary 10/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 3.6.36, monthly summary of intelligence (May), PRO – FO 371/20030. This evaluation discounts arrears of course.

²⁷⁵ *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 170.

whatever the misgivings of certain groups, was being shaped by the public itself, through its most organized elements represented in the popular and national committees, which passed the motion. After the quick dismissal of calls for a government workers strike, the success of the non-payment of taxes signaled that these forces had retaken the initiative and portended the continued deepening of the strike.

The intensification of the strike and the rebellion in urban centers

By the time the tax strike became effective, the general strike was beginning to give way to more menacing undercurrents. The AOC reported that “dangerous tendencies” were evident by 17 May, with “General insecurity on the highways, the throwing of bombs into Police Stations and the burning of crops” prominent features of the evolving rebellion.²⁷⁶ Small hand-held explosive devices, such as pipe bombs, made their debut in late April. Boutagy’s store in Haifa may have been their first target. They were used two days later in Jaffa and quickly became a daily staple of the rebellion.²⁷⁷ In Nablus, where A. Zu‘aytir and Mamduh al-Sukhn had begun preparations for paramilitary activity on 21 April, including arranging to hire a bomb maker from Syria, a bomb was thrown at the central police station on 5 May, and at the residence of ADC Hugh Foot, the highest local official, on 11 May.²⁷⁸ On 13 May bombs were hurled at the municipal building in Jaffa and at the district officer’s office in Tulkarm.²⁷⁹ The most ferocious use of bombs early on in the strike occurred in Haifa, where a string of

²⁷⁶ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 21, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

²⁷⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 30.4.36, #163, PRO – CO 733/310/1.

²⁷⁸ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 72, 88; Official communiqué 44/36, ISA (2) 566-6m.

²⁷⁹ Official communiqué 46/36, 13.5.36, ISA (2) 566-6m.

attacks on May 10 and 11 targeted the home of mayor and longtime-friend of the Zionist movement Hasan Shukri, the District Superintendent of Police, the Assistant District Commissioner, and the central police station – all without casualties.²⁸⁰

The proliferation of bombings was only one of many visible signs of the strike's metamorphosis into an insurrection. Towards the end of May, if not earlier, a general shift in tactics became apparent, and bomb attacks, sniping, and assaults on Jews and British police and troops became commonplace.²⁸¹ By this time police stations in Jaffa, Jenin and Nablus were shot at each night while elsewhere, such as at Nazareth and Acre, sniping was more sporadic.²⁸²

As the state's control of security deteriorated and the police were overwhelmed, the High Commissioner, with the concurrence of the AOC, requested military reinforcements, which began to arrive on 10 May.²⁸³ Regular reinforcements continued thereafter to be called to Palestine, until the size of the garrison had multiplied 12-fold and its troop strength reached approximately 20,000.²⁸⁴ By 22 May Palestine's infantry forces had been doubled and its complement of RAF bomber wings tripled, and by the close of the month military detachments were posted to most vital installations, such as

²⁸⁰ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 25, PRO – CO 733/317/1. These attacks may have been carried out by underground youth cells in which dozens of young men were organized prior to the strike (*al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 54-55).

²⁸¹ The escalation of the rebellion in the countryside is detailed separately below.

²⁸² Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 30, PRO – CO 733/317/1; HC to Colonial Secretary, 27.5.36 and 28.5.36, #287 and 292, PRO – FO 371/20033; *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 13-14.

²⁸³ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 22, PRO – CO 733/317/1. Officially the military's role was to buttress the colonial administration, known in imperial parlance as 'the civil power.' Joint military and civilian planning for defense and counter-insurgency began in late May, but as discussed below, the military rapidly became dissatisfied with what it saw as the administration's reluctance to undertake a campaign of "punitive measures" against the populace (Ibid., p. 33-34).

²⁸⁴ Report by the General Officer Commanding [hereafter Report by the GOC], part II, enclosure to: GOC to Undersecretary of War, 30.10.36, PRO – CO 733/317/1; DC-Northern (Keith-Roach) to Colonial Undersecretary (Parkinson), 30.9.36, PRO – CO 733/316/9; Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine*, p. 71.

oil depots, the railway workshops in Haifa, the broadcasting station in Ramallah, and the power station in Jerusalem.²⁸⁵ A destroyer was brought to harbor at Jaffa/Tel Aviv on 19 May after Arab lightermen attempted to board a vessel headed for Tel Aviv's fledgling port, opened on the 'Awja river (in the north of contemporary Tel Aviv) to replace the closed facilities at Jaffa. The lightermen were not easily deterred, however, and on the 25th mounted an attack at sea using hand-held explosives on another boat headed to Tel Aviv's jetty, before being apprehended by police.²⁸⁶

Several factors catalyzed the strike's transformation into an armed uprising. Certainly a core of radicalized peasants, youth, and workers had come to believe that force was the only avenue left through which to attain national and communal salvation. The state's use of firearms against demonstrators, as the CID noted, acted to spur militancy.²⁸⁷ Adding fuel to the fire, the Palestine administration released the biannual immigration schedule (which had been delayed for some weeks) affording permits for 4500 new Jewish immigrants, on 18 May.²⁸⁸ Finally, the state's arrest sweep days later of organizers and activists helped ignite a series of bloody urban and rural confrontations.

Colonial authorities hoped to avert further conflagration through the dispatch of the Royal Commission, announced the same day as the immigration schedule, whose work would only commence after 'order' had been restored.²⁸⁹ The AHC's response was emphatic. Sidestepping the Commission, it warned the High Commissioner on 19

²⁸⁵ Report by the GOC, part I, and Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 39, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

²⁸⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 19.5.36 and 25.5.36, #241 and 268, PRO – FO 371/20033.

²⁸⁷ CID, 23.6.36, periodical appreciation summary 11/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

²⁸⁸ *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 25.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

May that Britain's recalcitrance on the immigration issue would engender a strong public reaction, adding pointedly that: "It will be difficult for the [Arab Higher] Committee under such circumstances to continue to discharge its task which has reached a most difficult and critical stage."²⁹⁰

Though it was unwilling to offer any concessions, the administration was not entirely unsympathetic with the elites' position, which it saw as constrained by youthful radicals. The CID reported on 21 May that: "There is no doubt that the position cannot remain static and is likely to deteriorate owing to the efforts of the younger and more extremist element who are anxious to force the leaders into some more positive action." Murders, agrarian crime and the like were all put at the feet of youth, who were seen as instigators and agitators. It saw the AHC, whom it referred to as the movement's leaders, as straining to hold back more militant measures, but predicted that it would not be capable of such much longer.²⁹¹ HC Wauchope generally concurred in this assessment, regarding the AHC as having a moderating but "limited" effect on the struggle, whereas real power was vested in the NCs, as displayed during the 7 May congress.²⁹² This conjoint assessment by the High Commissioner and the CID paved the way for the first concerted push to break the youth trend's militancy.

On 23 May 61 Arab activists were arrested, most of whom were exiled and subjected to police supervision, but some of whom, like Akram Zu'aytir, were sent to an internment camp opened for political detainees at 'Awja al-Hafir on the Egyptian

²⁹⁰ AHC to HC, 19.5.36, ISA (2) 5076-4m. It reaffirmed its position of steadfastness, and its verbal deference to "the people," soon thereafter in a public communiqué (Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 115-17).

²⁹¹ CID, 21.5.36, periodical appreciation summary 10/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

²⁹² HC to Colonial Secretary, 23.5.36, #261, PRO – CO 733/310/2.

border.²⁹³ Members of the NCs were a clear target of the sweep, comprising two-thirds (40) of those detained.²⁹⁴ More arrests followed the next day, including Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani again and Fakhri Nashashibi (member of the Jaffa NC), and within a week, the detention camp at 'Awja al-Hafir began to fill with activists: Mamduh al-Sukhn and Qadri Tuqan of Nablus, Salih 'Abdu of the Drivers' Committee, Subhi al-Khadra (member of the Acre NC), 'Abd al-Ra'uf 'Abd al-Raziq (brother of the head of the Abu 'Ubayda scouts), Rafiq al-Shaykh Najib (youth leader from al-Tira), and others.²⁹⁵ In all, 37 additional leaders were detained by early June, while other NC members were exiled.²⁹⁶ Those arrested and sent to internment camps appear to be leaders that the colonial administration thought were most active or effective, and covered a spectrum of street and village activists – many probably members of the popular committees – and NC members.²⁹⁷ By contrast, the only member of the AHC interned was its able secretary, 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi.²⁹⁸

The initial arrests on 23 May caused a major outcry, and brought about a tumultuous demonstration at Nablus where police killed four protestors and wounded seven, while precipitating a battle between Tulkarm area villagers and the colonial

²⁹³ Most sources say 61 arrests were made (Kalkas, "The Revolt," p. 250; Kayyali, *Palestine: a modern history*, p. 193; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 255), but the *Report to the League of Nations* for the year states the number was 65 (p. 25).

²⁹⁴ Kalkas, "The Revolt," p. 250.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 117-19.

²⁹⁶ Kalkas, "The Revolt," p. 251.

²⁹⁷ For instance, three members of the Safad NC were interned (Nasuh Munnawir, Kamal Sa'd al-Din, and Jamal Hamid Qaddura), along with two other youth activists (Sa'id 'Aziz al-Hajj 'Isa and Fu'ad al-Khadra), because the local authorities were convinced that they were the local power brokers and organizers of note ('Abbasi, *Safad fi 'ahd al-intidab*, p. 209, 219).

²⁹⁸ 'Awni Bey was briefly succeeded by 'Izzat Darwaza, before he too was detained. Fu'ad Saba became the third and final AHC secretary during the strike.

authorities near Bal‘a, where four peasant rebels were injured.²⁹⁹ Nonetheless, the state was undeterred and its move to arrest, imprison, or internally exile popular leaders became a major component of its strategy to suppress the rebellion. Although details are scanty, the arrest of local leaders and activists appears to have become a continuous directive after the first sweep, and clearly aimed at crippling the revolt’s ground-level leadership. Foreseeing the crackdown, the NCs had prepared themselves for arrests by selecting alternate members or making provision for their later election or selection.³⁰⁰ They were thus able to maintain continuity of operations in spite of the detentions, which mounted considerably. Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim counts 800 youths and members of the national committees imprisoned during the strike.³⁰¹ Many of these leaders were eventually held at a large internment camp built from a former RAF billet at Sarafand al-‘Amar (commonly known as Sarafand), near Ramle.³⁰² At its peak 400 detainees were housed there, including the first batch of political detainees that had been sent to ‘Awja al-Hafir.³⁰³ Other strike activists and arrestees were sent to Acre prison or a camp at Nur al-Shams, near Tulkarm.³⁰⁴

The colonial state’s deployment of military reinforcements to cities and flashpoints and its strategy of incarcerating the uprising’s local leadership were unable to halt the intensification of the uprising. Urban centers, and especially the mixed cities,

²⁹⁹ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 70; Kayyali, *Palestine: a modern history*, p. 193. Al-Sifri places great emphasis on the detentions of Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman and Akram Zu‘aytir in particular as generating mass mobilization. This is at least partially corroborated by a letter sent to Humphrey Bowman, Director of Education, from an Arab correspondent, cited in: Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 218.

³⁰⁰ Najib, 14.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875; Haifa reports, 17.6.36 and 26.6.36, HA 8/38.

³⁰¹ *Al-Difa‘ ‘an Haifa*, p. 161.

³⁰² Kalkas, “The Revolt,” p. 250-51; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 56.

³⁰³ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 56

³⁰⁴ Haifan youth organizer Yunis Nafi‘, for instance, was imprisoned at Acre (HA report, 27.6.36, HA 8/38).

became zones of conflict and violence between Arabs and Jews. Although both British and Zionist narratives depict this as consisting solely of Palestinian attacks, and extol the Labor Zionist policy of “self-restraint” (*havlagah*) whereby the *yishuv* ostensibly avoided retaliation while the state alone suppressed the rebellion, in reality Jews also attacked Arabs, if with less frequency.³⁰⁵ The killing at Jerusalem by Zionist assailants of one member of a secret Arab society named *al-Hurriyya* (freedom) is one such example, which in turn triggered one of the most sensational episodes of urban violence during the strike. Bahjat Abu Gharbiyya, a member of *al-Hurriyya*, says that originally the group intended its first operation to be against the British, but after their comrade’s death, it became a matter of “revenge.” He and his associate, Sami al-Ansari, then carefully planned to carry out a massacre at the Edison theater, a Jewish cinema, though in the event only al-Ansari wound up unloading his revolver into the crowd on 16 May, killing three.³⁰⁶

In addition to arresting local leaders, the state’s response to mushrooming violence relied heavily on what it referred to as ‘searches’ of persons, areas, and whole villages. Shortly after the Edison theater shooting the police began conducting regular

³⁰⁵ This rendition of events was accepted by the Peel Commission, for instance (p. 121). For perspectives and discussions on *havlagah*, see: Haim, *Abandonment*; Anita Shapira, *Land and Power*; Segev, *One Palestine*, p. 382-87. The notion that *havlagah* prevailed within the *yishuv* in 1936 has been challenged by Uri Ben Eliezer, though he concentrates on the changing parameters of paramilitary organization and discourse concerning the use of arms more than on an accounting of Jewish assaults or retaliations (*The Making*, p. 6, 19-33). Abu Gharbiyya maintains that Zionist retaliations began early on during the strike, were well-organized, and followed quickly on the heels of events to which they were responding (*Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 68). Unprovoked assaults on Arabs by Jews did also occur. Early on in the strike the British grew aggravated that Jews transiting through Arab towns (under escort) sometimes attacked the locals, in one instance in Jenin, for example, trying to run over an Arab (Digest, p. 7, 7.5.36, HA 8/37). A rare British admission of “brutal” Zionist violence appears in: HC to Colonial Secretary, 22.8.36, CP 225 (36), PRO – CAB 24/263.

³⁰⁶ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 63, 67-70.

searches for arms at the gates of the Old City.³⁰⁷ The officer in charge of searches in the area was Assistant Superintendent of Police Alan Sigrist, who was reviled and feared by the Arabs and who had a reputation for abusing residents and harassing and humiliating youth especially. As Abu Gharbiya describes:

Sigrist used to cruise the streets daily in his little Morris car [with] a[nother] car of guards, and every time he saw two or more youths walking in the street he would stop and deliver them blows with his truncheon, his hands, and his legs without any reason, until the streets which he passed through became free of passers-by as soon as his well-known car was seen in the distance...³⁰⁸

Sigrist showed no respect for Arabs in the administration either, once beating a Jerusalem district officer, Khulusi al-Khayri, before forcing him to join young men in picking up nails strewn in the street by rebels. In another incident he hospitalized and disfigured the brother of local activist Shukri Qutayna, which earned him a death threat from the latter.³⁰⁹ His most infamous exploit occurred on 30 May, when in the early hours of dawn he led a detachment of 150 police in a search of the Bab al-Hutta quarter, a Muslim neighborhood in the Old City adjacent to the *Haram al-sharif* compound. The party divided up and broke into homes willy-nilly, surprising half-dressed occupants, holding them at gunpoint and beating the men randomly. In line with searches being conducted in the countryside, the police destroyed kitchen utensils and storage vessels, despoiled foodstuffs, smashed all manner of furniture, and generally trampled the residents' property underfoot, including copies of the Holy Qur'an. Coffeehouses and bakeries in the neighborhood were treated similarly. Local *'ulama*, who were not

³⁰⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.5.36, #252, PRO – FO 371/20033.

³⁰⁸ Abu Gharbiya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 72.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 72-73.

striking, quickly conducted an investigation into the destruction and submitted a report along with a letter of protest to the government, to no avail.³¹⁰

As a hated symbol of colonial arrogance and brutality, it is little surprise that Sigrist was the target of an assassination attempt.³¹¹ Abu Gharbiya, then age 19, and Sami al-Ansari attacked Sigrist on 12 June, shooting him before he managed to kill al-Ansari while Abu Gharbiya escaped. When word of the attack circulated, a jubilant mood erupted in Arab quarters and a curious demonstration followed in which children dressed as faux soldiers wearing bowls on their heads (in place of helmets) paraded with sticks through the streets, shouting “Sigrist is dead” and “*Allahu akbar*.”³¹²

As the administration was soon quick to recognize, the search regime put Arab police, the majority of the force, in a difficult position.³¹³ Given their aggressive and invasive character, they undoubtedly provoked or sharpened the sense of conflicted loyalties evident among many Palestinian police between their jobs and nationalist identification.³¹⁴ When the strike began, intimations of sympathy for the rebellion were almost immediate. Some officers resigned rather than be called on to suppress fellow

³¹⁰ Memo of protest from ‘*ulama* to the HC concerning police attacks on mosques and homes, 1.6.36, and enclosure, précis of the investigation of the ‘*ulama*, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 436-38; Minutes of a meeting, HC w/ certain ‘ulema, 1.6.36, PRO – CO 733/310/3.

³¹¹ Beyond his reputation in the streets, Sigrist was savaged by the Arab press for his role in the search regime (al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 83).

³¹² Abu Gharbiya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 74-77; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 52. Abu Gharbiya erroneously claims that Sigrist was killed in the attack (76).

³¹³ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 34, PRO – CO 733/317/1. Some 1516 Arabs were on the force (*Report to the League of Nations*, 1936, p. 117).

³¹⁴ This conundrum was hardly new for Arabs in the service. Many Palestinian police had been regarded as unreliable or worse in 1929. In the intervening years before the revolt, the state’s effort to pursue nationalist activists continued to be off-putting to Arabs. For instance, the famous Palestinian poet and rebel fighter ‘Abd al-Rahim Mahmud served in the Nazareth area for a year before quitting the force over precisely this issue (‘Abd al-Fatah al-Qalqili, *al-Sha’ir al-muqatil: ‘Abd al-Rahim Mahmud* (Jerusalem: al-Markaz al-Filastiniyya li-l-bahuth wa-l-dirasat al-istratijiyya, n.d.), p. 6).

Arabs.³¹⁵ More commonly, Palestinian police found ways to express some level of national solidarity without leaving their jobs. Clandestine fundraising for the struggle by police may have begun as early as the strike's second week.³¹⁶ Most importantly, some Arab police effectively became double agents, passing on vital intelligence to rebels, both in the cities and in the countryside, and helping them acquire weapons and ammunition from state stockpiles.³¹⁷ Tahir al-Misri, a prominent Nabulsi merchant and co-signer of the original general strike call, had contacts among Nablus police.³¹⁸ In Jaffa the National Guard had an ally on the police force.³¹⁹ The same was true for nationalists in Haifa, Safad, Acre, Tulkarm and other locations.³²⁰ Some police also had indirect contacts with strikers and rebels, passing information to their own relatives, who then in turn sent it on to the NCs.³²¹ By June the Inspector General of police viewed Arabs in the service as unreliable and untrustworthy, especially those at Jerusalem and Jaffa.³²² A group of Arab police at the time tried to organize their colleagues to openly declare a strike, but at least some rebels were reported to oppose the effort on account of the fact that the police were more valuable as conduits for intelligence and arms than otherwise.³²³

³¹⁵ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 102.

³¹⁶ Digest, p. 3, 3.5.36, HA 8/37.

³¹⁷ See below.

³¹⁸ Report, 15.7.36, HA 8/39.

³¹⁹ Report, 22.7.36, HA 8/39.

³²⁰ Haifa reports, 9.7.36 and 10.7.36, HA 8/39; Najib, 21.5.36 and 27.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875; Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 55-56.

³²¹ Letter, recipient scratched out, no author, 29.6.36, HA 8/38. The letter appears to be from an informer handled by the Arab Bureau.

³²² Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 46, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

³²³ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 98; Arab Bureau information, 31.5.36 and 16.6.36, CZA S/25 – 22231. Months later, after much wrangling and threats by the administration, a very small contingent of police submitted a watery protest (HC to Colonial Secretary, 15.8.36, PRO – CO 733/310/5).

Though many police bore clear sympathies for the uprising, some served the government without compunction. These men became targets for the rebels. As Hillel Cohen describes, strikers initially ostracized those who took actions against them, but after the strike's escalation in late May, they were subjected to attacks.³²⁴ Police who rebels deemed inadequately supportive of the uprising were assaulted with firearms in the streets and in their homes.³²⁵ Though in mid-June only two Palestinian policemen had died during the strike, the number later climbed.³²⁶ Detective Halim Basta and his deputy, Ahmad Na'if, both stationed in Haifa and both of whom had aided in squelching al-Qassam's revolt, topped a reputed hit list drawn up by *Qassamiyun* and their allies.³²⁷ On 2 August Na'if was assassinated and his loss reportedly incapacitated the secret police.³²⁸ Sergeant Shafiq al-Ghusayn was killed a fortnight later in Jerusalem, followed by officer Rashid Shakir of al-Bassa village near Acre.³²⁹ An attempt on Halim Basta's life was made on 7 October.³³⁰ Police informants were also killed by rebels, particularly later in the strike.³³¹ Na'if's assassination was subsequently attributed by Zionist sources to one Sa'd Sa'd, an agent of the Black Hand, but British intelligence concluded

³²⁴ *Army of Shadows*, p. 104.

³²⁵ Ibid; Report, 22.7.36, HA 8/39.

³²⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.6.36, #385, PRO – CO 733/310/3.

³²⁷ Haifa report, 2.8.36, HA 8/40; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 104.

³²⁸ Haifa reports, 2.8.36 and 4.8.36, HA 8/40.

³²⁹ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 105; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 84.

³³⁰ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 85.

³³¹ Haifa report, 8.9.36, HA 8/41; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 85; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 204. As an index of the growing vehemence against collaborators, al-Sifri and Zu'aytir both write about a man from 'Ayn Karim outside Jerusalem, who the latter refers to as an informer. His appearance at the funeral of rebel commander Sa'id al-'As led to his being beaten to death on the spot, and even to an attempt to feed his corpse to dogs.

that the gunman was a shaykh Dib al-‘Azim of Ijzim in the Haifa subdistrict, who was given critical aid by shaykh Yusuf Abu Durra, a veteran of the battle of Ya‘bad.³³²

The mass desertion of Arab police, much feared by the state, never occurred. Yet in spite of the noticeable abstention of police and other state employees from formal participation in the strike, its pulse seemed to grow, week by week. Neither the search regime nor the arrest campaign seemed to more than dent urban unrest and the ardor of strike partisans. Nowhere was this more crystalline for the state than in Jaffa. As the AOC described it, “The Old City had become a citadel from which bombing and sniping was continually directed against the Police and Military. In fact it completely defied the authorities and no political or police officer could hope to enter its tortuous alleyways without assassination.” Retaking control of the Old City was part and parcel of the administration’s plan to break the strike in the city, in particular by ending the Arab lightermen’s grip on the port. The lightermen, who participated in attacks on Tel Aviv and were well-known stalwarts and symbols of the strike, would be replaced by Jewish and Egyptian laborers, and thereafter, it was hoped, would be compelled to return to work. For the plan to be put in motion, the Old City, which overlooked the harbor and from which snipers had free reign, needed to be wrested back from the rebels.³³³

The military’s scheme for the reconquest of Old Jaffa had three components. Firstly, to combat sniping from its protected confines, the military made sustained use of machine guns and rifle grenades, responding to any incident with superior force. When

³³² Committee of the ‘Afula Bloc to A.H. Cohen, 20.1.37, CZA S/25 – 22192; Memorandum, n.d., p.2-3, MEC – Tegart papers 1: 3c). For more on the Black Hand see the next chapter.

³³³ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 36, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

this quickly changed the balance of power between rebels and the government, residents of Jaffa were compelled to participate in clearing the barricades and cleaning the filth and debris that had accumulated in its streets. The centerpiece to the campaign transposed to Palestine a technique long used to quell resistance and facilitate colonial rule in India's cities: the Old City was subject to wholesale demolition, and in place of its forbidding warren of slender streets and alleyways the Mandate regime built roads suitable for military use.³³⁴

On 13 June the administration received approval from the Colonial Office for the operation, and on the 16th the military distributed notices of evacuation in the area which fallaciously claimed that demolitions were being conducted in order to introduce improvements to the area and promising compensation to those losing their homes.³³⁵ On 18 June the first segment of the demolitions was carried out, and a road 10 meters wide was paved from 'Ajami police station westwards toward the sea, but before the second leg of the operation was initiated Jaffan residents petitioned the High Court for an injunction.³³⁶ At the urging of the High Commissioner, to circumvent intervention from the judicial branch the military sped up the second round of demolitions, which were completed at the end of June, only days before the High Court delivered a sharp

³³⁴ Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 55; Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 55, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

³³⁵ Colonial Secretary to HC, 13.6.36, #268, PRO – CO 733/311/3; Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 55, PRO – CO 733/317/1; Notice, n.d., reprinted in al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 94. Although at court the government refused to identify the source of the notices (ibid, p. 102), the AOC subsequently reported that they were circulated by the military.

³³⁶ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 55, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

rebuke to the administration for its blithe dishonesty concerning the operation.³³⁷

Though the court didn't stop the destruction of Old Jaffa, the AHC printed thousands of copies of the verdicts (written in two statements by the Chief Justice and the Senior Puisne Judge) and distributed them far and wide as proof of the colonial state's ill-intentions and casuistry.

'Isa al-Sifri equated the damage done by the demolitions to an earthquake.³³⁸

Approximately 220 homes were destroyed, rendering 450 families or perhaps 6000 people homeless, though owing to the panic which the state induced through the operation, another 1000 families were estimated to flee the area.³³⁹ Additionally, the state used the occasion to tear down some 825 wooden sheds and huts (*takhashib*) that served as housing for 4000 more people.³⁴⁰ Since the government claimed at court that the Old City demolitions were sanctioned under the 1931 Order-in-Council, which contained no strict provision for compensation in instances of property destruction, the state paid only 20 mils per head – a mere pittance – to those who lost their homes.³⁴¹

The newly dispossessed families added to the city's population of homeless Arabs,

³³⁷ Ibid, p. 55-56. The case brought by petitioner Hanna Mikha'il Qasir, an affected home owner, proved to be a major fiasco for the administration. The Order-in-Council (1931) invoked as providing the legal authority for the demolitions stipulated that buildings could be razed (not dynamited as they were) for purposes of defense, which was at clear variance with the government's public explanation of events via its notices in Arabic. The case illustrated the growing friction between the upper ranks of the judiciary, especially Chief Justice Malcolm McDonnell, and the Palestine administration, over the latter's efforts to undermine the independence of the judicial branch, subordinate it to the suppression campaign, and to otherwise evade the letter of the law when it was deemed expedient. McDonnell was subsequently forced out of his post. The transformation of the legal sphere during the strike and its ramifications for the state are taken up further in the next chapter. The verdicts in this case appear (in Arabic) in al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 98-106.

³³⁸ *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 96.

³³⁹ Ibid, p. 97; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 134.

³⁴⁰ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 98. These makeshift quarters were in the neighborhoods of Shaykh Murad, al-Jabalya, Saknat Abu Kabir, and 'Arab al-Dawudi.

³⁴¹ Verdict of first British [Senior Puisne] Judge, in al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 104-05; HC to Colonial Secretary, 18.6.36, #389, PRO – CO 733/311/3.

which had swelled after the arsons in April largely destroyed Manshiya.³⁴² While compounding the plight of the afflicted in Jaffa, the demolitions did not smother local resistance.³⁴³ The government's plan to break the port strike was dead in the water even before the second phase of the operation, and although the area was temporarily quieted by the military's machine guns and the ensuing devastation, rebel activity continued.³⁴⁴ The lightermen were reported in late July, for instance, to carry out nightly attacks on Beit Vegan, a Jewish neighborhood in the borderland between Jaffa and Tel Aviv.³⁴⁵

The National Guard, which had by then been implicated in or suspected of myriad acts of subversion and incitement, was banned and suppressed in July.³⁴⁶ Its leadership was arrested and interned at Sarafand (Ibrahim al-Shanti), went into hiding, or fled to Syria (Jawdat al-Habab and Rashad Bibi).³⁴⁷ Despite the group's early demise, its accomplishments were considerable. Aside from earning regard for its staunch position, damages to Jewish property in Jaffa were estimated by the JA at £P 100,000, or two-fifths of total direct material losses sustained by the *yishuv* during the strike.³⁴⁸

³⁴² Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 97.

³⁴³ This is contrary to Porath's contention (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 180).

³⁴⁴ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 55, PRO – CO 733/317/1; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 24.6.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030. This is not to say that the demolitions didn't cause the rebels much consternation. The lightermen especially were reported by Haganah intelligence to feel that they had lost a shelter and a base (Report from "the source," 2.7.36, HA 8/39). Dejection spread throughout the city (Najib, 23.7.36, CZA S/25 – 3875), but its partisans carried on.

³⁴⁵ Najib, 25.7.36, CZA S/25 – 3875. Technically the neighborhood was part of the Jaffa municipality, but it sought to be rezoned as part of Tel Aviv (LeVine, *Overthrowing Geography*, p. 202). For further account of militant action by Jaffans, see for instance: Reports, 12.7.36 and 17.7.36, HA 8/39; ASP-Southern (Foley) to IG-Police, n.d. [18.7.36 or after], HA 8/39; Division of acts of terrorism, 15.8.36, HA 8/40. Also see below.

³⁴⁶ CID, 12.7.36, periodical appreciation summary 12/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; Report, 22.7.36, HA 8/39; Arab Bureau information, situation appreciation, 26.7.36, CZA S/25 – 22231. See also: Report, 17.7.36, HA 8/39.

³⁴⁷ Kalkas, "The Revolt," p. 251; Report from "the source," 2.7.36 and Report, 22.7.36, HA 8/39.

³⁴⁸ Peel Commission report, p. 105-06.

Doubtless this owes in significant measure to the National Guard, along with the lightermen and other popular forces in the city.

While Jaffa bore the brunt of the state's increasingly militarized response to the strike, other cities also witnessed serious engagements and became sites of urban warfare. The army's decision to take over schools throughout the country and use them as barracks and bases³⁴⁹ escalated this dynamic and contributed to the militarization of urban space and urban centers. Nablus was surrounded with barbed wire and the army occupied the local *shari'a* court and the Sports Union Club (the NC's headquarters) and mounted machine guns on the latter's roof which were used against Arabs in the city.³⁵⁰ The historic Jazzar mosque in Acre was riddled with machinegun fire on at least one occasion.³⁵¹ In response, Arab paramilitaries struck back at urban military, police, and administrative targets as well as Jewish persons and assets. In June, Hasan Salameh, a veteran of the 1933 demonstrations and *al-Jihad al-muqaddas* from al-Quleh (near Lydda), led raids into Ramallah and Ramle while, in a separate operation, the Lydda airport used by the military was savaged by Taha al-Nimr's band.³⁵² Nablus boasted several urban platoons whose primary objective was reputedly to tie-down local military forces and enable rebels in the countryside a freer hand.³⁵³ Army and police bases were attacked in Safad on 9 August by forces commanded by 'Abdullah al-Sha'ir, and in

³⁴⁹ Miller, *Government and Society*, p. 116.

³⁵⁰ Arab Bureau information, 10.6.36, CZA S/25 – 22231; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 123; Foreign Undersecretary (O.G.R. Williams) to Foreign Secretary (Eden), 17.8.36, covering letter to an Arab Women's Committee petition, PRO – FO 371/20023.

³⁵¹ AHC to HC, 20.6.36, PRO – FO 371/20023. The administration's explanation for the shooting – that its soldiers were aiming for the *waqf* building adjacent to the mosque – only underlines the widening scope of military repression (Covering memo by FO to (AHC to HC, 20.6.36), n.d., PRO – FO 371/20023).

³⁵² Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 204-05; Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 188-89.

³⁵³ Events in Nablus (S.G.), 14.7.36, HA 8/39.

September rebels in Jerusalem attempted to assassinate the Assistant Chief Secretary, Max Nurock, and his aide.³⁵⁴ Despite the steady multiplication of such incidents, however, by June the revolt's center of gravity lay in the rural zones of the country.

Rural insurrection

In the countryside, the strike was first accompanied by a resurgence of agrarian crime and the provision of food and financial aid to Arabs in the cities.³⁵⁵ Material support by villages continued throughout the strike, but rural participation quickly grew more manifold.³⁵⁶ In the Nablus area a number of villages formed national committees on the model of those in the cities and convoked a series of mass meetings in early May in support of the strike.³⁵⁷ A similar meeting took place in Safad with villagers from the area coming together to form NCs and affirm the national movement's political demands.³⁵⁸ Public forums in rural areas were on occasion truly massive, with one reported by the Shai to have been attended by an estimated 6000 villagers who came bearing arms.³⁵⁹ Village residents also sent petitions to the state backing the strike's

³⁵⁴ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 76; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 11.9.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

³⁵⁵ HC to Colonial Secretary, 4.5.36, #180, PRO – CO 733/310/1.

³⁵⁶ DIG-CID to HC, 8.6.36, PRO – FO 371/20021; HC to Colonial Secretary, 16.7.36, PRO – FO 371/20022.

³⁵⁷ Formation of national committees in Nablus villages, in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 416-17. Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 76, 85-87.

³⁵⁸ 'Abbasi, *Safad fi 'ahd al-intidab*, p. 219-20.

³⁵⁹ Report, 13.5.36, HA 8/37. The name of the host village is illegible in the report. The AOC noted another such mass meeting on 18 May at Abu Ghosh (in the Latrun area) that was attended by thousands of pro-strike peasants (Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 29, PRO – CO 733/317/1).

demands and protesting the “Judaization” of the country, while adding further desiderata, such as state confiscation of Zionists’ clandestine arms stockpiles.³⁶⁰

Rather quickly some peasants and villagers moved to take up arms and fight the hated dual colonial order. The AOC reported that during the final two weeks of May the surge of peasant activity produced a “great increase in general lawlessness.”³⁶¹ By this time he regarded the *fellahin* in Samaria district in particular as “completely out of control.”³⁶² In truth, attacks on Jewish colonies, state institutions, and British and Jewish traffic on the country’s roads, as well as sabotage of public infrastructure (telephone and telegraph lines), began shortly after the strike’s declaration. Although some villagers complained that urban leaders left the fighting to the peasants, others lost no time in assaulting Zionist colonies or other targets.³⁶³ According to Yasin, one of the first bands appeared on the Nablus-Jerusalem road on 28 April and, under the command of Muhammad Salih al-Hamad (a.k.a. Abu Khalid), one of the first *Qassamiyun*, attacked a British military patrol.³⁶⁴ In the Tulkarm and Ramle subdistricts villagers from al-Tira, Miske, Taybe, ‘Azun, Kafr ‘Abbush, Far‘un, Irtah and other communities were reported to be responsible for attacks in early May on nearby Jewish settlements, consisting generally of sniping, arson and property destruction (uprooting trees, sabotaging

³⁶⁰ E.g. Representatives of the Jamma‘in *nahiya* to ADC-Nablus, via Salfit police, 26.4.36, in *Watha‘iq al-haraka*, p. 416-17. See also other examples in the same collection (under Formation of national committees in Nablus villages).

³⁶¹ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 29, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

³⁶² Ibid, p. 32.

³⁶³ Najib, 4.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

³⁶⁴ *Al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 122.

equipment, etc).³⁶⁵ One of the first of such rebel operations was led by Faris al-‘Azuni (from the village of the same name, east of Qalqilya), who attacked Kfar Saba with his men at the close of April.³⁶⁶ Shaykh Farhan al-Sa‘di and some of his *Qassami* colleagues were also active. Early targets of these and other rebel groups included Tel Litvinsky, Kfar Yabetz, Beit Alfa, ‘Ein Herod, ‘Ein Hahores, and Ramat Hakovesh, all located in the Marj Ibn ‘‘Amir or the coastal plain.³⁶⁷

More so than Jewish colonies, rebels directed their firepower early on at traffic on the roads and railways. This tactic was not merely the product of happenstance or aversion to risk; rather, impeding or shutting down traffic complemented the economic dimensions of the strike by disrupting commercial transit in Palestine’s interior. The country’s roads and shipping lanes were integral to the twin British projects of refashioning the local economy and building the Jewish National Home, both of which were despised by rural partisans. The attempt to paralyze Palestine’s transportation network, and the interrelated effort aimed at knocking out communications infrastructure, also struck at the state’s capacity to impose its authority in the

³⁶⁵ Najib, 6.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875. Khalil al-Khuri claimed that early attacks in the coastal plain were directed by rural leaders – Ahmad Abu Diya and Rafiq al-Shaykh Najib from al-Tira and ‘Ali al-Qasim from Taybeh – the latter two of which had worked for Jewish plantations or previously extorted “protection” monies from them (ibid.). (Al-Qasim, the son in law of the Tulkarm mayor, had also previously been involved in land-dealing, and according to Cohen, over the years of the Mandate seemed to alternately aid the Palestinian national movement and the Zionists as it suited him – see *Army of Shadows*, p. 68-70, 123, 194). The emergent campaign waged by rebels was dealt a setback mid-month when authorities arrested 18 youth from al-Tira in relation to the attacks (Najib, 13.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875).

³⁶⁶ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 137. Yasin offers a totally exaggerated estimate of Jewish casualties from the encounter.

³⁶⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary: 26.4.36 and 28.4.36, #151 and 154, PRO – CO 733/310/1; 26.5.36, #283, PRO – CO 733/310/2; 27.5.36, #287, PRO – FO 371/20033. The colonies listed stretched northwest and south from Tulkarm, indicating that rebel partisans from a number of additional subdistricts (Beisan, Jenin, Nablus, Jaffa, and possibly Haifa, Ramallah, or further afield) could have been involved.

countryside, protect its personnel and installations, and dispatch its ground forces.³⁶⁸ By attacking transportation and communications arteries, rebels thus sought to disrupt the colonial state's functioning, undermine its credibility (and self-image), hinder and harass its military, and diminish internal trade, thereby depriving the regime of the appearance of normalcy and order.³⁶⁹

Jewish ground transport was put under government escort from the earliest days of the strike.³⁷⁰ A month later, on 23 May a permit system run by police was instituted on roads throughout much of the country, excepting Tel Aviv and parts of the Northern District.³⁷¹ These measures failed to stem the growing tide of sniping, sabotage, and other attacks on transit. Trains and railways were demolished or sabotaged with growing frequency and skill from June on, and according to al-Sifri, no bridge on any major road escaped the campaign of subversion.³⁷² The most successful rebel operations of this variety caused train derailments, such as a 15 car wreck at Kafr Jins station, the destruction at Qaqun (Jaffa subdistrict) of a military train, and a 28 car pile-up on the Ra's al-‘Ayn line (Ramle subdistrict).³⁷³ Large-scale incidents were costly and on occasion killed members of train crews or their military guards. In response to the rash

³⁶⁸ This was partly acknowledged by the CID: 23.6.36, periodical appreciation summary 12/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

³⁶⁹ Yasin's explanation for the concentration on the railways mostly highlights their military functions and their utility as (armored) transport for Jews (*al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 205), but the total offensive on communications and transport speaks to broader logics.

³⁷⁰ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 29.4.36, monthly summary of intelligence (April), PRO – FO 371/20030.

³⁷¹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 22.5.36, #260, PRO – FO 371/20033; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 3.6.36, monthly summary of intelligence (May), PRO – FO 371/20030.

³⁷² RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.6.36, 24.6.36, 1.7.36, weekly summaries of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 71. Al-Sifri notes that the saboteurs grew more sophisticated in concealing mined and sabotaged sections of railway, and learned to evade the standard means of detection (trolleys sent ahead of trains as scouts) (p. 71-71).

³⁷³ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 74.

of incidents on the rail line in its vicinity, Lydda was searched and assessed a £P 5000 collective fine in June.³⁷⁴ In July rebels added the Iraq Petroleum Company's pipeline (transiting the Marj Ibn "Amir and terminating in Haifa) and water lines around Jerusalem to their list of targets for sabotage.³⁷⁵

By the end of May the police and the military had become the rural rebels' primary targets, and the RAF commented at the time that the "added determination" of the Palestinian fighters was "most marked."³⁷⁶ The new Colonial Secretary, William Ormsby-Gore, reported to parliament on 19 June that on a daily basis Palestine witnessed approximately 15 incidents of sniping or firearms attacks, 8 instances of railway sabotage, 5-10 bomb attacks, and 5-10 instances of telephone and telegraph sabotage.³⁷⁷ The pace of hostile engagements continued to quicken thereafter, with British military forces' use of firearms rising steeply from 113 total instances during roughly the first two months of the strike (until 17 June) to 253 instances by 1 July, only two weeks later.³⁷⁸ The number of encounters more than doubled again over the next month (by 31 July) to 542 and rose at a somewhat higher monthly rate over August to reach 897 by 4 September.³⁷⁹

The rebels practiced guerilla warfare, and were typically able to evade and frustrate the police and military, but as their confidence and numbers grew, bravado and inexperience led them into a number of withering head-on encounters with much more

³⁷⁴ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 1.7.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

³⁷⁵ CID, 26.7.36, periodical appreciation summary 13/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

³⁷⁶ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 3.6.36, monthly summary of intelligence (May), PRO – FO 371/20030.

³⁷⁷ Colonial Secretary to HC, 19.6.36, #273, PRO – CO 733/310/3.

³⁷⁸ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.6.36 and 1.7.36, weekly summaries of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

³⁷⁹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 31.7.36 and 4.9.36, weekly summaries of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030. These figures do not include police engagements.

numerous and heavily armed British forces.³⁸⁰ One such battle occurred on 21 June near Dayr al-Sharaf between Nablus and Tulkarm. A party of some 70 rebels attacking a convoy became embroiled in a 7 ½ hour firefight in which perhaps 25 rebels were killed while British forces lost only one soldier.³⁸¹ Rebels did at least manage to restrain the RAF, which reported that 3 of its planes were forced down.³⁸² Similarly, at Bab al-Wad in the Latrun salient on 26 July a party of 16 rebels firing on a Jewish convoy were engaged by its guards who forced them to retreat. British reinforcements encircled the band in the adjacent forest, and together with the RAF succeeded in killing 12 of their number, who were all found to be between 20 and 30 years of age.³⁸³

Pitched battles played to British strength, hence most of the time rebels endeavored to avoid the combined punishment of RAF airpower and ground forces' machine guns and autocannons (mini-howitzers). As the Syrian pan-Arab adventurer Fawzi al-Qawuqji somewhat dismissively summarized, before his arrival in August Palestinian rebel bands focused on assaulting caravans, capturing their guards' (more recent vintage) weapons, and then melting away into the countryside.³⁸⁴ The AOC's

³⁸⁰ The Colonial Secretary acknowledged to parliament in mid-June that the (Colonial Secretary to HC, 19.6.36, #273, PRO – CO 733/310/3).

³⁸¹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 24.6.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 77-78. The RAF estimated 20-25 rebels were killed, though they only recovered two bodies, but al-Sifri's account confirms 25 deaths, while erring in claiming rebels killed three British soldiers. Yasin provides a wildly fanciful and totally inaccurate account of this battle, though he gives its date as 22 June, terming it a "good beginning" to rebel operations in the triangle area (*al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 128). Interestingly, he recounts that the rebels were led by 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad, from the Tulkarm subdistrict, who went on to become one of the most respected rebel commanders, and for a brief period, titular leader of revolt.

³⁸² RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 24.6.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

³⁸³ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 79.

³⁸⁴ Al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 21. Al-Qawuqji arrogantly regarded the revolt as without serious consequence before his arrival (p. 20).

extended account generally backs up this description, noting that rebels were highly mobile and greatly adept at blending in to village and other environs in public.³⁸⁵

Although rebels were often badly bloodied if caught in an extended firefight, they did on occasion mount significant offensives. The Jewish *moshav* Kfar Yehezke'el (located between Beisan and 'Afule) faced repeated assaults in June from a large party of rebels estimated by residents at 300 in number, but more conservatively by the army at 100-150 men.³⁸⁶ Later in the month the CID noted that other Beisan area settlements, including 'Ein Herod, were sustaining heavy attacks.³⁸⁷ According to the Haganah, these assaults, targeting colonies isolated from the primary areas of Jewish settlement, were the most dangerous attacks waged by Arabs against rural Zionist communities during the strike.³⁸⁸ During the second half of July Jewish settlements in the coastal plain became a focus of rebel hostilities, which led the authorities to deploy tanks and armor in select locations as a prophylactic.³⁸⁹ Although Jewish persons, urban neighborhoods, and colonies were subjected to rebel violence with great frequency – the Haganah tallied some 1996 total attacks by Arabs during the strike – rebels for the most part did not attempt to overrun or occupy rural or suburban settlements.³⁹⁰ This likely owed to Palestinian perceptions, shared by the British, that the Zionists were well-

³⁸⁵ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 70, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

³⁸⁶ Reports, 10.6.36 and 13.6.36, HA 8/38. These attacks are noted by Subhi Yasin in his historical chronicle, though the first assault is put on 12 June, not the 10th, and the second is recorded as on a patrol near the settlement. Interestingly, unlike numerous episodes for which he provides exaggerated accounts of brave Arab rebels subduing or defeating their foes, he says little about what Jewish colonists claimed were large-scale operations (*al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 85).

³⁸⁷ CID, 23.6.36, periodical appreciation summary 11/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

³⁸⁸ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 338.

³⁸⁹ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 82, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

³⁹⁰ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 338-39.

armed.³⁹¹ It also stemmed from the fact, recognized by the RAF, that the British military was the rebels' chief target.³⁹²

The rebels were nothing if not flexible, and adapted their targets and tactics as opportunities or weaknesses availed themselves. As convoys became more heavily armed and well-protected, for instance, bands switched their focus to less well-equipped police and military patrols, and to military outposts (picquets) erected throughout the country.³⁹³ In July the RAF and the military began to note the use of more advanced military techniques by rebels, whom, it was also observed, possessed mostly dated and antiquated weapons.³⁹⁴ It was presumed that the improved capacities owed to Syrian and other foreign Arab trainers.³⁹⁵ In August prior to al-Qawuqji's arrival the RAF observed that insurgent operations and attacks were well-conceived and thought to be the handiwork of experienced military personnel.³⁹⁶

The early rebel formations have been deprecated by a variety of sources, from the Haganah and Zionist scholars to Fawzi al-Qawuqji, but they gradually earned the

³⁹¹ While the Haganah subsequently depicted Arab rebels as fearful of confronting it in battle (Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 339), the CID noted that this also owed to British defense of the colonies and the authorities' repelling assaults on their behalf (CID, 26.7.36, periodical appreciation summary 13/36, PRO – FO 371/20018).

³⁹² RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.7.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

³⁹³ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 80, PRO – CO 733/317/1. Beginning in the mid-July, a number of special lorries outfitted with pom-pom guns (autocannons) were deployed to the areas where road traffic was regularly attacked at night (Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarm, Nazareth, Jerusalem, and Beisan) (Ibid., appendix 5, p. 2). According to Palestinian prisoners, the guns had a "very demoralizing effect" on the rebels (Ibid., appendix 5, p. 2).

³⁹⁴ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 31.7.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030; CID, 26.7.36, periodical appreciation summary 13/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 70, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

³⁹⁵ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 13.8.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030; Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 70, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

³⁹⁶ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 13.8.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

grudging respect of the British and even of some stalwart Zionists.³⁹⁷ Though they were commonly referred to as bandits, the RAF understood that Arab partisans were in fact “not out for loot.”³⁹⁸ Instead, as the AOC put it, the insurgents were fighting what they saw as a “patriotic war in defence of their country against injustice and the threat of Jewish domination.”³⁹⁹ The CID added to this its regard for the valor of the rebels, observing that “the courage of many of the armed Arabs cannot be disputed.”⁴⁰⁰ Among Zionists, while in public the revolt was described as little more than a campaign of terror, behind closed doors JA Chairman David Ben-Gurion came to see it as a nationalist rebellion backed by “an organized and disciplined community, demonstrating its national will with political maturity and a capacity for self-evaluation.”⁴⁰¹ It was not a “wild and fractured mob, aspiring to robbery and looting” but a struggle against national dispossession.⁴⁰² By August, the Revisionists too believed they were witnessing a broad-based revolt.⁴⁰³

Officials in the Palestine administration were deeply averse to acknowledging that the strike had spawned a national rebellion joined in by townspeople and the rural population alike. Yet the numbers of rural fighters mushroomed as the insurrection

³⁹⁷ On the Haganah: Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 338-39. Dismissive views include Tom Bowden, “The Politics of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine, 1936-39,” *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 11, n. 2 (May 1975), p. 147-74; Lachman, “Arab Rebellion and Terrorism,” and, to a lesser extent, al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 20.

³⁹⁸ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 58, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ CID, 12.7.36, periodical appreciation summary 12/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁴⁰¹ Quoted in Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 370. Haim explains that the discrepancy in public and private representations was “no accident” since leaders feared that admitting the character and depth of the Arab rebellion would demoralize the *yishuv*, diminish immigration, and shrink needed capital imports (*Abandonment*, p. 36).

⁴⁰² Quoted in Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 370-71.

⁴⁰³ Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 37.

spread. A JA informant from ‘Ayn Karim reported in mid-June that as many as 2500 Arabs were under arms, while another Haganah intelligence report the same month held that individual rebel bands ranged as large as 250 men.⁴⁰⁴ By July the bands based in the Maythalun hills and Sanur mountains, and in ‘Arrabeh, Burqa and elsewhere in the Jenin region counted upwards of 1000 men.⁴⁰⁵ The Nablus and Tulkarm subdistricts together were home to an equally large body of fighters, whose redoubts were in the vicinities of Jamma‘in, Salfit, Tulkarm, and the Qalqilya hills.⁴⁰⁶ Tubas alone, the largest village in the Nablus subdistrict, reputedly boasted a force of 200, while earlier in the month Nablus was thought to be fielding some 300 fighters in the countryside.⁴⁰⁷ Estimates gathered by the Shai for regions outside the central highlands were comparatively smaller, yet still substantial, such as a group put at 60 in number in the Jericho area, and a force of around 100 in the Haifa vicinity.⁴⁰⁸ Also notable was the participation of communities that had struggled against land transfers, such as youth in the Huleh region

⁴⁰⁴ Report (“Yigal”), 16.6.36, and report (“For inquiry”), 19.6.36, HA 8/38. The AOC reported that sizable growth in rebel forces at this time, but did not record numbers anywhere near this size, gauging that rebel battalions numbered 50-70 members (Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 58, PRO – CO 733/317/1).

⁴⁰⁵ Report (S.G.), 15.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁴⁰⁶ Report (S.G.), 17.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁴⁰⁷ Report from “the source,” 3.7.36, HA 8/39, and Report, 25.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁴⁰⁸ Report (S.G.), 17.7.36, and report, 25.7.36, HA 8/39. The Haifa area tally appears to be an undercount. See the discussion of Tirat Haifa below. For sake of comparison, Tubas – the wealthiest village in the subdistrict – together with its satellite villages was estimated by the Shai to be home to 5000 people. Jericho’s Arab population numbered less than 3250 in 1931 according to the official census, while those of Nablus and Haifa respectively reached 51,500 and almost 35,000 the same year. There is little doubt that rebel mobilization derived primarily from village bases. Enumeration of the urban contribution to forces in the countryside is complicated by their tendency to operate as undergrounds within their cities, though some clearly joined rural bands. (Census figures are from *Survey of Palestine*, v. 1, p. 147).

and the ‘Ashirat ‘Arab al-Saqr, most of whom were from the Zubaydat Arabs, who were involved around Beisan.⁴⁰⁹

Gauging the size of rebel forces is rendered more ambiguous by the division between active combatants and what can loosely be termed reserve forces, as well as by the fluidity of peasant participation. Rebels pinned down or under military threat from British forces were sometimes able to mobilize considerable snap reserves via the rural custom of *faza* ‘ (alarm, or emergency call-up), by which locals would come to the aid of fellow country-dwellers in danger. Afterwards such emergency forces typically returned to their villages and residences and resumed their everyday lives.⁴¹⁰ Peasants and urbanites also moved in and out of full-time participation in armed operations. With the strike freeing rural youth from seeking work in the cities and the harvest completed in mid-summer, rural conditions grew more conducive to the growth of active cadres.⁴¹¹ All told, Darwaza estimates that some 6-8000 Palestinians, full-time and reserve, fought in 1936.⁴¹²

The elastic and apparently elusive character of the rural insurrection confounded the state. As one CID report put it, “Many of the villagers are bandits by night and seemingly peaceful Fellahin by day.”⁴¹³ Schizophrenically, the same report maintained that most peasants were favorably disposed towards the administration, even in no less

⁴⁰⁹ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 75, 97. Numerous Bedouin groupings are mentioned in Yasin’s account, in every area of the country.

⁴¹⁰ The flexible quality of peasant participation, particularly as potential reserves, is noted in al-Sifri (*Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 71) and many scholarly accounts (e.g. Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 197; Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 160).

⁴¹¹ Report (“For inquiry”), 19.6.36, HA 8/38; CID, DIS [daily intelligence summary?] extract, 3.7.36, HA 8/39; CID, 26.7.36, periodical appreciation summary 13/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁴¹² *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 131.

⁴¹³ CID, 1.9.36, periodical appreciation summary 13/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

militant a region as Nablus. The state's difficulty in digesting the strike's transmutation into a rural-centered uprising owed not only to its difficulty in ascertaining friend from foe, but also to colonial preconceptions which divided and compartmentalized urban and rural spaces and subjectivities. The former were commonly regarded as the sources of political 'agitation' and beacons of political discontent and incitement which radiated out into the countryside.⁴¹⁴ In mid-July, for instance, the CID noted that the rural regions were being subjected to propagandizing at the hands of students, the SMC and "probably" the National Guard.⁴¹⁵ The Zionist movement was even more persuaded of the geo-social conceit of urban agency and rural receptivity than the authorities.⁴¹⁶ More accurately, however, after Palestine's growing incorporation into the world economy in the late Ottoman period and almost two decades of critical, accelerated transformation under British rule, the country's urban and rural zones had become increasingly articulated across "porous boundaries," which, during the revolt, facilitated the growth of strong translocal rebel networks.⁴¹⁷

While the British were apt to express bafflement at the rural rebellion and insinuate nefarious urban influence, Zionist bodies were more adamant in maintaining their top-down conception of Palestinian society. A number of Zionist intelligence

⁴¹⁴ Miller, *Government and Society*, p. 117.

⁴¹⁵ CID, 12.7.36, periodical appreciation summary 12/36, PRO – FO 371/20018. The suggestion that peasant rebels were pawns of urban propaganda subsequently became the official narrative put forward in the annual police report for the year ('Abbasi, *Safad fi 'ahd al-intidab*, p. 220).

⁴¹⁶ Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 35. Early reports collected by Zionist intelligence certainly reinforced this notion. See, for example: Najib, 28.4.36 and 21.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875. This notion is replicated in much Zionist scholarship, such as Porath (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 168, 181-82) and Arnon-Ohana (*Herev mi-bayit*, p. 253, 275).

⁴¹⁷ Gelvin, "The Other Arab Nationalism," p. 239.

reports tie rural forces not only to the NCs, but to the AHC.⁴¹⁸ Few scholars contend that the AHC had much influence over armed activity or rebel villagers.⁴¹⁹ In truth, the insurrection lacked any kind of centralized control, whether by urban or rural forces, and initiative was freely taken by partisans virtually everywhere.

Initial efforts at unifying rural forces, one by Ibrahim al-Shanti before his detention and another by Nablus-area bands in early July, were abortive.⁴²⁰ But after two rounds of talks near Tubas among several commanders, key figures agreed on a loose set of arrangements. On 7 August, Khamis ‘Aqrabawi, ‘Abdullah al-Bayruti, shaykh Farhan al-Sa‘di, Darrar Nashashibi, and Fakhri ‘Abd al-Hadi agreed to split their operations into three jurisdictions focused on Jabal Nablus, Tulkarm, and the northern district (Haifa and Acre).⁴²¹ They also formed a revolutionary court, about which little is

⁴¹⁸ Report, 2.6.36, HA 8/38; Report, 25.7.36, HA 8/39; Report (S.G.), 11.8.36, HA 8/40; and, from an unnamed Arab informant: Division of acts of terrorism, 15.8.36, and Report #7: the congress of NCs and the position of the AHC, 20.8.36, HA 8/40. Another Shai report more equivocally notes that rural bands both acted on their own initiative and on “orders” from members of the political leadership (Report (“For inquiry”), 19.6.36, HA 8/38). Though the CID’s regular reports do not connect the AHC directly to the rebels, its head did at least once: Memo, DIG-CID, 24.8.36, HA 8/40.

⁴¹⁹ Even Porath, whose work embodies the *effendi* thesis regarding the strike, contending that the countryside rose at the instigation of the urban youth, does not argue that the AHC had much sway with rural fighters (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 182, 192-93). See also Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 192. Basheer Nafi suggests that the rural insurrection was “Instigated at least partly by radical members of the HAC [AHC]” but his sources (Charles Tegart’s files and S. Yasin’s book) do not clearly bear out this claim (*Arabism, Islamism*, p. 224). Al-Hut argues that the AHC coordinated or cooperated with the *Qassamiyun* in the north, and through the NCs, rebels in the south, but her contention rests on a single document at the PLO Research Center Archives (*al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 351).

⁴²⁰ Report (“For inquiry”), 19.6.36, HA 8/38; Report, 8.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁴²¹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 186. Although the breakdown of jurisdictions isn’t exactly clear, al-Bayruti planned operations around ‘Anabta (Report from “the source” on the situation in Nablus and its surroundings, 3.7.36, HA 8/39) and ‘Aqrabawi commanded men based in the Qalqilya hills (Report (S.G.), 17.7.36, HA 8/39) and also, reputedly, faraway Jericho (Report, 25.7.36, HA 8/39). Shaykh Farhan led battles in the triangle (Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 130-31) and through the *Qassami* network, had links to rebels in the Haifa region. Fakhri ‘Abd al-Hadi, originating from ‘Arrabeh near Jenin, reputedly stood at the head of the considerable forces of the subdistrict (Report, 25.7.36, HA 8/39) and has been seen by some as the paramount commander before al-Qawuqji took charge (al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 142; Porath, op. cit.).

known, for trying those accused of treason.⁴²² Military coordination between them appears to have been on a contingent basis before al-Qawuqji's arrival, and generally minimal.

Though they were not subordinate to urban forces, many rebel bands were vitally connected to them. The NC network and the popular committees were critical in this respect. In the Tulkarm area, several NC members – Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman, ‘Abdullah Samara, Midhat Abu Hantash – were connected to urban and rural rebel groups, including the Abu ‘Ubayda scouts and the band operating around the town itself.⁴²³ Samara, for instance, was reported by fellow NC member Khalil al-Khuri to be supplying weapons, ammunition, and information to ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Na’ifa, whose men sniped the roads in Tulkarm's vicinity, while the NC was implicated in organizing, or helping to organize, bands in several villages.⁴²⁴ Al-Khuri also credited the Jaffa NC with being responsible for all “worrisome things [acts]” in the Jaffa area, including distributing weapons and recruiting fighters.⁴²⁵ The lightermen worked with the NC to smuggle arms to the rebels while several NC members, including former mayor ‘Umar al-Bitar, Yusuf ‘Ashur, and Sa‘id al-Khalil, wrote them explicit notes of encouragement.⁴²⁶ The local relief committee reportedly procured ammunition, paid fighters a monthly wage of £P 10 and afforded the families of fighters a stipend.⁴²⁷ The NC at Nablus likewise funneled money to bands in its area and was alleged in mid-July

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Najib, 18.5.36 and 25.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875; Arab Bureau information, 30.5.36, CZA S/25 - 22231.

⁴²⁴ Najib, 27.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875; Arab Bureau information, 31.5.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

⁴²⁵ Najib, 31.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁴²⁶ Report (S.G.), 12.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁴²⁷ Ibid. Dating from mid-July, the situation may later have changed as the rebellion entered a financial crisis.

by the Shai to be in daily contact with rural rebels.⁴²⁸ According to Yasin, the NC in Gaza was an essential backstop and fundraiser for rebels in the area. It maintained a subcommittee whose tasks consisted of weapons acquisition, purchasing supplies for fighters, and supporting their families.⁴²⁹ NCs on occasion also issued written authorizations of their support for armed activity which were used to help collect rifles from villagers for the rebel campaign.⁴³⁰ Wary of the dangers they courted in aiding armed insurrection, NCs took a range of precautions to try to cover their tracks and obfuscate their roles, including keeping dual financial registers, one kept for display to the authorities showing receipts being spent on aid to the poor and the impacted, while the true hidden record logged seditious expenditures.⁴³¹

Students in cities, towns, and villages also provided valuable aid to rural fighters. At a meeting at Danabe, in the environs of Nablus, they resolved to organize battlefield first aid stations, manned by youth in areas near recent engagements. A doctor connected to Nablus's students' association, Ahmad T. al-Mahir, treated injured band members *gratis*. Students also gathered money for the rebels from wealthy urbanites at mosques. Some undoubtedly played more extensive roles. Faysal al-Nabulsi, a member of the Islamic Sports Club, zealous rebel supporter and nephew of Hajj Nimr al-Nabulsi, a prominent merchant, occasionally took part in local sniping operations. He also served

⁴²⁸ Events in Nablus (S.G.), 14.7.36 and Report (S.G.), 15.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁴²⁹ *Al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 212. The subcommittee's members included Muhammad Abu Ramadan, Yusuf Jabir (from 'Anabta in the Nablus subdistrict), Fa'iq Bisisu, and Ja'far Filfil, who, no doubt quite usefully, was chief clerk at the Gaza police station.

⁴³⁰ Arab Bureau information, 11.5.36, CZA S/25 – 22231. See the report on Ibrahim al-Shanti's efforts at Maliha and Abu Ghosh at: Arab Bureau information, 25.5.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

⁴³¹ Arab Bureau information, 16.6.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

on a secret, little-known body referred to by the Shai as the Economic Council of the Rebels in Nablus, which likely acted as a fundraising arm.⁴³²

Youth members of clandestine groups within urban centers formed an important part of the rebels' protean intelligence apparatus. At Nablus, the local Black Hand group, comprised of Sa'di 'Arafat, Walid Salah, Muhi al-Din al-Misri, Wasif Kamal, and members of the Islamic Sports Union Club, reportedly circulated among area villages on a daily basis promoting the insurgency and tracking military movements. One Zionist intelligence source even claims they interfered with the state's military operations, though no detail is provided. The Black Hand in turn was also connected to the local unit of the drivers' organization, which likewise funneled useful information to rural bands, including on strikebreaking in the villages by peasants.⁴³³

As noted previously, Arab police were important to the rebel movement, aiding in the acquisition of weapons and ammunition (usually from police stocks) and transmitting information directly or via third parties to the rebels on military and police planning and movements in the field. Ammunition was left for rebels by police in the Latrun area and around Jaffa, often by burying it in secret locations.⁴³⁴ Mayors and

⁴³² Events in Nablus, 14.7.36, and Report, 25.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁴³³ Report from "the source" on Nablus, etc., 3.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁴³⁴ Najib, 14.6.36, CZA S/25 – 3875. For at least part of the strike's duration, Jaffa appears to have been a significant transshipment node for arms heading to rebels in other regions (Najib, 28.6.36, CZA S/25 – 3875), which would make sense given not only its accessibility to seaborne smuggling, but also its proximity to cooperative police (in the Latrun area). Although I have found little explicit British documentation detailing the subject, Zionist intelligence sources often alleged widespread, and in some locales uniform collusion between Arab police and the rebels. See, for instance Najib, 14.6.36, CZA S/25 – 3875; Report (S.G.), 15.7.36, HA 8/39.

municipal councilors, for instance in Ramle in August, also sometimes participated in these clandestine activities, or in their facilitation.⁴³⁵

In spite of the sinews of material aid and information binding rebel concentrations in the countryside to urban centers, tensions also shaped their interrelations. At the widest scale, many peasants declared more clearly than urban politicians did that the revolt was an independence struggle, and wasn't reducible to the immigration issue.⁴³⁶ This sentiment was shared by popular forces in urban spaces as well, but as the insurrection wore on, the rural bands came to see themselves as distinct from city-dwellers in that they were under arms and faced combat, whereas urbanites were presumed to be insulated from armed struggle.⁴³⁷ This appreciation, though not entirely accurate as we have seen, led some rebel fighters to see the NCs and urban youth as cowards, and late in the rebellion, animated highly coercive attempts to compel urban youth to join the rebel bands.⁴³⁸ For their part, there is little doubt that some urban forces did try to exercise authority over the rural rebels. The degree to which they succeeded probably varied greatly from band to band, although available evidence gainsays British military and Zionist evaluations depicting urban leaders as pulling the strings.

While neither sector attained hegemony over the other, the balance of forces between the two changed. As noted above, urban merchants and notables often

⁴³⁵ Najib, 20.8.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁴³⁶ Najib, 22.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁴³⁷ Ibid; Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 172.

⁴³⁸ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 172. Probably based on this perception, some 500 young men who had fled to Damascus during the strike, many of whom were Christian, were threatened via letters in late August (Haifa report, 24.8.36, HA 8/40). The hostile conscription efforts are returned to below.

contributed freely to the strike in its first weeks, but after several months they had been asked for significant sums multiple times. By mid-July, wealthy figures in Jaffa, for example, had been hit up three times.⁴³⁹ At this time, Nablus-area fighters were known to enter the town on a nightly basis and collect money from willing and unwilling sources.⁴⁴⁰ The antagonism that developed between the bands and major strands of the upper classes was not limited to the cities and towns, but also manifested itself in the rebels' relations with wealthy villagers. As Khalil al-Khuri put it, wealthy elites and intellectuals "poisoned the state of affairs" by refusing to voluntarily pay for rebellion.⁴⁴¹ Peasant fighters needed the cash first and foremost for arms and ammunition, but al-Khuri suggested that a strong undertone or spirit of vengeance informed the continued financial demands on the upper strata, and even perhaps a desire to redistribute the wealth of those commonly blamed for peasant dispossession.⁴⁴² Faced with repeated solicitations many affluent merchants and notables fled the country, repairing to Lebanon, Egypt, Cyprus or elsewhere to wait for the strike's denouement.⁴⁴³

Rebel relations with the countryside were no less dense, complex, and at times fraught than those with the cities and towns. Peasant rebels made camp in supportive villages as well as in remote and often rocky, naturally fortified areas. As in any guerilla war, they were reliant for food, supplies, information, and communications on villages in

⁴³⁹ DIS [presumably daily intelligence summary of the CID] digest, 19.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁴⁴⁰ Najib, 17.7.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁴⁴¹ Najib, 21.6.36, CZA S/25 – 3875. Al-Khuri was personally asked to contribute £P 20 to the rebels, while other intellectuals faced imposts of £P 50 or more.

⁴⁴² Najib, 19.6.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁴⁴³ Arab Bureau information, "On the state of affairs these days," 30.6.36, CZA S/25 – 22231. Cohen provides a couple of interesting examples (*Army of Shadows*, p. 114), though he fails to critique the JA's contention (explicitly made in one case he discusses) that the Husayni family was running the strike and was, by extension, responsible for the citrus farmer in question's flight.

the areas of their operations or close to their rural bases. Villages were also the greatest source of new recruits. In vast areas of the country the bands were readily provisioned and sheltered, but this was not uniformly the case. Some villages, or their elders, wanted nothing to do with the rebellion. Others were frightened into a quietist posture by British searches or other hostile measures. In yet other instances rebel conduct alienated or repelled their residents.

Even rebel-friendly communities at times had strained relations with the bands. Tirat Haifa, the second largest village in the subdistrict, provides one example.⁴⁴⁴ The Shai collected information on it continuously, probably through its *mukhtar*, Muhammad al-‘Abd Shaykh Yunis, who was assassinated at the end of August on suspicion of being a spy.⁴⁴⁵ The village was connected in mid-May to a plan to sabotage the lands and attack the colonists of nearby ‘Athlit, but Haganah intelligence subsequently downgraded its assessment of the threat it posed.⁴⁴⁶ Rebel villagers, probably youths, then planned to participate in an attack on Ahuza, another colony in the Haifa area, but the police caught wind of the effort and preempted the assault.⁴⁴⁷ Perhaps suspecting it had gone soft on the uprising, two bands from outside the village paid it a visit only days later in late June, demanding it supply 40 new, fully outfitted (i.e. armed) recruits and

⁴⁴⁴ Not to be confused with the aforementioned al-Tira in the Ramle subdistrict, Tirat Haifa was sometimes also called al-Tira, or Tirat al-Lawz, after its abundant almond groves (*All That Remains*, p. 195-96).

⁴⁴⁵ Haifa report, 24.8.36, HA 8/40. See also: Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 105.

⁴⁴⁶ Haifa report, 18.5.36, HA 8/37; Haifa report, 11.6.36, HA 8/38.

⁴⁴⁷ Haifa report, 27.6.36, HA 8/38. Police foreknowledge contributed to the development of new rebel protocol for the region that heightened secrecy. Military planning was to be consolidated under one commander who would issue directives on a need-to-know basis with little lead time, shortly before an operation was to be set in motion (*ibid.*).

food for several days, on pain of being treated like a Jewish settlement.⁴⁴⁸ Many in the village were vexed at the foiled plot on Ahuza, and after being prodded, the village mustered 100 men, including former Ottoman soldiers.⁴⁴⁹ Though the pressure on Tirat Haifa appeared to work, and subsequent reports showed its villagers and village band as active partisans, efforts at conscription elsewhere did not always succeed, even in the heart of rebel territory in the triangle.⁴⁵⁰

Rebels were quite aware that the colonial state intended to use the coercive regimen of searches and collective punishments to cut them off from their village *milieus*. At their most cynical, some rebel groups may on occasion have acted to draw the state's attention to particular regions in order to propel hesitant local villages to actively join the insurrection. Smaller bands from the southern coastal plain area reputedly intended on using such a strategy to ratchet up the rebellion around Haifa's Jabal Mar Ilyas (Mt. Carmel).⁴⁵¹ Villagers in the subdistrict complained vociferously in August to Haifa's NC about the bands' continuous "financial extortion" (Hebrew: *shitat kesefim*). The NC's remedy was to send for band representatives and fix a limited number of designated collections agents.⁴⁵²

Villages which dissociated from the insurrection, or opposed it, were seen as suspect or hostile, and sometimes found themselves the recipients of unwanted harassment or violence. The administration reported that a Safad-area band attacked the

⁴⁴⁸ Haifa report, 30.6.36, HA 8/38.

⁴⁴⁹ Haifa report, 27.6.36, HA 8/38; Haifa report, 7.7.36, HA 8/39. Population in 1931...

⁴⁵⁰ Haifa reports, 4.8.36, 14.8.36, 26.8.36, HA 8/40; Haifa report, 9.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁴⁵¹ Report, 5.7.36, p. 4-5, HA 8/39. As at Tirat Haifa, the bands also allegedly threatened to damage the property of uncooperative villages. As this report also shows, bands migrated at times considerable distances from their points of origin.

⁴⁵² Report, 28.8.36, HA 8/40.

village of Husayniyya on 5 July, injuring the *mukhtar*'s son and shooting up cattle.⁴⁵³ Shaykh Munis (a.k.a. Shaykh Muwannis), a village then situated where Tel Aviv University now stands, was subjected to similar treatment at about the same time.⁴⁵⁴ As the Shai observed, such attacks left villagers fearful of rebel groups.⁴⁵⁵ Villages which refused to aid rebels or rebuffed specific demands risked intimidation and violence by disgruntled fighters. At Daliyyat al-Karmil and 'Isfiya, two majority Druze villages outside Haifa, cooperative *mukhtars* were unable to raise donations from residents for the strike fund.⁴⁵⁶ Although the Haifa band was reputedly composed of Druze from 'Isfiya and elsewhere, rebels later showed up in force and demanded money and recruits, and in the process, hit the wife of one of the *mukhtars*.⁴⁵⁷ Upon their departure, the police were informed and immediately deployed 200 men to dissuade the rebels from returning.⁴⁵⁸ Friction between bands and Christian villages also existed in some areas, such as Bayt Jala outside Jerusalem and Sinjil in the Ramallah subdistrict.⁴⁵⁹

Although rebels used threats and intimidation when provisioning and aid was not voluntarily offered, they rarely appear to have done more than beat up influential opponents or resort to traditional displays of discontent through property damage. Sometimes they sufficed with heated warnings. At Dayr al-Asad in the Acre subdistrict, a local rebel band demanded £P 100 in August, but when they were turned down, they

⁴⁵³ Official communiqué 161/36, 6.7.36, ISA (2) 566-6m; Report, 6.7.36, HA 8/39. The latter states that the *mukhtar* was also wounded, and that several band members were identified and later apprehended.

⁴⁵⁴ Report, 8.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid. The Shai also noted that the bands responsible for the assaults and intimidation at al-Husayniyya (mistakenly identified as 'Ihsaniya') and Shaykh Munis were suspected of being under non-Palestinian commanders.

⁴⁵⁶ Report, 1.7.36, HA 8/39. 'Isfiya was also known as 'Usufiya.

⁴⁵⁷ Report (S.G.), 17.7.36, HA 8/39; Haifa report, 20.8.36, HA 8/40.

⁴⁵⁸ Haifa report, 20.8.36, HA 8/40.

⁴⁵⁹ Najib, 22.9.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

threatened villagers and decamped without further incident.⁴⁶⁰ Reflecting on the bands' aggressive financial solicitations, the RAF surmised the same month that they probably indicated growing indiscipline and a weakening of the rebels' economic position.⁴⁶¹ Upon his arrival Fawzi al-Qawuqji recognized that fighters represented a burden on villages and furthermore that indecorous rebel behavior endangered the rebellion's base of popular support in the country.⁴⁶² For these reasons, and to stem what he referred to as a flood of complaints by villagers, he erected an administrative apparatus designed to appropriately regulate rebel requests for support. Through a network of committees managing food procurement, supplies and finances, all supervised by al-Qawuqji, and via the use of designated 'tax' collectors, his proto-administration aimed to resolve conflicts between the population and the rebels while assuring the latter of the material support necessary for the struggle.⁴⁶³ The scheme did not work as well as al-Qawuqji had hoped, as villagers continued to allege that the new committees misappropriated village funds while certain *mukhtars* and local strongmen seized on the circumstances to divert monies to their own retinues, sowing discord and impacting village relations with rebel forces.⁴⁶⁴

While disputes over financing and high-handed behavior by the rebels marred or complicated their relationships with the public in certain areas or villages, rebels appear to have generally restricted the use of lethal force to those accused of spying and passing information to the colonial authorities, and to Arab police active in the fight against the

⁴⁶⁰ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 13.8.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁴⁶¹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 21.8.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁴⁶² Al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 21.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., p. 22-23.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 54.

insurrection. In July an assassination squad targeting informers was reputed to exist in the Jenin area, where shaykh Farhan al-Sa‘di operated.⁴⁶⁵ In August, band representatives from the Tulkarm, Haifa, Nablus, Jerusalem, and Jenin subdistricts met and purportedly decided to assassinate informers, secret police, and government workers obstructing rebels or aiding Jews.⁴⁶⁶ Shaykh Farhan and his men were especially keen on eliminating Arab police that had participated in the suppression of al-Qassam’s venture.⁴⁶⁷ To this end, they liaised with Haifa’s Black Hand.⁴⁶⁸ Although reports exist which allege that the Black Hand at Haifa favored the execution of anyone caught trading or selling goods to Jews, which could be construed as in line with the decision of the aforementioned inter-band meeting, there is little evidence that assassinations by rural or urban rebel groups extended this far.

As in their relations with urban centers, rebel relations with the countryside were predicated foremost not through intimidation, but through shared bonds and active solidarity. In a prelude to the subsequent phase of the Great Revolt, one vital index of this solidarity lay in the changing position of the *mukhtars*. *Mukhtars*, as Ylana Miller underscores, were not villagers’ representatives, but something more akin to state-appointed junior tax farmers.⁴⁶⁹ The roles they played during the strike were highly variable, from aiding to impeding rebel financial collections, and from facilitating rebel access to villages to blocking it and allying with the state. In June, paralleling renewed attention to the question of state employees, rebel groups and the Arabic press began to

⁴⁶⁵ Report (S.G.), 15.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁴⁶⁶ Report (S.G.), 11.8.36, HA 8/40.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ *Government and Society*, p. 59.

call for their departure from government service. In the Ramle, Jenin and Haifa subdistricts in particular many *mukhtars* complied.⁴⁷⁰ As with the police, those who didn't resign sometimes displayed their loyalties by smuggling arms to the rebels.⁴⁷¹ Although mass resignations only occurred in several subdistricts, this compares favorably to the continued, ineffectual agitation for urban state employees to strike and indicates the strength of rebel networks and affiliations in particular geographic zones.

Solidarity cut both ways of course. Though rebels were not much able to defend villages from the depredations of the search regime, they did act to check opportunists who saw the rebellion as a chance for pillage. The CID reported that Arab toughs who tried to extort money from villages for purposes other than the revolt were quickly suppressed by the rebels.⁴⁷² This obviously served the rebels' interests in maintaining or elevating their standing with rural communities, but more elementally it also spoke to their desire to protect villagers and preserve the integrity of village life, which, after all, was a cause very close to the hearts of rural fighters.

In no small measure owing to its strong imbrication with rural communities, the insurrection continued to grow in intensity, reaching a new peak in August. As the Haganah observed, the rebels enjoyed great freedom of movement and maneuver in the central hill country at this time.⁴⁷³ Rebel intelligence was regular and effective enough that they often evaded unwanted encounters with British forces, much to the

⁴⁷⁰ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 103; Report, 10.6.36, HA 8/38. Al-Sifri writes more generally of the resignations, contending exaggeratedly that most Arab *mukhtars* throughout the country resigned (*Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 31).

⁴⁷¹ E.g. Haifa report, 27.6.36, HA 8/38.

⁴⁷² CID, 1.9.36, periodical appreciation summary 15/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁴⁷³ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 333.

consternation of the military brass.⁴⁷⁴ In July, the fleet of local armored cars employed in the country wore out from continuous use, and in August, as one Foreign Office minute noted, rebel operations at night ran British troops ragged.⁴⁷⁵ In spite of the search regime, continuous British reinforcements, and sustaining major casualties in battle, the revolt paradoxically moved from strength to strength in the late summer. But the apex of rebel activity and effectiveness on the battlefield was yet to come, after Fawzi al-Qawuqji arrived in late August.

Collective punishment and the quandaries of suppressing the strike movement

As the rebellion spread and engulfed rural areas the administration forged a two-pronged response. Its first initiative was to try to drive a wedge between the strike and the countryside. To this end it crafted a series of propaganda leaflets designed to dissuade peasant participation in the unrest and warning that tax forgiveness would be jeopardized by disquiet. Alongside the tax abatements for villagers, it mustered a set of collective punishments, especially in the countryside. These included the erection of punitive police posts, the assessment of collective fines, the subjection of villages to the search regime, and house demolitions. The two tacks, carrot and stick, were employed hand-in-hand, but the collective punishments rapidly overshadowed other tactics and came to define the government's counterinsurgency strategy.

⁴⁷⁴ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 184. On this point Porath cites Brigadier Simson, Chief of Staff to General Dill, GOC, who relieved the AOC of command in mid-September.

⁴⁷⁵ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 76, 78, PRO – CO 733/317/1; Minute, J.C. Sterndale Bennett to L. Oliphant, 14.8.36, PRO – FO 371/20023.

Hoping to avert a major confrontation with large swathes of the peasantry, the colonial state printed hundreds of thousands of leaflets which it dumped by plane across the country. This operation began as early as the second week of the strike. The first versions of these missives strove to keep villagers from heading into the cities and towns.⁴⁷⁶ By the end of July over a million leaflets had been dropped on some 960-980 Arab villages.⁴⁷⁷ In spite of the insurgency's continued development, the government put a favorable spin on its propaganda effort as a glass half full, and the RAF conjectured in July that the leaflets served their purpose.⁴⁷⁸

At least six different flyers were devised.⁴⁷⁹ They ranged from paternalistic, depicting the state as the benevolent protector of rural cultivators, to the divisive, arguing that "The poor man is the one who always loses" while the rich city-dwellers evade risks, foisting them upon the lower classes.⁴⁸⁰ Perhaps most striking among them is one which waxes nostalgic for the pre-strike days. It presents an image of life in the countryside in which traders provided for their families, peasants profited from marketing their goods, and the state had funds to spend on improving villages, only to have the strike tear everything asunder, subjecting merchants to debt, robbing peasants of markets, and causing the government to redirect monies towards the military and the repair of damage caused by the rebels. It is hard to conceive that this idealized image,

⁴⁷⁶ Najib, 4.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁴⁷⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 31.7.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030; Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 64, 86, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁴⁷⁸ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 9.7.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030. The original print-run of 600,000 was thus doubled to over 1.3 million leaflets by late August (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 31.7.36 and 21.8.36, weekly summaries of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030).

⁴⁷⁹ They are reproduced in al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 118-20.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 118.

void of the indebtedness that saturated peasant existence and fancifully conjuring up an altruistic, developmentalist state, could have been taken by most of its intended audience as anything but a colonial hallucination.

The colonial state aimed its tax inducements not only at destitute, struggling peasants, but also at those in the profitable citriculture sector, who were capable of bankrolling the rebellion. A reduction in the rural property tax for citrus grade lands was thus announced on 19 May.⁴⁸¹ Similar provisions followed. As these failed to bring about the desired pacification of the countryside, the government not only threatened that tax forgiveness would be wiped out by increased state outlays in suppressing unrest, but that new taxes might additionally be necessary.⁴⁸²

Central to the state's counterinsurgency effort was its expanding regime of collective punishments. The 1931 Order-in-Council invoked at the outset of the uprising empowered the High Commissioner to issue Emergency Regulations for the purpose of "securing the public safety and the defense of Palestine."⁴⁸³ The first new collective punishment, the power to order mandatory curfews, was declared on 19 April.⁴⁸⁴ Two weeks later the government redefined the scope of punitive police posts to include unwanted strike-related activity. These bases, the costs and provisioning of which were born by the villages in which they were situated, were formerly used as a response to agrarian crime. Balad al-Shaykh, the activist suburb of Haifa, was saddled with one of

⁴⁸¹ Official communiqué 57/36, 19.5.36, ISA (2) 566-6m. The season's poor harvest owing to climatic conditions was given as the official rationale for the deduction.

⁴⁸² HC radio address to Palestine, enclosure to: HC to Col Sec, 12.7.36, PRO – CO 733/310/4.

⁴⁸³ Palestine (Defence) Order-in-Council, 1931, PRO – CO 733/239/5. For a survey of major powers authorized under the Emergency Regulations, see *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 9-11.

⁴⁸⁴ *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 9.

the first of the new outposts on account of the frequent stoning of traffic in its area.⁴⁸⁵ Arson of Jewish property was also cause for their establishment.⁴⁸⁶ Though the historical record is incomplete, it appears that these outposts were probably, if not generally, the result of mere proximity to sites of undesirable activity, for which the closest Arab communities were frequently held responsible, irrespective of the actual perpetrators.⁴⁸⁷ Initially, seven posts were erected in the Haifa subdistrict and the north, and by mid-June a total of 27 villages and tribal (Bedouin) areas bore detachments.⁴⁸⁸ In some cases the administration used the threat of the imposition of a punitive police post to compel the cooperation of village *mukhtars* with the government, such as at Yatta outside Hebron in mid-June.⁴⁸⁹ Villagers objected to the burdensome and coercive posts from the outset, but these were only the beginning of the state's rollout of collective sanctions.⁴⁹⁰

Despite his quick invocation of the Order-in-Council, HC Wauchope did not think the military's unvarying advocacy of force and "punitive measures" was a wise course. He preferred to cloak the revolt's suppression in a silken glove. In so doing his intent was to forestall the general radicalization of the Palestinian population, prevent the

⁴⁸⁵ HC to Colonial Secretary, 4.5.36, #181, PRO – CO 733/310/1. Authority for the new deployment of the posts derived from the Collective Punishment Ordinance.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ The proximity principle, as it might be called, antedated the strike of course. Its revision during the strike was elaborated by the AOC and became the basis for the rural search regime (Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 34, PRO – CO 733/317/1). See below.

⁴⁸⁸ Official communiqué 37/36, 5.5.36, ISA (2) 566-6m; HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.6.36, #385, PRO – CO 733/310/3.

⁴⁸⁹ Arab Bureau information, 17.6.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

⁴⁹⁰ Formation of national committees: Great village meeting on 11.5.36, in: *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 419.

spread of unrest to Transjordan, and assure that the rebellion did not become a religious war.⁴⁹¹ As the Chief Secretary underscored to high civilian and military officials:

There is one principle which H.E. wishes to be generally understood, namely that we are living in a friendly country with some enemy inhabitants; our wish is to punish and capture the malefactors and not to alienate people who are not already alienated or actively hostile to Government.⁴⁹²

Nevertheless, the resort to collective punishments as the primary means of combating the uprising paradoxically did much to erase exactly the distinction that Wauchope strove to retain between active opponents of the regime and the rest of the Palestinian public.

The use of collective fines as means of quelling unrest dated almost to the origins of the British occupation. After 1929 they became an integral tool for repressing peasant resistance to Zionism. Their use was expanded and adapted during the strike after the initial attempt in late May to decapitate or intimidate the movement through arrests failed. Since the strike was not technically illegal the administration opted to focus on and criminalize the financial support, as the High Commissioner put it, of those who endeavored to “coerce the Government of Palestine.”⁴⁹³ The assets of those financially abetting the uprising would, as recompense and disincentive, be seized or placed under attachment. The grounds for the imposition of collective fines then multiplied further to include resistance to searches, or more arbitrarily, a community’s proximity to unlawful

⁴⁹¹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 2.6.36, #320, PRO – CO 733/311/3.

⁴⁹² Chief Secretary to DCs, 25.7.36, HA 8/40.

⁴⁹³ HC to Colonial Secretary, 7.6.36, #335, PRO – CO 733/311/3.

acts associated with the revolt.⁴⁹⁴ Where the primary targets of previous fines had (since 1929) been rural areas, during the strike cities and towns were also hit with such levies.

Though under the 6 June Emergency Regulations District Commissioners enjoyed broad latitude in assigning collective fines, after several weeks the High Commissioner made it known that he wanted the penalties to be limited.⁴⁹⁵ In cases of property destruction or sabotage they were not to exceed the sum of the damages, save for exceptional cases. He did not wish to repeat the folly of the 1929 fines, when £P 33,340 were assigned as penalties, of which only £P 8520 was paid and the remainder remitted in 1935.⁴⁹⁶ Instead, imposts were to be “moderate” and were to be collected “promptly” within 24-48 hours, on pain of seizures by the army.⁴⁹⁷

Even before the protocol for collective fines was expanded in June, residents in the Tulkarm region were reported to slow their involvement in sabotage operations, in fear of debilitating penalties.⁴⁹⁸ At Bayt Dajan, outside Jaffa, a fine of £P 500 was levied on the town on 3 June for the murder of two Jews in its vicinity, even though assailants were arrested for the crime. Crops were seized as payment the same day.⁴⁹⁹ A month later a £P 2000 fine was charged to Hebron on account of a nearby military engagement in which the government sustained no fatalities. Somewhere between £P 7-

⁴⁹⁴ Al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 21. Furthermore, as per the 1926 version of the Collective Punishments Ordinance under which fines were authorized, no proof tying a given locality to specific unlawful activity was necessary (HC to Colonial Secretary, 10.6.36, #348, and Colonial Secretary to HC, 11.6.36, #255, PRO – CO 733/311/3).

⁴⁹⁵ Chief Secretary to DCs, 25.7.36, HA 8/40. It is noted in this circular that a prior missive with similar instructions was sent out on 30 June. On the authority to issue fines, see discussion of a court case involving Gaza in: RAF, 7.8.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁴⁹⁶ Peel Commission report, p. 194.

⁴⁹⁷ Chief Secretary to DCs, 25.7.36, HA 8/40.

⁴⁹⁸ Najib, 31.5.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁴⁹⁹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.6.36, #324, PRO – FO 371/20033.

800 was quickly collected.⁵⁰⁰ By this time fines had begun to accumulate. Lydda was hit with the aforementioned £P 5000 levy; Yagur, a village near Haifa, was assigned £P 200; and Gaza faced a £P 1000 charge.⁵⁰¹ In all, al-Sifri counted no less than 250 villages assessed with various imposts.⁵⁰² The CID praised the collective fine regulation as, along with death penalties attached to firing on British forces, the most useful of the new emergency laws.⁵⁰³ By the strike's end £P 21,272 in charges had been assigned, though less than half of this sum was collected by early 1937.⁵⁰⁴

The search regime at the heart of the government's counterinsurgency campaign originated from mapping rebel activities. As the AOC explained, "By carefully plotting the incidence of depredations upon a map it... [became] clear that the bulk of these occurred consistently in the neighborhood of certain villages or encampments."⁵⁰⁵ The supposition that proximate villages bore responsibility for rebel activity, or that they at least facilitated it, provided the military and the police, who operated jointly, with the rationale and the targets for search operations. What were called 'searches' often resembled punitive raids. Houses and businesses were smashed up, goods and foodstuffs spoiled and ruined, livestock killed, and villagers humiliated, beaten, and on occasion killed. Publicly these operations were justified as searches for contraband weapons and lawbreakers, but the AOC privately admitted that their real purpose was

⁵⁰⁰ CID, 12.7.36, periodical appreciation summary 12/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 91.

⁵⁰³ CID, 23.6.36, periodical appreciation summary 11/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁵⁰⁴ Peel Commission report, p. 194.

⁵⁰⁵ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 34, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

“punitive” and to intimidate the population into docility.⁵⁰⁶ Though he compared them to “similar Turkish methods” of police action, the search regime owed much more to the Collective Punishments Ordinance and its twinned logics of collective responsibility and guilt through proximity. As with collective fines and other punishments of the same ilk, no proof of misdeeds was ultimately necessary for a search to be ordered and conducted.

As the High Commissioner later admitted, from its beginning in late May the search regime was punctuated by state violence against villagers.⁵⁰⁷ On 25 May at Kafr Kanna in the Galilee, renown as the site where Christ made water into wine, women “heavily stoned” a search party dispatched to the village after a convoy was similarly assaulted nearby. Police responded by opening fire, supposedly not directly at the women, yet one “Arab girl” was killed.⁵⁰⁸ Six days later at Aqraba, southeast of Nablus, police killed one resident during a search for arms.⁵⁰⁹ On 24 June, at Dayr Aban west of Jerusalem, state forces killed two men who attempted to escape the cordon placed around the village.⁵¹⁰ Perhaps the worst incident of this sort took place in operations in the Ramallah subdistrict when sweeps on 5 and 6 July led troops to repeatedly fire on villagers, killing six and injuring four.⁵¹¹ Other fatal search encounters occurred at ‘Abud, Khirbat Dayr Nizam, ‘Aqir, ‘Alma, and Qaqun.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Memorandum prepared by HC in response to GOC Dill’s report of 30.10.36 to War Office [hereafter: Memo by HC on GOC’s rpt], p. 3, enclosure to: HC to Colonial Secretary, 28.11.36, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁵⁰⁸ HC to Colonial Secretary, 25.5.36, #268, PRO – FO 371/20033.

⁵⁰⁹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 3.6.36, monthly summary of intelligence (May), PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁵¹⁰ Memo by HC on GOC’s rpt, p. 4, PRO – CO 733/317/1. The HC misidentifies the village as part of the Ramle subdistrict.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 87. Respectively these villages belonged to the subdistricts of Ramallah (the first two), Ramle, Safad, and Tulkarm.

When they weren't lethal, searches remained destructive and terrifying. At Burqa, near Ramallah, residents watched in shock in early June as, in response to damaged phone lines in the area, household cooking oil stocks were emptied into the streets and used to douse and ruin villagers' bedding.⁵¹³ At al-Tira in the Ramle subdistrict the police and military spoilt victuals, wrecked doors to homes, shops and storehouses, and beat or struck some 70 residents.⁵¹⁴ This episode reputedly frightened Arabs as far away as Tulkarm.⁵¹⁵ At Kwaykat in the Galilee search forces gathered the village's men and youth, took them to a prescribed location where they were forced to run and jump on command, then beat and kicked them after forcing them to sleep on the ground.⁵¹⁶ During the first month of searches the AHC named the villages of al-Dhib, Kafr Misr, Nabi Shmu'il [Samwil], Bayt Iksa, al-Taybeh, Qaqun, and Dhanabeh as sites for all manner of similar abuses.⁵¹⁷

In addition to the violence, cruelty, property destruction, and collective levies which search parties imposed on target villages, residents also suffered from the theft of goods, cash, and jewelry by security forces. Like other accusations of unbecoming conduct, charges of plundering were hotly denied. At Beisan, local Arabs accused government forces of robbery, to which the ADC-Beisan responded dismissively that the townspeople were too "impecunious" to have had any savings worth taking.⁵¹⁸ When

⁵¹³ Report, 2.6.36, HA 8/38.

⁵¹⁴ Najib, 5.6.36, CZA S/25 – 3875; Arab Bureau information, 10.6.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

⁵¹⁵ Najib, 5.6.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁵¹⁶ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 86.

⁵¹⁷ AHC to HC and League of Nations, 20.6.36, PRO – FO 371/20023. Most of these villages were in the Jerusalem and Tulkarm subdistricts.

⁵¹⁸ AHC to HC and League of Nations, 20.6.36, and covering memo for same by the Foreign Office, n.d., PRO – FO 371/20023.

asked by the Chief Secretary in late July about pilfering by soldiers, DC-Northern Keith-Roach fulminated that any allegations were simply fabrications of the AHC.⁵¹⁹

On 11 June the Colonial Secretary approved a new addition to the collective punishments arsenal: home demolitions.⁵²⁰ In his *in camera* preview of the 12 June Emergency Regulations HC Wauchope explained that such demolitions would be employed when government forces were fired upon (against dwellings housing snipers or fighters) and, when culprits could not be located, as an exemplary punishment for the public to behold.⁵²¹ By al-Sifri's count the new power was wielded in at least 30 villages, sometimes in conjunction with other punishments.⁵²² At 'Alma, in the hinterlands of Safad, state forces killed the village's livestock before destroying a home that contained a seed repository. In Khan Yunis, near Gaza, six homes were blown up; at Qalansuwa (southwest of Tulkarm) five were destroyed; in Majd al-Krum (Acre subdistrict) four homes were targeted and at Wadi Qabbani (Tulkarm subdistrict) the toll was eight. Bases for NCs were demolished at Khirbata and in Beersheeba, where six other dwellings were also razed. Bedouin populations which saw portions of their encampments destroyed included the Wadi al-Hawarith, the Tarabayn (Beersheeba), and the Tayaha (Naqab). Most often the demolitions were limited to a handful of houses or less and did not entail wholesale destruction of villages. Exceptional in this regard was Bal'a in the Tulkarm subdistrict, a rebel stronghold where several of the largest battles

⁵¹⁹ Report, 22.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁵²⁰ Colonial Secretary to HC, 11.6.36, #255, PRO – CO 733/311/3.

⁵²¹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 7.6.36, #335, PRO – CO 733/311/3. The Colonial Secretary first disapproved of the "purely punitive" character of the exemplary demolitions, before relenting (Colonial Secretary to HC, 8.6.36, #251, PRO – CO 733/311/3).

⁵²² Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 90. All detail above on specific demolitions comes from al-Sifri, p. 89-91.

with colonial forces were fought. There, 16 homes were destroyed during three separate demolition operations and the entire village was eventually depopulated. In all, the Palestine administration estimated that 100 homes were destroyed solely on punitive grounds during the strike.⁵²³ Although the High Commissioner preferred to believe that home demolitions were kept to a reasonable minimum, this was not the perception of the Palestinians, who were repulsed by the state's willingness to make families homeless.⁵²⁴

By 9 June 41 villages had been searched.⁵²⁵ This number doubled to 81 by 24 June before rapidly escalating to reach 148 by July.⁵²⁶ Of a tally of 215 searches of villages and other premises by the close of July, 94, or almost 44 percent resulted in no capture of suspects or weapons.⁵²⁷ During the three months of the strike preceding 29 July, government forces netted only 119 rifles and 129 handguns.⁵²⁸ Large scale regional sweeps proved to be even greater flops. In late June an operation in the Latrun combing through villages in a wide area between Battir and Artuf produced little.⁵²⁹ An even larger sweep in July, employing 4000 men in the triangle region and focused on the Nablus hinterlands in particular, turned up nothing.⁵³⁰ The paltry results of the search

⁵²³ HC to Colonial Undersecretary (Parkinson), 16.10.36, PRO – CO 733/316/11. This total does not include those in Jaffa.

⁵²⁴ As the RAF put it, "This form of punishment has proved very effective and has had a certain amount of moral effect on the villages concerned. It is a quick and conclusive form of punishment and one that is understood by the Arab mind. The ruins of the house or houses stand as a lasting memorial of Government punishment" (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 4.9.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030).

⁵²⁵ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 10.6.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁵²⁶ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 24.6.36 and 1.7.36, weekly summaries of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁵²⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 31.7.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030. The total number of villages listed as searched in this report (137) conflicts with the figure given a month earlier, cited above. It may be that the 148 figure includes repeat searches of individual villages, but this is only speculation, and not what the texts each say.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 61, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., p. 72; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 82; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 349.

regime may have something to do with evasive measures developed by rebels.

According to a report by the Shai, an unknown number of communities followed a protocol whereby two people from each village were responsible for stowing weapons in hidden caches outside the village.⁵³¹ By dint of their size and logistics, larger operations were also more visible and detectable to rebel lookouts and allied villagers.

The violence, destruction, and financial losses caused by searches led to widespread fear among rural populations. Still, state incursions and fines provoked resistance. In late June state forces demanded the residents of Zir'in, north of Jenin, turn over a government clerk, Khalil Mustafa, who was alleged to be involved in the attacks on Kfar Yehezke'el. When villagers refused, police and troops removed its male inhabitants, took its women to the mosque, and then ransacked it, ostensibly to cover a £P 100 charge assessed to it.⁵³² At Tirat Haifa on 19 August villagers fooled the authorities into accepting bags of refuse as payment for a collective fine. However, when they realized the trick the army returned the next day and, after indiscriminately attacking the village, coerced it into paying.⁵³³ Similarly, in July, Fuqu'a, Nuris, and other Jenin-area villages also refused to pay fines imposed on them, each of which had to be collected by force.⁵³⁴

It is likely that most resistance to searches was passive. Using a tactic that was gravely misinterpreted during the 1948 war, rural populations sometimes opted to flee ahead of searches and collective fines. This occurred, for instance, at Qabatiyya in the

⁵³¹ Report, 13.6.36, HA 8/38.

⁵³² Report, 30.6.36, HA 8/38.

⁵³³ Haifa report, 23.8.36, HA 8/40.

⁵³⁴ Report, 22.7.36, HA 8/39.

Jenin subdistrict and among the ‘Arab al-Bawatin Bedouin, encamped east of Beisan.⁵³⁵

The AHC pointed to such instances in a protest it lodged with the government and the League of Nations on 20 June against the arbitrary violence of the search regime and its “intimidation of women and children.”⁵³⁶ Residents also departed areas in the wake of paying collective fines. Subsequent to collection of a £P 300 charge in Beisan on 29 June many Muslim residents declared their intention to exit the town in disgust at state forces’ treatment, again, of women and children.⁵³⁷

Christians looking to avoid police and army depredations sometimes elected not to preemptively flee, but rather to fly crusader flags as an indication or dissimulation of their loyalties. At Rafidiya, a mostly Christian village just west of Nablus, inhabitants who displayed such banners in late June were left unmolested by a detachment of soldiers. Other Christian villages thereafter emulated the tactic, marking or adorning individual homes with crusader emblems.⁵³⁸

By July the mounting “resentment” and “bitterness” caused by the search regime, combined with its manifest failure to stem the burgeoning insurgency, led the High Commissioner to revise its scope. On 7 July he informed the Colonial Secretary that henceforth searches were only to be authorized in cases where tangible evidence such as tracking dogs or eyewitnesses linked a village to rebels, arms, or sabotage.⁵³⁹ New regulations issued on the use of firearms restricted targets to armed persons and those

⁵³⁵ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 87.

⁵³⁶ AHC to HC and League of Nations, 20.6.36, PRO – FO 371/20023.

⁵³⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.6.36, #441, PRO – FO 371/20034; Report, 1.7.36, HA 8/39. This was at least the second search or fine imposed on Beisan by this time.

⁵³⁸ Najib, 26.6.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁵³⁹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 8.7.36, PRO – CO 733/311/3.

wielding bombs, but permission remained for firing on those bearing an undefined “hostile intention” or engaged in sabotage, as well as in instances of self-defense.⁵⁴⁰ In spite of its lackluster performance as a deterrent and with regard to weapons seizures and apprehensions of rebels, the AOC represented the search regime up to that date as a success.⁵⁴¹ Faced with what he called “malicious propaganda inflam[ing] the country... against the Government” and the High Commissioner’s own reservations about the effectiveness of searches within the overall counterinsurgency strategy, however, the AOC cried sour grapes, claiming that he preferred an unspecified course of alternative “punitive measures” along with “showing the flag” through military and government visits to select areas.⁵⁴²

Although much ado was made by top military figures about the strictures placed on their operations as unduly hampering the suppression campaign, the figures cited above indicate that the search regime was not terminated; nor was its severity perceptibly lessened.⁵⁴³ The July reforms were in fact the second modification of the search protocols, the first having ostensibly banned punitive expeditions only days after

⁵⁴⁰ Chief Secretary to AOC, 10.7.36, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁵⁴¹ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 34, 58, 61, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁵⁴² Ibid., p. 74-75. The AOC also notes in this connection that searches were “not popular with the troops.”

⁵⁴³ Ibid., p. 45, 48; Report by the GOC, part I, PRO – CO 733/317/1. In the former, the AOC complains about troops being substituted for police during searches and then that the government did not favor the destruction or confiscation of crops and livestock, though these events were not uncommon during searches thereafter.

A number of scholars have largely concluded, as the military brass did, that HC Wauchope’s administration suffered from a “vacillatory policy” that crippled the counterinsurgency and suppression of the revolt (Michael J. Cohen, “Sir Arthur Wauchope, the Army, and the Rebellion in Palestine, 1936,” *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 19, n. 1 (Jan 1973), p. 29; see also Martin Kolinsky, “The Collapse and Restoration of Public Security” in *Britain and the Middle East in the 1930s*. Such accounts typically do not examine the effects of collective punishments with any detail or care, but praise it (Cohen, p. 22) or the emergency laws (Kolinsky, p. 154) while doting on the military’s disputes with Wauchope.

they began in late May.⁵⁴⁴ As followed the May guideline's issuance, killings of villagers and Bedouin by police and military continued after the July reforms, along with injuries, thefts and the capricious destruction of property. Only days later, on 11 July, an army patrol shot at near Quleh, in the Ramle subdistrict, responded with indiscriminate fire against the village, killing a woman and child.⁵⁴⁵ After news of the outrage spread, the High Commissioner appointed a panel of inquiry, one of whose heads was J.E.F. Campbell, DC-Jerusalem, who visited Quleh the day after the incident and ordered its four nicest homes demolished.⁵⁴⁶ The panel concluded that greater warning needed to be given to villagers concerning searches, particularly the danger of fleeing a cordon, and this message was then inserted into one of the state's propaganda leaflets dumped across the countryside.⁵⁴⁷ It also stoked debate over the regulations for opening fire and further spurred military accusations that the administration was tying its hands, though the use of firearms was not further restricted until 7 September when persons disobeying military directives were disallowed as targets unless they were known to have arms or to have participated in hostile activity.⁵⁴⁸ Although the July regulations didn't terminate the search regime, by August it was directed less at villages and more so at houses and

⁵⁴⁴ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 45, 48, PRO – CO 733/317/1; HC, Notes on Air Vice Marshall Pierse's dispatch [i.e. Report by the AOC (untitled)], p. 3, enclosure to: HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.11.36, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁵⁴⁵ Memo by HC on GOC's rpt, p. 5, PRO – CO 733/317/1. Though the AOC claimed that the killings were caused by failures to heed military instructions or attempts to break the cordon placed on the village (Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 73, PRO – CO 733/317/1), al-Sifri describes the boy's death as an act of cold-blooded murder (*Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 86).

⁵⁴⁶ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 73, PRO – CO 733/317/1; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 87.

⁵⁴⁷ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 73, PRO – CO 733/317/1; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 119-20.

⁵⁴⁸ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 74; Report by the GOC, part I; Chief Secretary to AOC, 7.9.36, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

unidentified “areas suspected of harboring armed bands or hidden arms.”⁵⁴⁹ This approach was subsequently presented by the RAF as “very successful” in capturing men and arms, though the evidence for this claim is thin.⁵⁵⁰

As the rebellion wore on the AOC continued to articulate a counterinsurgency strategy based in the core principles of collective punishment: collective responsibility and guilt through association or proximity. On 20 August he advocated evacuating and bombing towns and villages “intimately connected with [the] formation and maintenance of armed bands and intimidation,” with Nablus and the central hills first up as candidates for the new air action. He also recommended the declaration of martial law in specific regions or in the whole country, deportation of the mufti, “intensified searching” in urban areas, curfews, and other “restrictive measures” in population centers.⁵⁵¹ Martial law had first been raised in earnest after the search regime threatened in June to incite Arab police to mutiny or mass defection, but the Colonial Secretary had rejected the idea on the grounds that the 1931 Order-in-Council was adequate to the task of enabling the Palestinian revolt’s suppression and that martial law legally required indemnification, which was undesirable.⁵⁵² With Ormsby-Gore’s backing, HC Wauchope continued to assert his preeminence over the counterinsurgency campaign, much to the aggravation of military authorities. In reply to the AOC, the High Commissioner deprecated the motion to bomb villages and urban areas, fearing such would both widen the rebellion and cause

⁵⁴⁹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 31.7.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁵⁵⁰ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 7.8.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁵⁵¹ Memorandum by the AOC on the military situation, 20.8.36, CP 225 (36), PRO – CAB/24/263.

⁵⁵² Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 45-46, PRO – CO 733/317/1; HC to Colonial Secretary, 2.6.36, #320, Colonial Secretary to HC, 3.6.36, #242, PRO – CO 733/311/3.

great civilian casualties. In the process he signaled considerable doubts about the efficacy and justice of collective punishments:

At present the fact that chiefly prevents punitive measures, such as heavy collective fines or destruction of houses, is lack of evidence of guilt against definite individuals or definite villages. By employing this intensive method [proposed by the AOC] we shall make many more innocent people suffer all the more severely, and by so doing greatly intensify the already bitter feeling in town and country.⁵⁵³

The AOC did not relent, and in early September, after the second battle of Bal‘a (2-3 September), again urged authorization be given to bomb inside villages, after evacuation orders.⁵⁵⁴ By this point, the Cabinet had reached a turning point. At its 2 September meeting it rejected any diplomatic concession to the Palestinians and resolved decisively on “intensive measures, designed to crush the Arab resistance.”⁵⁵⁵ To this end it approved the dispatch of another division of troops to Palestine and promulgation of martial law at “an appropriate moment” under a new military commander, Lieutenant General J. G. Dill, the Director of Military Intelligence and Operations at the War Office.⁵⁵⁶ The High Commissioner was compelled to assent to the new line, but swiftly moving events and lingering legal questions ultimately prevented the establishment of martial law and the GOC from taking the reins.⁵⁵⁷

Beyond being subordinated to ‘the civil power’ and subject to its constraints, the military echelon chafed at being relegated to what it saw as a fundamentally defensive posture dedicated to reinforcing the police and guarding road traffic and state

⁵⁵³ HC to Colonial Secretary, 22.8.36, CP 225 (36), PRO – CAB/24/263.

⁵⁵⁴ AOC to Air Ministry, 3.9.36, PRO – CO 733/315/6.

⁵⁵⁵ Cabinet meeting extract, 2.9.36, PRO – FO 371/20024. Bombing villages was not approved however.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 4.9.36, CP 238 (36), PRO – CO 733/297/5.

institutions.⁵⁵⁸ However, this selective narrative omits not only the indiscriminate violence and longevity of the search regime, but that the military's deficiencies in hunting down the rebel bands owed less to restraints imposed by the High Commissioner and more to insufficient intelligence and especially to its inability to mount surprise offensives.⁵⁵⁹ Public hostility to British colonial policy was such that a steady stream of leaks fed and eased rebel intelligence collection, allowing the rebels to avoid hammer-blows like the massive July sweep in the triangle.⁵⁶⁰ This was not a shortcoming the military easily overcame, though it still managed to engage rebels in a host of fearsome battles as the insurgency hit its widest scope, from August on.

Even as their tactical capabilities steadily improved, the rebels sustained punishing losses in prolonged engagements, many of which they initiated.⁵⁶¹ On 7 August an attack on a convoy between Nablus and Dayr al-Sharaf resulted in 22 rebel casualties.⁵⁶² Three days later, rebels dug into fortifications in the craggy hills northwest of Nablus ambushed army forces and the ensuing combat spread towards Rafidiya, killing 11 Arab partisans and leaving four more captured.⁵⁶³ Airpower proved forbidding in a 12 hour battle in Wadi 'Ar'ara on 20 August, where 32 casualties were inflicted on forces led by shaykh 'Atiya Ahmad 'Awad, a *Qassami* from Balad al-

⁵⁵⁸ This complaint was most sharply put by the GOC, who contended that "a purely defensive policy" prevailed before the Cabinet's statement of policy in September (Report by the GOC, part I, PRO – CO 733/317/1). As noted above, the AOC lamented the High Commissioner's initial instructions against "punitive" searches, and each subsequent reiteration or augmentation of that directive. See also Kolinsky, "The Collapse and Restoration," p. 149-50.

⁵⁵⁹ See Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 87, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁵⁶⁰ Kolinsky, "The Collapse and Restoration," p. 150.

⁵⁶¹ See favorable comment on rebel tactics by the AOC: Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 99, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁵⁶² Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 98, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., p. 99; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 128. In Arab accounts this is referred to as the first battle of Bal'a (ibid; Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 131).

Shaykh who became a key commander during the second phase of the Great Revolt.⁵⁶⁴

The following day, a second engagement cost the rebels 11 more men in the same location.⁵⁶⁵ Although not all major combat encounters ended in crushing defeats for the insurgents, and the rebels still showed great “facility” at escaping and eluding pursuit, the toll taken on the Palestinian partisans was heavy.⁵⁶⁶ The AHC estimated by the end of August that 1000 Arabs had been killed during the strike, but many of the casualties were kept hidden as villagers feared that their disclosure could invite further government reprisals.⁵⁶⁷

In the AOC’s view, however, nothing short of crushing the peasantry altogether, particularly in the central hill country, was adequate to snuff out the stubborn rebellion.⁵⁶⁸ The AOC’s determination to scourge and chasten peasants *en masse* bespoke the military’s own failure to uproot the insurgency. The resort to collective punishment *as strategy* betrayed the guerillas’ capacity to survive and build the insurgency even while taking withering losses. HC Wauchope straightforwardly declaimed in his post-strike evaluation the idea that a military victory was won by colonial forces.⁵⁶⁹ Given the general popularity of the revolt and the elusiveness of the Arab bands, the military turned, as Bayan al-Hut sarcastically suggests, and “expressed

⁵⁶⁴ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 100, PRO – CO 733/317/1; Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 132-33; Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 186. The AOC mistakenly refers to the location as ‘Arrabeh. Shaykh ‘Awad was with shaykh Farhan when his band carried out the caravan robbery and murder in April that touched off the revolt (Musa, op. cit.).

⁵⁶⁵ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 100, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁵⁶⁶ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 21.8.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁵⁶⁷ CID, 1.9.36, periodical appreciation summary 15/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁵⁶⁸ The AOC argued in late summer that “since the ultimate vote for peace or war lies now with the fellaheen, their subjection must be the primary object” (Memo by the AOC, 20.8.36, CP 225 (36), PRO – CAB/24/263). This was the cornerstone of his plan for an amplified program of counterinsurgency.

⁵⁶⁹ Memo by HC on GOC’s rpt, p. 9, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

its valor by wiping out the unarmed poor.”⁵⁷⁰ Incapable of landing a crushing blow on the insurgents, colonial forces aimed instead to cut it off from its base of rural support by intimidating and brutalizing villagers in areas of rebel strength. This method, a hallmark of Britain’s recent experiences suppressing opposition in India’s Northwest Frontier province where villages and their property were destroyed as recompense for guerilla attacks, had entered imperial counterinsurgency doctrine.⁵⁷¹ In this light, AOC Pierse, GOC Dill, and their immediate subordinates saw any fettering of such options as guileless restraint and an unnecessary sop to the rebels.⁵⁷²

The military’s continual hunger for wider, indiscriminate punitive measures should not obscure the reality that collective punishments were employed throughout the period of the strike. This was so, irrespective of the High Commissioner’s desire to exit the crisis without having stoked the entire Arab population into anti-colonial furor.⁵⁷³ The contretemps that even the tepid and equivocal regulation of the suppression campaign kicked up at this time portended ill for the countryside, which would continue to suffer greatly and often arbitrarily as, over the succeeding years, the state was converted into a counterinsurgency regime in which increasingly severe collective punishments came to mediate and symbolize the Mandate’s relations with the Palestinian population.

⁵⁷⁰ *Al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 354.

⁵⁷¹ Matthew Hughes, “From Law and Order to Pacification: Britain’s Suppression of the 1936-39 Arab Revolt in Palestine,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* v. 39, n. 2 (winter 2010), p. 7.

⁵⁷² Hughes notes that Dill’s Chief of Staff, H.J. Simson, was a follower of H.E. Callwell, the doyen of military intellectuals interested in counter-insurgency and author of the influential *Small Wars* (1896) (“From Law and Order,” p. 7).

⁵⁷³ In the event, the High Commissioner’s fears of a backlash were not unfounded, and even Michael Cohen, a scholar sympathetic to the British military, has noted that, as he puts it, “the repressive actions forced upon the military authorities” in the first two months “merely served to rally Arab opinion solidly in favour of continuing with the strike” (“Sir Arthur Wauchope,” p. 24).

The AHC and the search for an exit

While the military confrontation between Arab rebels and British forces raged, the AHC became increasingly concerned to bring the revolt to a close. A month into the strike the CID reported that “there is no doubt that the High Committee for some time have been considering how they can extricate themselves from the present position without loss of prestige.”⁵⁷⁴ The committee’s conservative inclinations were an open secret and earned it a steady stream of reminders of its charge from the horizontal constituencies driving the movement.⁵⁷⁵

Given its precarious loyalty to the strike, a full-fledge crisis of confidence was not long in the making, arriving after the first wave of organizer arrests in late May, a mere month after the AHC was formed. Figures in the Istiqlal party and Raghib al-Nashashibi heatedly contended that the arrests and exiles had been prompted by the mufti.⁵⁷⁶ These allegations spurred a series of no-confidence measures drawn up against al-Hajj Amin in the Jerusalem, Gaza, and Nablus NCs. ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi, secretary of the AHC, interceded with the Jerusalem NC and effectively scuttled its resolution, but those in the other two committees passed, expressly censuring the mufti and the *majlisi* faction.⁵⁷⁷ ‘Awni Bey, who had been trying to mediate the seething tension between the mufti and Raghib al-Nashashibi, was arrested in the middle of an AHC session in early

⁵⁷⁴ CID, 21.5.36, periodical appreciation summary 10/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁵⁷⁵ Probably for this reason too, its remit at regular meetings was limited (Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 175-76, citing the papers of H.F. al-Khalidi).

⁵⁷⁶ Arab Bureau intelligence, 31.5.36, CZA S/25 – 22231; Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 384; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 76.

⁵⁷⁷ Arab Bureau intelligence, 31.5.36, CZA S/25 – 22231; Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 385; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 76-77.

June where charges of the mufti's connivance with the authorities were being given a fresh airing by A.L. Salah.⁵⁷⁸ Ironically, 'Awni Bey's detention was also laid at the foot of the mufti, who reportedly complained to the High Commissioner about his continued advocacy for a government employees strike.⁵⁷⁹ As rumors swirled, the mufti was censured for meeting with government officers and press criticism of the AHC's timidity grew.⁵⁸⁰

The Palestine administration soon found means by which to further weaken the tottering AHC. Days after HC Wauchope praised the mufti in early June for refraining from lending the uprising a religious coloring, Jamal al-Husayni was granted a visa to Britain, along with A.L. Salah, Dr. 'Izzat Tanus, and Shibli Jamal. All but Salah were provided with a letter of introduction to the Colonial Office by the High Commissioner, on the understanding that they sought a negotiated solution to the Palestine conflict.⁵⁸¹ By this endeavor, the High Commissioner temporarily removed two members of the AHC from Palestine (Jamal Effendi and A.L. Salah), after having interned its most effective organizer, 'Awni Bey. Predictably, the mission became fodder for further factional recriminations. It was reportedly paid for from the Central Relief Fund, controlled by al-Hajj Amin, but Raghib Bey derided the idea that it was anything but a personal voyage, not sponsored by the AHC, while Ahmad Hilmi Pasha declared it a PAP delegation.⁵⁸² Shorn of 'Awni Bey and Jamal Effendi, the RAF noted a tendency towards what it called the AHC's "break-up," while the CID remarked on 23 June that

⁵⁷⁸ Arab Bureau intelligence, 7.6.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

⁵⁷⁹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 170; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 74-75.

⁵⁸⁰ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 10.6.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁵⁸¹ Kayyali, *Palestine: a modern history*, p. 194.

⁵⁸² Arab Bureau information, 12.6.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

“There is no real organization apparent, in fact the whole movement seems to lack organising ability.”⁵⁸³ The CID added that “The public has, to an extent, lost confidence in the Supreme Committee [AHC] and more extreme action is urged,” while the RAF depicted a centripetal process of leadership moving to regional bodies and “extremists.”⁵⁸⁴

Despite insistent Zionist claims that the mufti was the strike’s chief orchestrator, he very clearly acted as a brake on the revolt in its early months.⁵⁸⁵ The CID held that he was “not prepared to stake his all, and to assume full responsibility” for the rising, and contrasted his equivocation with the charismatic religious leadership and call to *jihad* of al-Qassam.⁵⁸⁶ As the High Commissioner acknowledged, the mufti had not only demurred from lending the rebellion a religious imprimatur, but had further avoided calling a meeting of the SMC, thereby dodging the sticky question of a potential strike by its staff.⁵⁸⁷ His quietist and cooperative posture was temporarily shaken when the Colonial Secretary made the mistake of crowing about the SMC’s stance in his June 17 appearance at parliament, but after a public rebuttal by the mufti the Chief Secretary’s office succeeded in eliciting a further statement of his “distinct desire to follow lawful means in asserting the nation’s rights.”⁵⁸⁸ The mufti’s public statement rendered the

⁵⁸³ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.6.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030; CID, 23.6.36, periodical appreciation summary 11/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., both sources.

⁵⁸⁵ Even Moshe Shertok, head of the JA’s Political Department, was compelled to admit privately in late June that the mufti was a relative moderate in the field (Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 385-86, 399). Nonetheless Shertok pushed for his deportation.

⁵⁸⁶ CID, 23.6.36, periodical appreciation summary 11/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁵⁸⁷ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 388.

⁵⁸⁸ Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 77-78; SMC to HC and Colonial Secretary, 22.6.36, PRO – CO 733/310/4. The High Commissioner nonetheless remained frustrated that the mufti would not outright condemn rebel

SMC's position ambiguous, and some preachers did begin to interject religious tones into the rebellion, but al-Hajj Amin continued to oppose calls for a government employees' strike.⁵⁸⁹

While the mufti sought to balance what Mattar has referred to as his "paradoxical position" at the head of the strike and as president of the non-striking SMC, further evidence of his orientation emerged during Jamal Effendi's visit to London.⁵⁹⁰ In statements to the press and before parliament in mid-July Jamal al-Husayni reverted to the long-preferred *majlisi* line that the Palestinians were in revolt against Zionism, and that they had no animus towards Great Britain. Adding fuel to the fire, he also distanced the delegation from the rural rebels, terming them "innocent and uneducated people."⁵⁹¹ These comments enraged the political detainees at Sarafand who fired off a rebuke to the AHC declaring that the delegation was supposed to support the revolt, not declaim it.⁵⁹² The AHC's response was desultory and formulaic, and wasn't even directly conveyed to the prisoners, but the latter relented, believing that little could be done.⁵⁹³

Of more lasting salience to the political detainees was the AHC's continued stymieing of initiatives for a government employees' strike. At 'Awja al-Hafir the unflagging Akram Zu'aytir organized an NC of detainees in late May, one of the first

violence, but this risked, as the latter well knew, divorcing himself from the popular constituencies backing the revolt (HC to SMC, 6.7.36, PRO – CO 733/310/4).

⁵⁸⁹ Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 78; CID, 23.6.36, periodical appreciation summary 11/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁵⁹⁰ Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 77.

⁵⁹¹ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 138-40; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 345.

⁵⁹² Quoted in Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 139-40.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 147. The prisoners learned of the response some three weeks after their protest via 'Ajaj Nuwayhid, a former camp resident released to the hospital.

communiqués of which called on state employees to join the strike.⁵⁹⁴ By the close of June, incessant attention to the issue led to a compromise which divided the Arab public. Over 150 Arab employees of the first rank signed a memorandum drafted by Musa al-'Alami, Acting Solicitor General, and George Antonius, which lent support to the strike's demands and in particular contended that only a halt to Jewish immigration could rectify the government's position.⁵⁹⁵ A similar memo by 1200 second rank employees followed.⁵⁹⁶ At the same time, up to half of government workers' salaries were claimed as strike funds.⁵⁹⁷ The submission of these petitions left the political prisoners dissatisfied and they continued to inveigh against "leniency" and "haggling" on the part of the AHC and to advocate a state employees' strike until the close of August.⁵⁹⁸ On the other hand, bands in the Nablus, Beisan, and Irbid (Transjordan) regions were reputed to be buoyed by the memorials, viewing them as the first sincere participation by the "aristocracy" in the struggle.⁵⁹⁹ Recognizing that government workers were under extraordinary pressure and seeking to avert a sudden implosion of the bureaucracy, the High Commissioner decided only to warn the signatories of the two memoranda, rather than punish them.⁶⁰⁰

Yet the AHC faced its stiffest challenge in the growing internal polarization that characterized Palestinian society during the strike and the roiling dissension over the

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 118-19, 127.

⁵⁹⁵ Memo by Arab senior government officials, 30.6.36, in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 440-45; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 170-71.

⁵⁹⁶ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 171.

⁵⁹⁷ Arab Bureau information, "On the state of affairs these days," 30.6.36, CZA S/25 – 22231; CID, 18.8.36, periodical appreciation summary 14/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁵⁹⁸ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 148-49, 155, 158-60.

⁵⁹⁹ Report (S.G.), 15.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁶⁰⁰ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 171.

sacrifices it entailed. As at the strike's outset, the greatest sources of discontent with the uprising were found among urban merchants and the propertied classes whose material assets were taxed by both various rebel groups and collective fines, and whose businesses were subject to prolonged hiatus. Merchants and plantation owners were ill at ease as the rebellion deepened throughout May, but often kept quiet in fear for their lives.⁶⁰¹ After the second full month of the strike economic conditions deteriorated significantly. By July fears of hunger emerged in Jaffa.⁶⁰² As wealthy families fled the country other merchants clandestinely conducted or attempted to conduct business from their homes.⁶⁰³ The NCs and the AHC were reportedly low on funds.⁶⁰⁴ Commenting on the situation in mid-July, the CID forecast a wave of bankruptcies among tradespeople and small shop-owners and described most urbanites as "having a miserable time" financially.⁶⁰⁵ The RAF added that many merchants were especially afraid that the imposition of collective fines would ruin them.⁶⁰⁶ Murmurs in the press of the strike's potential end and strike-breaking in Jaffa and Jerusalem brought a renewed emphasis on strike enforcement, but cajoling and displays of force by youthful partisans couldn't stem the growing economic losses and disarray.⁶⁰⁷

Merchant meetings in the same cities in mid-July castigated the strike in letters to the AHC, and in the former 150 traders appended their names to a call for a switch in

⁶⁰¹ Arab Bureau information, n.d. [22 days into strike], from "Shomer," CZA S/25 – 22193; Arab Bureau information, 31.5.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

⁶⁰² Najib, 30.6.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁶⁰³ Arab Bureau information, "On the state of affairs these days," 30.6.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.; CID, 23.6.36, periodical appreciation summary 11/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁶⁰⁵ CID, 12.7.36, periodical appreciation summary 12/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁶⁰⁶ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.6.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁶⁰⁷ CID, 12.7.36, periodical appreciation summary 12/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; Arab Bureau information, situation evaluation, 12.7.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

tactics from the strike to an anti-Jewish boycott.⁶⁰⁸ Where Jerusalemite merchants bitterly complained that smaller retailers and vegetable vendors were flouting the strike and protested the rough treatment they received at the hands of youth enforcers, their counterparts in Jaffa pointedly argued that the strike was not hurting the Zionists and that their own dire position would force them to break ranks, regardless of the consequences. Further disparaging the new social authority of the popular classes during the upsurge, the latter also added their opinion that it was better that the leaders lead, rather than being led. The AHC was already concerned at this point about the suffering of smaller merchants and villagers, and about the potential for the mounting economic crisis to cripple or unravel the strike.⁶⁰⁹ Accordingly, the cancellation of collective fines was added to the list of Palestinian demands, along with a general amnesty for acts associated with the revolt committed during the strike.⁶¹⁰ Haifan entrepreneurs soon echoed their Jaffan colleagues' plea for the strike's curtailment, and Nabulsi soap manufacturers, who were known to be bankrolling the rural fighters, also requested permission in July from the AHC to resume business so as to retain their markets.⁶¹¹ All of these importunings were for naught, but to solidify his position, the mufti cleverly sent motions for an end to the strike to the NCs, informing them that they needed to reach a resolution on the subject. Though outwardly consulting with the NCs as per the AHC's *modus operandi*, he thereby shifted responsibility for the strike's hardships back

⁶⁰⁸ Arab Bureau information, situation evaluation, 12.7.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

⁶⁰⁹ CID, DIS extract, 8.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁶¹⁰ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.7.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁶¹¹ Arab Bureau information, situation appreciation, 26.7.36, CZA S/25 – 22231.

squarely onto the NCs' shoulders while signaling that he would not be first to push for the strike's end.⁶¹²

As the strike took a toll on the financial health and economic prospects of Arab society its advocates dug their heels in. Local groups took their own initiatives to reinforce the strike and increasingly came to threaten lethal force against those perceived to be shirking their national responsibilities. In Nablus an obscure association grouped around Ihsan Abu al-Nimr issued a call in early July for government workers to strike within a month's time, on pain of death.⁶¹³ The profusion of death threats from such groups and the Black Hand came to be aimed at wider groups of targets, and stoked a climate of suspicion and emergency that had corrosive effects on the movement. Ahmad al-Shak'a, a member of Nablus's NC and known funder of the rebellion, was accused in public posters around the same time of illicit contact with the authorities and treason.⁶¹⁴ Tahir al-Misri, another Nabulsi merchant from a prominent local family was similarly accused of using the revolt for personal gain.⁶¹⁵ After his detention, conjecture led to talk at Haifa's NC headquarters of potentially assassinating no less a figure than 'Awni Bey.⁶¹⁶ Though the plot never went anywhere, this episode illustrates the pervasive mood of paranoia gripping some of the strike's most ardent foot soldiers.

In August elite fears of an inward, internecine turn within the revolt fully materialized. After leaving an NC meeting on the 14th, Nasr al-Din Nasr al-Din, acting

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ Report from "the source" on Nablus, etc., 3.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.; Najib, 15.6.36, CZA S/25 – 3875; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 103.

⁶¹⁵ Report from "the source" on Nablus, etc., 3.7.36, HA 8/39; Report (S.G.), 15.7.36, HA 8/39.

⁶¹⁶ Haifa report, 11.7.36, HA 8/39.

mayor of Hebron and head of the city's NC, was gunned down.⁶¹⁷ As Darwaza explains, Nasr al-Din was believed to favor the Royal Commission and to have gone soft on the strike.⁶¹⁸ The RAF interpreted the event as a pungent warning to wobblers and those perceived to be "interfere[ing] with the strike movement."⁶¹⁹ The assassination may also have had to do with Nasr al-Din's contacts with Amir 'Abdullah – a notion which looks plausible in light of the escalation of intimidation and threats aimed at *mu'arada* figures. Both al-Shak'a and al-Misri in Nablus were Opposition leaders. 'Isa al-'Isa was another target, probably on account of *Filastin*'s critical coverage of the AHC and the *majlisiyyin* and its favorable view of the Opposition and Amir 'Abdullah.⁶²⁰ On the evening of 11 August rebels barged into his house seeking him, but he wasn't in. As the RAF noted, *Filastin*'s coverage subsequently swung away from factional partisanship and refrained from criticism of the strike, though this circumspection didn't last long.⁶²¹ Merchants close to Sulayman Bey Tuqan who advocated an end to the strike received death threats at about the same time, and, at the close of the month, he himself was reported by army intelligence to be subject of an assassination plot authored by al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni.⁶²² The formation of revolutionary courts in the triangle could hardly have come as comforting news to merchants, the *mu'arada*, and elites aghast at the accelerating radicalism of the strike.⁶²³

⁶¹⁷ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 106.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., p. 107-08.

⁶¹⁹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 21.8.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁶²⁰ Ibid.; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 105-06.

⁶²¹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 21.8.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁶²² Ibid.; Army headquarters, 28.8.36, extract, HA 8/40.

⁶²³ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 21.8.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

In this light, the AHC's effort to garner foreign support and its ginger pursuit of a diplomatic resolution to the revolt took on new urgency. In one of its first sessions, on 26 April, the AHC resolved to appeal for external support from Arab states.⁶²⁴ The most active foreign interlocutor was Amir 'Abdullah, whom the AHC engaged preemptively from the strike's earliest days "in order to prevent him from working at cross purposes" – though it must be added that *mu'arada* figures were not entirely displeased at the thought of Palestine's incorporation into a larger Transjordanian emirate, as the amir had for some years proposed on and off.⁶²⁵ The AHC's approach to 'Abdullah did not bear fruit, as the young potentate was anxious to diminish tensions between the Arabs and Britain, and thus recommended on several occasions that the AHC unilaterally terminate the strike, without preconditions.⁶²⁶ For its part, the British government was concerned not to create a precedent of foreign Arab intervention in Palestine policy; nonetheless, when it became clear that fellow Arab statesmen were focusing their exertions on the Palestinians and not on the offices of the empire, certain quarters, and particularly the Foreign Office, began in July to warm to the attempts at intercession.⁶²⁷ However, as the administration and the government in London were averse to a *quid pro quo* which they believed would be interpreted as a capitulation to violence, no breakthrough was possible. On 22 August, with the AOC pushing for the bombing of urban centers and martial law, HC Wauchope broke the deadlock by advancing an alternative option, for

⁶²⁴ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 29.4.36, monthly summary of intelligence (April), PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁶²⁵ Wilson, *King Abdullah*, p. 116 (including quote); al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 134. On the Opposition's position towards 'Abdullah, see the next chapter and see Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 105-06.

⁶²⁶ Wilson, *King Abdullah*, p. 116-18.

⁶²⁷ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 205.

the first time proposing to London a temporary suspension of immigration (during the Royal Commission's investigations) and amnesty for non-violent offenses in return for the AHC issuing a call to end the strike.⁶²⁸ With great trepidation, the Colonial Secretary mooted the High Commissioner's proposal to the Cabinet, giving it his guarded approval.⁶²⁹ Only days earlier, Nuri al-Sa'id, Foreign Minister of Iraq, had begun to press the AHC to call off the strike in return for Iraq's official intercession with Great Britain on behalf of Palestine.⁶³⁰ Nuri Pasha's bid quickly gathered momentum, although the AHC remained deeply divided and public assent to a diplomatic exit far from guaranteed. Factional antagonism within the organization was exacerbated in early August by a clumsy attempt by Amir 'Abdullah, in the company of Opposition politicians, to strong-arm it into declaring an end to the strike without any guaranteed concession.⁶³¹ After months of attempting to steer clear of direct implication in the revolt and maintain as clean a record as he could under the circumstances, the mufti had also become a more active advocate of the insurrection, deepening the committee's split over the armed struggle. Taggar and Mattar have both argued that this turn came about as al-Hajj Amin sought to retain his standing among the rebels.⁶³² Given their increasing militancy and determination to impose themselves on the political situation, the mufti also must have seen closer affiliation with the rebels as necessary for his own self-

⁶²⁸ HC to Colonial Secretary, 22.8.36, CP 225 (36), PRO – CAB 24/263.

⁶²⁹ Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 26.8.36, CP 225 (36), PRO – CAB 24/263.

⁶³⁰ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 207-08. For interesting detail on his first attempt at mediation in June, including Weizmann's acceptance (and subsequent retraction) of a halt to Jewish immigration for a period of one year, see p. 204.

⁶³¹ Wilson, *King Abdullah*, p. 118; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 207.

⁶³² Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 393; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 78-79.

preservation.⁶³³ Indeed, rather famously he later requested and received a bullet-proof vest from the administration.⁶³⁴

As discussions over an end to the uprising heated up in August, the AHC received telegrams from NC stalwarts, including representations from Tulkarm, Beisan, Jenin, and elsewhere refusing compromise and counseling against concessions.⁶³⁵ The AHC responded by calling a congress of NCs to discuss Nuri al-Sa'id's efforts to broker a settlement.⁶³⁶ The date was set for 20 August, but the administration forbade the meeting at the last minute.⁶³⁷ According to one well-connected Haganah informant, the AHC then resolved to consult with the NCs individually if the government wouldn't allow a congress.⁶³⁸ In its 22 August session the AHC agreed to Nuri Pasha's intercession, but added a bevy of demands, including the complete stoppage of immigration, Jewish disarmament, compensation for damages caused by the military and police, remission of collective fines, and revision of the Royal Commission's terms of reference.⁶³⁹ Backed by "moderates" within the committee, Nuri al-Sa'id objected to this stance and forced the committee to scale back its position in return for his

⁶³³ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 393; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 79. Taggar adds that the mufti sought to make himself indispensable by aligning with the rebellion (p. 394), but this suggestion seems open to debate. More certain is the fact that his ambiguous embrace of the strike led to rumors that he was favorable towards the government (Report from "the source" on Nablus, etc., 3.7.36, HA 8/39) which consequently placed him in potential jeopardy.

⁶³⁴ Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 79. Although undoubtedly told with great exaggeration, Bahjat Abu Gharbiyya claims that by the end of the strike, a trusted source informed him that the mufti was receiving around 200 letters a day threatening him should he accept the Royal Commission without securing any concession on Arab demands (*Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 91).

⁶³⁵ Note, n.d., CZA S/25 – 22193.

⁶³⁶ Note, n.d., w/ Hebrew translation of AHC notice, CZA S/25 – 22193.

⁶³⁷ Report #7: the congress of NCs and the position of the AHC, 20.8.36, HA 8/40.

⁶³⁸ Ibid. The informant was on good enough terms with Fuad Saba, secretary of the AHC, that on the evening of 20 August they reputedly shared beers – at a British bar – after the AHC's session!

⁶³⁹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 208-09.

mediation.⁶⁴⁰ At its session on the 24th the AHC entered new terrain, formally accepting the principle of foreign Arab intervention, without guarantees, in support of the strike's three original demands.⁶⁴¹

Following the AHC's approval of Nuri Pasha's intercession, 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi, who had communicated to the High Commissioner that a settlement was achievable if immigration was halted, was released from Sarafand and optimistic rumors began to circulate among the Arabs that victory was impending.⁶⁴² On 26 August the AHC reaffirmed its position in a unanimous vote.⁶⁴³ Further indicating the organization's newfound coherence, it planned to convince the NCs to accept its stance, which was predicated on the assumption that some form of immigration cessation would be forthcoming.⁶⁴⁴ Nuri al-Sa'id informed HC Wauchope that the AHC had also privately pledged to do what it could to tamp down the violence of the insurrection.⁶⁴⁵

Conscious that the militants would need to be brought along to make a settlement stick, Nuri Pasha had solicited the opinions of the Sarafand detainees before the AHC's vote on 26 August, a move followed up by 'Awni Bey, whose further dialogue with the political prisoners elicited their first, guarded approval of Nuri's proposal, with an

⁶⁴⁰ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 21.8.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 209.

⁶⁴¹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 209.

⁶⁴² HC to Colonial Secretary, 22.8.36, CP 225 (36), PRO – CAB 24/263; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 28.8.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030. 'Awni Bey was released at the urging of Nuri al-Sa'id.

⁶⁴³ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 135.

⁶⁴⁴ HC to Colonial Secretary, 31.8.36, #664, PRO – FO 371/20023.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

immigration halt and amnesty measures as necessary provisos.⁶⁴⁶ The AHC then announced its unanimous resolution in a communiqué on 31 August in which it called again for a congress of national committees to confirm its course.⁶⁴⁷ The invitation to NCs provoked enough outrage from Raghib al-Nashashibi, who had left the relevant session before this course was agreed upon, to cause the proposed congress to be postponed.⁶⁴⁸ Both the CID and the RAF speculated that al-Hajj Amin was attempting to block the Iraqi mediation, but it is more likely that the majority of the AHC viewed the NCs' agreement as a requisite step in legitimizing the diplomatic climb-down.⁶⁴⁹ Indeed the High Commissioner agreed with Nuri al-Sa'id's contemporaneous assessment that short of an immigration halt any leader calling for the end of the uprising was liable to be assassinated.⁶⁵⁰ The Cabinet's 2 September meeting and subsequent 7 September statement of policy backing military suppression of the revolt caught the Arabs off-guard and temporarily took the wind out of Nuri Pasha's initiative.

Fawzi al-Qawuqji and the end of the strike

As London officials shut down the diplomatic advance, Fawzi al-Qawuqji assumed command of the insurgency. At a meeting also on 2 September the newly arrived Syrian tactician received pledges of support from key commanders of the triangle region, Fakhri 'Abd al-Hadi, 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad, 'Arif 'Abd al-

⁶⁴⁶ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 159-60. Their first preference remained a widening of the struggle via a state employees' strike (including the SMC), but they added that if this was impossible, then external mediation might serve to preserve the nation's honor.

⁶⁴⁷ Reproduced in al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 135-36.

⁶⁴⁸ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 4.9.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.; CID, 1.9.36, periodical appreciation summary 15/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁶⁵⁰ HC to Colonial Secretary, 31.8.36, #664, PRO – FO 371/20023.

Raziq, shaykh Farhan, shaykh ‘Atiya ‘Awad, and Abu Khalid.⁶⁵¹ Al-Qawuqji’s military credentials and exploits in the Syrian rebellion in the mid-1920s preceded him and conferred upon him an aura of professionalism unmatched by the rural Palestinian commanders. Immodest and given to bravado, he thought little of the civilian leadership of the strike, although al-Hajj Amin and Istiqlal figures helped entice him to join the rebellion.⁶⁵² Darwaza has attributed al-Qawuqji’s campaign to these politicians, but al-Qawuqji appears to have had little patience for them.⁶⁵³ Instead he quickly sought to establish himself as the revolt’s unfettered supreme commander.

After he entered the country with volunteer fighters from Iraq and Syria in late August, al-Qawuqji quickly embarked on a plan to reorganize and intensify the rebellion. As well as the aforementioned measures instituted to coordinate and constrain rebel requisitioning from villagers, he erected a revolutionary court system to keep order, prevent rebel mistreatment of the public, and weed out informants.⁶⁵⁴ On the military side, he ran an intelligence network akin to that already in use by rebels, relying on Palestinian police and clandestine scouts.⁶⁵⁵ More importantly, perhaps, he strove to institute a new model of paramilitary mobilization. Under the guidance of experienced military men like himself, al-Qawuqji sought to train the widest number of villagers

⁶⁵¹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 189.

⁶⁵² Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 135; Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 226; Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 183. Mu‘in al-Madi and Iraqi Prime Minister Yasin al-Hashimi were central to this process.

⁶⁵³ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 135. Al-Qawuqji hardly mentions the civilian politicians in his memoir, though this may also owe to soured relations thereafter (*Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2). He is known, however, to have been more partial to affiliates of the Opposition (Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 227; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 191-92), and not the mufti, whom he saw as a pawn of the British (Porath, p. 192).

⁶⁵⁴ Al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 22, 28; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 190.

⁶⁵⁵ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 189.

possible in battlefield tactics, including techniques for fighting airplanes and tanks.⁶⁵⁶ He instituted a system based on rotating forces, by one account working with no more than 200 men in a group, who would drill and fight for weeks and then return to their villages while new batches of recruits were similarly trained.⁶⁵⁷ This system was intended both to align rebel provisioning with the villages from which fighters hailed and to seed the country with capable bodies of reserves who could be mobilized in a *faza* ' or for offensive purposes.⁶⁵⁸ Taking Bal'a and Dayr al-Ghusun in the Tulkarm subdistrict and Yasid in the environs of Nablus as his bases, al-Qawuqji concentrated his efforts on the triangle region and the area between Jenin and Beisan.⁶⁵⁹ The triangle was divided under two further subcommanders, 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad in the south and Fakhri 'Abd al-Hadi in the north, while shaykh Salman al-Sa'di al-Saturi was designated head of the region east of Jenin.⁶⁶⁰ Each subcommander was to maintain a permanent force of 100 men, trained by al-Qawuqji's instructors, but estimates of the total forces mustered under his hand were considerably larger...⁶⁶¹

In his first communiqué announcing his presence and rallying the population to arms, al-Qawuqji called for the formation of a "temporary revolutionary government."⁶⁶² Akram Zu'aytir saw such grandiosity as useless, but al-Qawuqji's advance significantly

⁶⁵⁶ Al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 36.

⁶⁵⁷ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 83. 'Izzat Darwaza related, after being permitted to leave Sarafand on a brief release, that al-Qawuqji had issued a call-up in the Ya'bad area (20 km west of Jenin) for 25 men from each local village (Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 164).

⁶⁵⁸ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 83.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 81; al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 27-28, 35.

⁶⁶⁰ Al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 28. This individual is unmentioned in other sources consulted and his name is later given on the same page as Sulayman al-Sa'di. In reality it may have been shaykh Farhan al-Sa'di.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶⁶² Communiqué from the general command of the Arab revolt, 28.8.36, in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 448-49.

reshaped the revolt.⁶⁶³ Within a month, many top commanders were judged by the CID to be Syrians, not Palestinians.⁶⁶⁴ Tensions between rebels and villagers rose and the government made inroads in inducing some *mukhtars* to block access to their villages.⁶⁶⁵ This in turn escalated insurgent pressure on the countryside and particularly on those hamlets opposed to the rebellion.⁶⁶⁶ On the other hand, al-Qawuqji's instructors and reorganization unquestionably increased the effectiveness and skill of rebel fighters.⁶⁶⁷ During the second battle of Bal'a, for instance, on 2-3 September, al-Qawuqji's men fought off an onslaught by 13 planes and a ground force for about four hours, shooting down at least one plane, killing three British servicemen and losing 9-14 men before making good their retreat.⁶⁶⁸ This battle stoked the morale of fighters and the public alike and was followed by other high profile engagements which illustrated the colonial state's inability to snuff out the revolt.⁶⁶⁹ In a display of daring and panache, al-Qawuqji coordinated a well-orchestrated raid into Nablus on 24 September that led to a panicked response by Brigadier Evetts, Chief of Staff to the AOC, who took mayor Sulayman

⁶⁶³ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 175. This is contrary to the view of some (Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 192).

⁶⁶⁴ CID, 28.9.36, periodical appreciation summary 16/36, PRO – FO 371/20018. Alongside al-Qawuqji fellow Syrian revolt veterans Sa'id al-'As, Muhammad al-Ashmar, and Munir al-Rayyis, head of the revolutionary court and al-Qawuqji's intelligence service (al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 28; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 189) were each pegged as prominent leaders. Darwaza's description in *Hawla al-haraka* (p. 134) supports this view.

⁶⁶⁵ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 11.9.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030; al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 30, 37, 48.

⁶⁶⁶ Al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 48.

⁶⁶⁷ CID, 28.9.36, periodical appreciation summary 16/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 100, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁶⁶⁸ Report by the AOC (untitled), p. 100-01, PRO – CO 733/317/1; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 11.9.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030; al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 26-27; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 152.

⁶⁶⁹ Najib, 9.9.36, CZA S/25 – 3875; al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 27.

Tuqan hostage and used him as a human shield, installed on the roof of the city's military headquarters, in order to forestall any definitive insurgent assault.⁶⁷⁰

The result of the rebels' growing proficiency under al-Qawuqji was to bolster the more radical forces among the Palestinians against those seeking an end to the uprising. As the War Office commented at the close of September, "moderate leaders" had "lost whatever control they possessed."⁶⁷¹ By his own estimation, al-Qawuqji's revolutionary courts carried out many death sentences of "spies," such as Arabs in the secret police, while other accounts contend that some Arabs who challenged the uprising were also given death sentences.⁶⁷² When *Filastin* became the first Arabic newspaper to propose, in view of the onset of the citrus season, a review of the strike, its proprietor's house in Ramallah was shot up, but again al-'Isa was saved by his absence.⁶⁷³ This incident led a number of orchard owners to send a delegation to the AHC to pledge their loyalty to the national cause, come what losses may from foregoing citrus exports.⁶⁷⁴ A greater blow followed, however, with the assassination of Hajj Khalil Taha, the head of Haifa's NC,

⁶⁷⁰ ADC (Bailey) to DC-Northern (Keith-Roach), 29.9.36; HC to GOC, 8.10.36; and GOC to HC, 12.10.36; all enclosures to: HC to Colonial Undersecretary (Parkinson), 16.10.36, PRO – CO 733/316/11. This incident irritated the High Commissioner, but the GOC refused to condemn or forswear the practice of using human shields.

On the same day, rebels fought in major encounters at al-Jab'a and Halhul in the Hebron subdistrict. At al-Jab'a a force hundreds strong escaped evisceration with the aid of a *faza* during a rare British surprise attack. Some 40-50 rebels were estimated killed in their greatest single known loss (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 26.9.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 154; Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 133-34). At Halhul, rebels along a 15 km line of fire skirmished with a state force estimated four times as large and took only three casualties (al-Sifri, p. 157).

⁶⁷¹ Gen. Staff, WO, Palestine summary #1, n.d. (through 29 Sept), PRO – FO 371/20030. This was chalked up in part to the mufti and his allies on the AHC, probably in relation to their recruitment of al-Qawuqji. In keeping with the general view of the War Office and its principals in Palestine, such views overstate the mufti's role.

⁶⁷² Al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 28; Arab Bureau information, 21.9.36, CZA S/25 – 22193; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 147.

⁶⁷³ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 183; Arab Bureau information, 21.9.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

⁶⁷⁴ Najib, 19.9.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

on 27 September. Hajj Khalil's killing shocked Akram Zu'aytir, Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, and others at Sarafand, who found it inexplicable. Zu'aytir regarded it a dangerous and dispiriting development, threatening to take the strike in the direction of fratricide.⁶⁷⁵ Hajj Khalil enjoyed a checkered reputation, having had business contacts with Jews in the past, but what appeared to have spelled his end was his advocacy of permitting citrus growers to export their produce in return for paying a tax to the AHC.⁶⁷⁶

The effects of the social and political polarization that accompanied the strike's final month and a half were not limited to anxious merchants and orchard owners, but refracted back on a key urban constituency: youth. Shortly after al-Qawuqji's arrival the climate for youth in cities and towns became caustic. In Jaffa in early September youth in the markets were shamed for their non-participation in rural combat.⁶⁷⁷ In Nablus local bands demanded that the city's youth should be mobilized, and were promised a "national army" of youth by local leaders.⁶⁷⁸ Nonetheless in Nablus and Tulkarm it was soon unsafe for youth to be seen in the streets unless they were band members, and those who weren't fighting were liable to receive death threats.⁶⁷⁹ Shahada Musa has observed that, where in similar liberation struggles elsewhere youth advanced to play a leadership role in combat, in Palestine educated youth generally refrained from such, leading

⁶⁷⁵ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 192-93.

⁶⁷⁶ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 230 and ft. 29, p. 260; Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 220. The CID noted that Hajj Khalil had sometimes helped authorities, but that he also had his hands in unsavory activities during the strike (28.9.36, periodical appreciation summary 16/36, PRO – FO 371/20018). At Sarafand it was rumored that the assassination stemmed from his support of the Royal Commission (Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 192-93) but while he does appear to have made favorable comments regarding the Mandatory government (Haifa report, 16.9.36, HA 8/41), the proposal to modify the strike for citrus growers stands out as most out of step with the militant determination to maintain the strike.

⁶⁷⁷ Najib, 5.9.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁶⁷⁸ Haifa report, 9.9.36, HA 8/41.

⁶⁷⁹ Najib, 5.9.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

peasants to scorn them.⁶⁸⁰ The threats and compulsion faced by urban youth late in the strike, whether or not mostly nominal and exhortative as they appear to have been, ironically represent the dynamic of discipline coming back full circle to its most well-known urban practitioners.

Squeezed between an unyielding Britain and escalating militancy, the AHC's bid for a negotiated exit appeared to be lost. After the 2 September Cabinet meeting it went into "more or less permanent session" while radicals threatened anyone standing in the way of the revolt.⁶⁸¹ Much of the AHC remained eager to put an end to the strike, but feared assassination.⁶⁸² It again called for a conference of NCs to chart future policy but the colonial state again refused to permit the gathering.⁶⁸³ In doing so the administration tipped the scales in favor of the AHC, which found further backing, indirectly, from the Arabic press. More surprising than *Filastin's* call to reconsider the strike, the fervently nationalist *al-Difa'* opposed the motion for a congress of NCs in September, believing that it might spur internal conflict rather than unity.⁶⁸⁴ The press's increasing emphasis on Arab unity as the key to finding a resolution also bolstered the AHC and helped lay the groundwork for the diplomatic denouement to the rebellion that it brokered with foreign Arab leaders.⁶⁸⁵ Possibly in response to al-Qawuqji's independence, the mufti

⁶⁸⁰ *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 181-82.

⁶⁸¹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 11.9.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030; CID, 28.9.36, periodical appreciation summary 16/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁶⁸² British delegation at Geneva (League of Nations) [to FO], 19.9.36, Part I, PRO – FO 371/20025. This memo transmits comments by Nuri al-Sa'id.

⁶⁸³ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 18.9.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁶⁸⁴ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 4.9.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20030.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

fell back in line with the negotiated exit by early October.⁶⁸⁶ A fortnight later, on 10 October, just ahead of a date set for transferring power from the HC to the GOC,⁶⁸⁷ the heads of state of Iraq, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia issued a call to Palestinians, worked out in concert with AHC, to terminate the strike, lay down their arms, and trust in the offices of the Arab states and the “good intentions” of the British empire.⁶⁸⁸ The AHC rapidly issued its own statement the same day announcing its unanimous support for the motion and setting 13 October as the date by which all hostilities should cease.⁶⁸⁹

Although the AHC claimed to have deliberated with the NCs on this course, Zu‘aytir and Yasin both contest this notion, the former writing in his diary that on 9 October AHC discussions with NC representatives were restricted to the terms of the communiqué, not its substance, while the latter, fighting in one of the rebel platoons, later wrote that there was no popular assent whatsoever to the end of the uprising.⁶⁹⁰ The kings’ announcement and the AHC’s quick echo certainly took Fawzi al-Qawuqji by surprise, who similarly claimed that he hadn’t been consulted regarding the initiative or the strike’s cessation.⁶⁹¹ Nonetheless, the rebel paramilitaries quickly ceased operations and, after two days without incident, the administration announced the restoration of order on 15 October.⁶⁹²

⁶⁸⁶ Baghdad consul (Kerr) to FO, 2.10.36, PRO – FO 371/20026. The mufti’s assent was communicated to the British through the Iraqi consul at Haifa.

⁶⁸⁷ Cabinet meeting, 22.9.36; The Palestine Martial Law (Defence) Order in Council, 1936, 26.9.36; and Colonial Secretary to HC, 2.10.36, PRO – FO 371/20026.

⁶⁸⁸ This process is handled in the greatest detail by Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 211-14.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 170-71, reproduces the AHC’s *bayan*.

⁶⁹⁰ AHC communiqué, in al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, book two, p. 170-71; Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 203; Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 37.

⁶⁹¹ Al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 52

⁶⁹² Official communiqués, 13-15.10.36, 287-89/36, ISA (2) 566-6m.

The insurgents' adherence to the AHC's decision to conclude the strike was taken by the GOC as proof that there was "no distinction between [the] strike and disorders" but rather that the whole was "one well controlled [sic] rebellion."⁶⁹³ The High Commissioner, on the other hand, dismissed the GOC's view and opined that, on the contrary, the AHC "in fact are neither well trusted nor very effective."⁶⁹⁴ The High Commissioner's appraisal rings truer, but begs an explanation of how its widely suspect leadership was able to break from its prior, steady acquiescence to the radicals and terminate the rebellion.

A number of factors impelled and enabled the reassertion of elite initiative. For one, the AHC was prohibited from convoking a popular congress where the radical groupings within the NCs might have held sway. Without a representative forum to assure the strike against capitulation, internal violence spread and endangered the higher leadership, amplifying its desire to forestall greater internecine conflict. At the same time the AHC knew that the ranks of the discontented were growing, and included previous stalwarts like the Jaffan lightermen as well as the merchant classes virtually everywhere, and that the great majority were suffering from the prolonged disruption of economic life.⁶⁹⁵ Still, the AHC lacked influence over and perhaps even communication with the fighters in the field, as is plain from the rebels' lack of prior knowledge of the political leadership's decision to call-off the strike. By the close of September, however, al-Qawuqji's high-handed manner and program of centralization had helped splinter the

⁶⁹³ Report by the GOC, part III, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁶⁹⁴ Memo by HC on GOC's rpt, p. 11, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁶⁹⁵ Division of acts of terrorism, 15.8.36, HA 8/40; Gen Staff, WO, Palestine summary #2 (through 6 Oct), n.d., PRO – FO 371/20030; Arab Bureau information, 7.10.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

rebellion's military command and precipitate disputes with key Palestinian commanders (F. 'Abd al-Hadi and A.R. al-Hajj Muhammad) over control of territory and financing.⁶⁹⁶ In characteristic style, al-Qawuqji relates that internal frictions and repeated insubordination (*'asyan*) posed the greatest danger to the revolt – rather than the British – but this makes light of difficult external conditions.⁶⁹⁷ Added to the chronic shortage of ammunition and equipment, the final weeks of the revolt witnessed heavy combat, including the defeat of rebels surprised at the battle of Khudr, near Hebron, on 4 October, which led to the death of veteran Syrian commander Sa'id al-'As and the injury and capture of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, son of Musa Kazim Pasha and the only known guerilla leader from the urban notability.⁶⁹⁸ The arrival of another army division by October doubled British troop strength while legal technicalities delayed the looming imposition of martial law.⁶⁹⁹ In the breach the administration pressed the AHC and notables across the country to exercise their influence to avert further carnage.⁷⁰⁰ It was within this maelstrom that the AHC gambled – successfully – that the Arab public, exhausted by six months of arduous struggle, would not spurn the intervention of the Arab regimes whose greater degree of self-government (however limited) commanded respect and whose leaders were generally esteemed.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁶ Najib, 28.9.36, CZA S/25 – 3875.

⁶⁹⁷ Al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 54.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 47-48; Report by the GOC, part II, PRO – CO 733/317/1; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 201; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 159. Rebels were informed on by the *mukhtar* of Battir, a confidant of Zionist intelligence (Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 117-18).

⁶⁹⁹ Report by the GOC, part II, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁷⁰⁰ *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 33.

⁷⁰¹ As noted here Amir 'Abdullah's regime elicited a more divided response, largely because of his ill-concealed ambitions to rule Palestine.

A brief crisis developed after the ceasefire had mostly taken hold when the colonial authorities contemplated disarming the rebels and GOC Dill prepared to resume battle and disperse groups of inactive fighters still congregating in the central hills.⁷⁰² Yet, to the GOC's great vexation, after a major remobilization and *faza* ' when the army encircled al-Qawuqji's men at Qabatiyya, the operation was scuttled in order to avoid reigniting the revolt.⁷⁰³ Peasant fighters and al-Qawuqji held a victory parade and were fêted by thousands of villagers at Sayda northeast of Tulkarm.⁷⁰⁴ The Syrian commander was reputedly first asked to stay on in Palestine, but the AHC soon surprised him again by requesting that he withdraw across the border.⁷⁰⁵ Some nationalists and villagers were clearly dismayed with this turn of events and al-Qawuqji, among others, saw it as a mistake and a surrender of hard-fought territory.⁷⁰⁶ Nevertheless, he again complied with the AHC and exited Palestine in late October, taking Fakhri 'Abd al-Hadi with him, but leaving Abu Kamal behind him, deputed with managing the demobilized forces, stowing weapons and matériel, and acting as liaison with the NCs.⁷⁰⁷ With the departure of al-Qawuqji, his retinue, and a segment of Palestinian fighters and commanders the first phase of the revolt reached an end.

⁷⁰² Report by the GOC, part III, PRO – CO 733/317/1. One significant battle followed the AHC's call on 16 October.

⁷⁰³ Ibid.; Memo by HC on GOC's rpt, p. 12, PRO – CO 733/317/1; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 218-19.

⁷⁰⁴ Al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 171; al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 53.

⁷⁰⁵ Arab Bureau information, 18.10.36, CZA S/25 – 22193; al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 55.

⁷⁰⁶ Al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 55; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 222.

⁷⁰⁷ Al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 56.

Conclusion

Historical assessment of the Palestinian general strike of 1936 is broadly split, like much of the literature on the Mandate, between those who laud its performance of national unity and solidarity while emphasizing its suppression and those who contend that it suffered from critical internal and strategic flaws. Darwaza, for instance, insinuates that the administration deliberately prolonged the strike so as to economically damage the Palestinians. He faults unspecified Arab leaders for holding the movement back, but generally maintains the view that Palestinian society presented a unified front, exemplified at the strike's close by the simultaneous and concerted wind-up of armed activities.⁷⁰⁸ Porath, by contrast, author of the most extensive discussion of the strike, argues that it failed in its designs to cripple Jewish firms and paralyze the economic life of the country.⁷⁰⁹ Mimicking the conclusions of the Haganah's analysis, Porath suggests that the exception of the Haifa port and Arab government employees from the strike were major errors.⁷¹⁰ Had the Haifa port been shut down both international trade and Jewish immigration, he tells us, would have ground to a halt. Had Arabs in the bureaucracy and state services struck the government would have been brought "to an almost total standstill." Both Porath and the Haganah stress the Haifa port as the colonial regime's Achilles' heel that the uprising failed to seize upon. Although Porath depicts the strike as "the greatest demonstration of Arab nationalist sentiment in

⁷⁰⁸ *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 124-25, 143.

⁷⁰⁹ *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 168, 174. Porath's argument that the strike's implicit aim was undermine Jewish businesses is amiss, but nonetheless symptomatic in its assumption that the *yishuv* constituted the primary target of the revolt.

⁷¹⁰ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 167, 171. On the Haganah: Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 329-30. Similarly, though without following the Haganah, Kayyali argues that the AHC missed its chance to disable the administration by not enjoining a state employees strike (*Palestine*, p. 194).

Palestine” and the fruit of a genuine national struggle, it is clear from his counterfactual – and erroneous – lines of argument that his account judges the strike to have been a strategic failure.⁷¹¹ A similar conclusion is reached by Lesch, who echoes the view that the strike was a great display of the Arabs’ conjoined “political will and desperation” and subsequently contributed to the Royal Commission’s conclusion that the Mandate’s dual obligation was unfeasible, but that materially it failed to secure its aims while enervating the Palestinians economically.⁷¹²

Neither romantic evocations of social unity nor the extant, supposedly hard-nosed dissections of the movement’s shortcomings are ultimately adequate to evaluating the popular leadership and institutions that drove the rebellion. This is not to say that each school of interpretation lacks merit, which is hardly the case, but rather to suggest that they have limited our apperceptions of the strike by clinging to certain orthodoxies.

To begin with, though the strike did not attain any of its declared aims, it is surely misguided and simplistic to conclude that this rendered it largely an exercise in futility. The rebellion did have a dramatic effect on immigration and settlement, capital imports, state revenues and expenditures, and the British authorities’ project in Palestine.

While no formal cessation of Jewish immigration was forthcoming, let alone a ban, the uprising nonetheless broke its strong upward trend, which, over the four preceding years (1932-35) had almost doubled the population of the *yishuv*. The number of immigrants in 1936 fell by more than 50 percent, though still sizeable at 29,595

⁷¹¹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 173, 299. This is so even in light of his exaggerated concern over foreign Arab intervention and the Palestine problem’s “internationalization” (p. 295-302)

⁷¹² Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 220-21.

individuals, before a further sharp decline in 1937-38.⁷¹³ Where Palestinians had feared being demographically overrun in a matter of years, the strike initiated a downturn in immigration which forestalled such an outcome. Given the scale of immigration from 1933-35 especially and the escalating persecution of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe, this was not an inconsiderable achievement.

The Palestinian rebellion had similar, if temporary effects on other aspects of the *yishuv*'s development. No new colonies were established during the strike.⁷¹⁴

According to state registers, aggregate land sales for the year declined almost 60 percent.⁷¹⁵ Though this gave way afterwards to a renewed colonization drive by Zionist agencies on a new and expanded model,⁷¹⁶ the temporary halt in settlement building again reveals that the revolt was momentarily able to accomplish what endless diplomatic entreaties never could. Damages to Jewish property were claimed modestly to total £P 250,000, including 80,000 citrus and 62,000 other fruit trees ruined, along with 16,500 dunams of land.⁷¹⁷ The indirect costs to the *yishuv* were considerably larger. Aggregate capital formation, the great majority of which can be presumed to have been dedicated to Jewish enterprises, dropped off by two-thirds for the year, from £P 3,120,000 in 1935 (admittedly a blockbuster year) to £P 1,038,000.⁷¹⁸ These losses, like the relative break put on immigration, illustrate that the uprising, and the principles

⁷¹³ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 39.

⁷¹⁴ Haim, *Abandonment*, ft. 67, p. 114.

⁷¹⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 46. This figure includes all transfers, including Arab-Arab, hence it can only be taken as a loose indicator of the overall trend, rather than a specific measure of sales to Jewish entities.

⁷¹⁶ Bein, *Return to the Soil*, p. 484, 489-90.

⁷¹⁷ Peel Commission report, p. 105-06. This sum may have represented an underassessment. Zu'aytir relates that claims amounting to £P 200,000 worth of losses were lodged with a single Jewish insurance company by late October (*Yawmiyat*, p. 220).

⁷¹⁸ *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 46.

of direct action and mass mobilization it embodied, were potentially capable of derailing the Zionist dream.

Economically, the strike also dented the state's coffers, though owing to the immense surplus built up prior to 1936, the effect was muted. Customs revenues were brought to a monthly rate of £P 138,000, off by almost half from their preceding rate of £P 245,000.⁷¹⁹ Extra expenditures, the lion's share on the military, police, and prisons, ate up another £P 1,500,000 and skewed state spending even more heavily than previously towards 'security.'⁷²⁰

More substantially, the broad colonial strategy of inducing Arab cooperation with the state and managing Arab quiescence to the Mandate collapsed. The High Commissioner tried to paint his counterinsurgency effort in the best light, arguing that its ostensibly contained character preserved "British authority" in the aftermath.⁷²¹ But DC-Northern Keith-Roach more accurately summarized the situation when he wrote in late September to the Colonial Office that what he was witnessing was the "shatter[ing]" of his 17 years of toil – and by extension, the British project – in Palestine.⁷²² The Arab public almost universally sympathized with the rebellion.⁷²³ The policy laid down in the MacDonald letter had failed, he pointedly declared, otherwise what need was there for a Royal Commission?⁷²⁴ In a series of letters and memos he scathingly critiqued the parameters of British policy on immigration, which he suggested were tied too closely to

⁷¹⁹ Ibid.

⁷²⁰ Peel Commission report, p. 106.

⁷²¹ Memo by HC on GOC's rpt, p. 10, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

⁷²² DC-Northern (Keith-Roach) to Colonial Undersecretary (Parkinson), 30.9.36, PRO – CO 733/316/9.

⁷²³ DC-Northern (Keith-Roach) to Chief Secretary, 28.7.36, PRO – CO 733/316/9.

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

an overly narrow boom in construction – in other words, an economic bubble – and the creation of “land hunger” among the Palestinians, in part owing to the failure of regulations like the Protection of Cultivators Ordinances to safeguard peasant tenancies.⁷²⁵ This patchwork of wrongheaded policies based on faulty assumptions and false pretenses had exposed the British administration in Palestine to “five riots, each one greater than the last,” and had left the Palestinians feeling, he contended, as “the Kentish people” would if Kent had been declared a homeland for the Normans.⁷²⁶

With the “prestige” of the colonial regime in tatters, the rebels of 1936 scored a tentative victory. But the costs to Palestinians were grave. The AHC estimated at the close of August that some 1000 Arabs had been killed, and though the sum rose during the final fevered weeks of insurgency, the August figure was subsequently accepted by the authorities, without adjustment, as the final tally.⁷²⁷ If the original number was accurate, then the final toll was likely closer to 1200 or higher, and in any case, dwarfed the 28 British and 80 Jewish fatalities.⁷²⁸ Arab economic losses weren’t tabulated by the occupation regime, but Darwaza assayed that they amounted to something on the order of £P 2,000,000 (presumably in both direct and indirect costs).⁷²⁹ However inexact, this

⁷²⁵ DC-Northern (Keith-Roach) to Chief Secretary, 5.8.36, and DC-Northern (Keith-Roach), memorandum on cantonization scheme, 30.9.36, p. 4, PRO – CO 733/316/9. Keith-Roach’s critique of the economic basis supposedly informing immigration policy and his advocacy of a “political high level,” or limit, as an alternative, was first endorsed by the Colonial Secretary (Minute by Colonial Secretary, 14.10.36, PRO – CO 733/316/9) and then picked up and recommended by the Peel Commission.

⁷²⁶ DC-Northern (Keith-Roach), memorandum on cantonization scheme, 30.9.36, p. 8, 10, PRO – CO 733/316/9.

⁷²⁷ CID, 1.9.36, periodical appreciation summary 15/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 20.

⁷²⁸ *Report to the League of Nations, 1936*, p. 19. Police casualties included eight Arabs and a Jew, while injuries of British and Jews totaled respectively 144 (in the security forces) and 308. The official count of Arabs wounded was just under 800.

⁷²⁹ *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 131.

colossal sum indicates severe damage incurred to a society whose sharpening class divisions had already given rise to a growing marginal population, and whose mercantile and wealthy strata struggled to compete with the *yishuv*'s impressive financial and commercial development in the 1930s. The few economic advantages that Palestinians held over the Zionist movement, such as the provision of gravel for construction (from Arab quarrying) and fruits and vegetables for local consumption, were soon turned against them and became targets for Zionism's drive for autarky.⁷³⁰ The strike at the Jaffa port, as noted in every account, also had the unintended effect of spurring its decline and replacement by the new facilities built at Tel Aviv, much to the outrage of the lightermen and the national movement.

Internally, the strike crystallized the ascent of the popular social forces, with youth and peasants prominent at the forefront. For most of its duration, elites took a decidedly back-seat role, save perhaps for some who threw their lot in with the restive multitude. The predominance of the NCs (until September), the popular committees, and the guerilla bands upended social hierarchies and subjected the wealthy and the political class to the will of the dispossessed and disaffected masses. It was, in many respects, a world turned upside down – that rare moment when the dynamics of social power organizing a society are reversed. Aspirations to genteel diplomacy gave way to mass mobilization, the concerted disruption of the colonial order, and armed insurgency. No doubt for many strike partisans and peasant fighters it was a moment of great exuberance. Indeed the duration of the general strike is unlike any other in world

⁷³⁰ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 174-75.

history, and stands as a symbol of the ferocious popular determination and resolve that guided it. But the contradictions within the Palestinian social formation that the rebels sought to erase or rectify by asserting their leadership perdured and saddled the movement with major structural weaknesses and dilemmas.

Probably most noted in this regard was the endurance of elite factionalism. This aspect of Palestinian politics has abetted a certain narrative of historical misrecognition. Musa al-‘Alami, for instance, expressed to David Ben-Gurion that in his view the “whole strike and civil disobedience business was no more than a new episode in the old quarrel between the Mufti and Nashashibi.”⁷³¹ In this view, national politics during the greatest moment of ebullition in Palestinian history thence was little more than the puppetry of feuding patriarchs from well-known and influential families; agency was not a universal category, but one reserved to a small, privileged fraction of the population. Renditions of this perspective informed the official British narrative, Zionist understandings, and not least, as al-‘Alami’s remark exemplifies, certain Palestinian and Arab appreciations of the revolt. In light of the great currency it has variously been given its weight in the historiography is hardly surprising, if completely at odds with the dynamics in play for most of the strike.

While national unity was subject to gamesmanship by elites, the deeper fissure lurking beneath the surface continued to be that between popular social forces and the balance of merchants and elites. Unlike other national liberation struggles, what passed for the bourgeoisie (which was in some ways more akin to an aristocracy) and the haute

⁷³¹ Quoted in Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 169.

bourgeoisie in Palestine often had to be compelled to participate in the campaign. The temptation on the part of some rebels to exact revenge on their purported or actual expropriators, and the perception by many elites that this was a *sub rosa* or subtending agenda of the revolt, made the situation explosive. Although lethal internecine violence was mostly minimal, the profusion of threats sowed disquiet. The spate of assassinations of Arab police which occurred in August clearly emboldened those willing to use force and intimidation internally in the name of securing national and anti-colonial objectives. The attempts on 'Isa al-'Isa's life and the murders of national committee members Nasr al-Din Nasr al-Din and Hajj Khalil Taha were the culmination of this development. They introduced or confirmed a certain tendency towards devolution within the rebel formation and spread distrust among Palestinians. Where they were intended to ensure the uprising against capitulation they ironically wound up weakening its social cohesion.

Another key structural conflict evident during the revolt concerns interrelations between the city and the country, as represented in the strike and the insurgency, and their respective places within the national struggle. The imbalance between the two was palpable, particularly as urban spaces proved easier for the colonial state to pump full of police and the military. Akram Zu'aytir reflected on 10 October as the strike was called off that its relative disconnection from the revolt and its weakening over time led the latter to overshadow it.⁷³² The fractured social basis of the uprising thus mapped as well onto its geography, giving rural fighters the impression that the city was incapable of or unwilling to hold up its end of the bargain, hence the threats and coercion directed at

⁷³² *Yawmiyat*, p. 205.

urban youth after al-Qawuqji's arrival on the scene. The wire of tension between peasant guerillas (including youth) and allied urbanites (youth, workers, intellectuals) was in many ways part of the socio-cultural inheritance of peripheral capitalism. It remained alive throughout much of the strike, in spite of the overt cooperation between sectors, and arguably grew to be one of the revolt's greatest stumbling blocks during its second phase.

Finally, the rough edges and unruly qualities of the 1936 uprising call forth one further feature which, in the present view, has not been given adequate consideration, namely, its acephalous and decentralized character.⁷³³ The absence of an overarching leadership within the rebel movement or rather its dispersion across multiple bodies and groupings in both urban and rural zones, was a reflection of the elite fragmentation and the diffusion of new models of nationalist activism via youth societies, labor unions, and paramilitary organization that preceded the upsurge in the early 1930s. As in the prior period these conditions proved conducive to local initiative and mobilization, helping to generalize the revolt through a multiplication of organizational sites. Popular factors certainly predominated throughout much of the strike, but there was great fluidity amongst them and no constituency or political grouping attained preeminence.

Allegiance to the strike became imperative, and its guardians and would-be guardians proliferated from youth in the streets to the Black Hand and peasants threatening those who shirked adherence to the national struggle. The spread of disciplinary agents and dynamics produced a progressive radicalization, guided by initiative and example rather

⁷³³ A rare direct acknowledgement of this aspect is found in Johnson, *Islam and the Politics*, p. 48.

than a central body or force. Yet the fluidity of the rebel formations ultimately allowed elites to embark on their own endeavor to exit the strike, both to stave off further economic losses for rich and poor alike and to avert the iron fist mandated by the Cabinet. Foreign Arab intervention was accepted by the rebels and the public, if skeptically in some quarters, but the uneasy finale of the strike, and the colonial denial of its political demands led insurgents to see the end of the first phase as a “truce” (*hudna*) and not a genuine end to conflict.

The rebellion opened a Pandora’s Box for Palestinians. The Zionist movement suffered immediate setbacks and was further radicalized as a result. After months of trial by fire the local administration urged concessions to the strike movement, only to have London reverse course and push a military ‘solution.’ The moment and the rebel movement that had birthed it were opaque even for Palestinians. The turmoil which Arab society had experienced under British imperial rule, coupled with perpetual political disenfranchisement, had accelerated the urgent need for action felt by many Arabs, yet the revolt provided no clear resolution. As Shahada Musa instructively points out, the resort to force of arms begged the question of whether Arab paramilitaries were intended to lend Palestinian political demands leverage or whether they were fighting a wholesale war of liberation.⁷³⁴ The answer depended in good measure on one’s vantage point. For nationalist elites they were clearly closer to the former, while those carrying rifles across the hillocks and the valleys were more likely to perceive that there was no other way to guarantee that Arab society wouldn’t come to be dominated by Zionism

⁷³⁴ *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 192.

than to evict the colonizers. The divided vision of the insurgency's potential, and of the ultimate aims of the national struggle – independence under British treaty or anti-colonial liberation project – lingered on after the strike. The contrasting orientations evident in this contest deepened in the second, more volatile phase of the revolt, again coloring relations between the movement's elite and popular wings and shaping the prosecution and outcome of its struggle's most critical hour.

Chapter 8:

A tense truce: the Peel Commission interregnum

In late autumn 1936 Palestine entered an uneasy period. When the Arab general strike was terminated in October the colonial authorities were relieved. Ahmad al-Shuqayri recalls that British soldiers were elated at the news and hugged Arabs in the streets as if the conflict between them over Palestine's fate had evaporated.¹ The High Commissioner believed that he had steered a middle course, refusing to bend to an Arab campaign of violence while also denying the military control of the counterinsurgency effort and barring scorched-Earth tactics. As bureaucratic jousting with the GOC continued in the final months of 1936, the High Commissioner claimed that his methods had paved the way for the successful preservation of "British authority."² His triumphalism proved short-lived. Beneath the surface tensions seethed throughout the country, in the *yishuv* as well as among the Arabs. By year's end Colonial Secretary Ormsby-Gore declared the prevailing atmosphere "very gloomy."³ Far from having resecured Palestine for the empire, as HC Wauchope boasted, the colonial authorities were confronted with a fragile and incomplete 'restoration of order' in which they were seen by many Palestinians as brutal opponents of Arab national rights.

Palestinian opinion was split on the outcome of the strike. In both the country and the city some hailed it as a victory, while others saw it as a "veiled surrender."⁴ As

¹ Al-Shuqayri, *Arba 'un 'aman*, p. 163.

² Memo by HC on GOC's rpt, p. 10, enclosure to: HC to Colonial Secretary, 28.11.36, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

³ Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 1.1.37, CP 1 (37), PRO – CAB 24/267.

⁴ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 9.10.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031; Arab Bureau information, 18.10.36, CZA S/25 – 22193; CID, 7.11.36, periodical appreciation summary 18/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 205. Boosting the more optimistic evaluations were rumors and tall

RAF intelligence quickly discerned, for Arab fighters and for much of the public the strike's end marked the beginning of a truce, or armistice, and not a return to the *status quo ante*.⁵ All eyes were on the Royal Commission, but already in November the CID reported that the prevailing sense among the Arabs was that its conclusions would not be satisfactory and that the uprising would consequently be resumed in full the following year, after the commissioners' recommendations were delivered.⁶ Whispers of secret societies dedicated to eliminating "traitors" and internal 'national enemies' were not long in coming,⁷ and by 1937 the mobilization and training of armed men preparing for a second round of conflict became more conspicuous.

Yet the road to a new insurgency was hardly straightforward. Discontent with British rule was widespread, but the strike had brought with it great suffering and losses for all sectors of Arab society. Its material costs were felt by all, albeit unevenly, while its human costs certainly weighed heavily on the underclasses and the popular social forces that drove the revolt, and most of all on the peasants who fought and the villagers whose communities bore the brunt of the government's collective punishments and counterinsurgency measures. The strike had also shaken up the reigning social, political, and economic hierarchies of Arab society and brought class conflict, anti-urban and anti-upper class sentiments to a boil, polarizing the Palestinians in dramatic fashion. The economic depression that followed the 1936 uprising (discussed below) stoked class

talk, such as *al-Liwa*'s flagrantly inaccurate depiction, right before the end of the strike, of Chaim Weizmann as having agreed to a future in which Arabs remained the majority in Palestine (RAF, op. cit.).

⁵ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 192; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.10.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031. If not earlier, the CID reached the same conclusion by November (7.11.36, periodical appreciation summary 18/36, PRO – FO 371/20018).

⁶ CID, 20.11.36, periodical appreciation summary 19/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.11.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031.

divisions and antipathies further, underscoring the fractured state of the Arab polity. Finally, at the end of six months of fearsome struggle, none of the national movement's central demands had been won outright (and the longer or medium-range trends traced at the end of the preceding chapter were not immediately apparent). Without a clear victory and in the wake of the elite assertion of will that terminated the strike, popular forces were left in relative disarray and the moment of their revolutionary authority lapsed.

The interval between the strike's end and the full-scale resumption of the revolt a year later has often been treated as a lost year as far as Palestinian history is concerned. Most accounts offer it a few paragraphs at most and concentrate on the Royal (Peel) Commission and its recommendation for the partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab entity to be subsumed into Transjordan.⁸ By contrast, the present chapter seeks to develop a fuller narrative chronology than those already extant and to shine a spotlight on several interrelated aspects of the period. Extending the overarching project of this dissertation in examining elite-popular interactions and dynamics, it surveys the resurgence of elite influence and prominence within the national movement, the contrary activities and organization of rebel groups which favored a new insurrection, and the place of the Peel Commission and the British authorities in unwittingly helping to lend strength to the cause of the Palestinian revolutionaries and reignite the Great Revolt.

⁸ The two most extended discussions of the Great Revolt's interregnum, those of Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement* (p. 217-32), and al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat* (p. 359-74), both conform to the pattern noted above.

When the strike was dissolved elites quickly moved to reclaim their preeminence and their stewardship of the national struggle. Two key consequences of this process will be considered most: 1) the return of factionalism and its changing political colorings and depth; and 2) the common efforts of both the Opposition and the *majlisiyyin* to return the movement to a renewed course of diplomacy and avert a recrudescence of armed struggle. Despite its top leaders' considerably more mixed records during the events of 1936, and indeed over the previous years since the 1929 rising, the *majlisi* faction emerged from the strike in a position of great strength. Although its claim to leadership and its presumptive control of the political agenda have been much taken for granted in the historical literature, the faction's quest for dominance quickly met with significant friction and opposition on a variety of fronts. Most extravagantly, the Royal Commission investigation spurred the *mu'arada*, inveterate foes of the *majlisiyyin*, to publicly back the country's partition and throw their support behind Amir 'Abdullah as the sovereign of an amalgamated Palestinian-Transjordanian kingdom. The elite schism took on lethal shades in the Peel Commission interregnum and, as has been observed, did much to weaken and cripple the national movement throughout the remainder of the Great Revolt. Still, the vehemence of intra-elite competition masked considerable agreement on the means, if not the ends, of the national struggle, and especially on the desirability of preventing a second round of conflict with the colonial authorities.

In the lead up to the Royal Commission report, youth, workers, and villagers were at the center of the tug of war among elites, including the Istiqlalists, as had been the case preceding the strike. Our knowledge of these groups at this time is too scanty,

but it appears to be clear enough that while many were mobilized to one elite-led grouping or another, others remained outside their reach, and a small fraction of the latter were independently organized in both urban and rural rebel formations. On the whole, youth moved from the forefront of struggle in 1936 to less imposing stations afterwards, as will be touched on below.

In spite of the retrenchment of popular power and authority, the continued existence of the *Qassami* brotherhood, and its transformation into the core of a clandestine underground based in Haifa and the north, presented an alternative to the diplomatic posturing of elites. The Haifa underground pulled in an array of radical elements, predominantly popular in nature, but also including an important group of professionals and Istiqlalists. It hunted those Arabs it judged to be collaborators and waged a mini-offensive in the first half of 1937 against Zionist colonies, the military and the police. In carrying on armed operations after the 1936 ceasefire, and by dint of its size and tenacity, it placed itself at the head of those who believed that liberation would only come about through confrontation and the force of arms.

Palestinian politics in the first half of 1937 was shaped by the uneven triangular contest between the *majlisi* camp, the Opposition, and the radicals (represented foremost by the Haifa underground). The release of the Peel Commission report in July changed things decisively. Its recommendation to partition Palestine, to create a Jewish state that would uproot a quarter million Arabs or more, and to bar the Palestinian Arabs from sovereignty except under the Hashemite crown of Transjordan was a political

miscalculation of epic proportion. From the day it was publicized and provisionally accepted by the British authorities, the fuse of a new uprising was effectively lit.

An uncertain armistice begins

When Arab irregulars set aside their arms in October 1936, it rather quickly became apparent that the strike was not to be followed by a general demobilization of Arab forces, but rather that a degree of popular mobilization would continue. The national committees and the AHC, which formed the organizational core of the strike, were retained in its aftermath.⁹ The NCs were rapidly converted into or replaced by boycott committees, tasked with instituting a comprehensive campaign against Jewish commerce.¹⁰ Its slogan, in paraphrase, was “money spent with Jews buys them bullets with which to kill you.”¹¹ Unlike the effort during the strike to sever economic ties between Arabs and Jews and separate the Arab community from the settler economy, the post-strike venture was intended to operate through the Arab business community and corporate and financial entities, rather than through interdiction at the street level by youth patrols. Arab consumer demands would be met through a coordinated campaign enlisting merchants, workshops, and special economic bodies or corporations.¹² The Jaffa Chamber of Commerce took an early lead in trying to organize the importation of

⁹ This was against the wishes of the GOC (Report by the GOC, part III, enclosure to: GOC to Undersecretary of War, 30.10.36, PRO – CO 733/317/1).

¹⁰ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.10.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031. According to the RAF, the Jerusalem NC was dissolved, apparently on the mufti’s initiative, and replaced by a boycott committee and several other associated bodies over which he had influence (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 30.10.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031). Zionist intelligence reported that the original NC was overcome by factional infighting which led to two rival committees claiming the title (see Arab Bureau information, reports from 18.10.36 and two from 27.10.36, CZA S/25 – 22193).

¹¹ Survey, 19.2.37-26.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

¹² Arab Bureau information, 15.10.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

goods that Jewish businesses had previously handled.¹³ The Society to Promote Virtue and Prohibit Vice, an Islamic association closely tied to al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the SMC, became a propaganda arm for the boycott while in Haifa the YMMA and in Jaffa the reconstituted National Guard acted as enforcement bodies.¹⁴ In spite of the campaign's altered focus, youth resumed or retained their enforcement roles elsewhere as well, utilizing the methods made familiar during the 1929 boycott and the 1936 general strike, including pickets, intimidation, public shaming, and informal fines, to dissuade against business relations with the *yishuv*.¹⁵ The boycott committees were rapidly labeled a "menace to authority" by RAF intelligence, but they were seen as "more or less responsible" parties in comparison with the more radical Arab elements which favored violence against land brokers and other 'traitors.'¹⁶

The Arab boycott and the losses that Jewish businesses had already incurred during the strike led some Jewish industrialists to propose ending the "100 per cent Hebrew Labour policy" championed by JA Chairman and Histadrut head Ben-Gurion.¹⁷ Zionist leaders rejected the notion and instead, while finding a loophole through which to subvert the Arab campaign (exporting Jewish manufactures to Lebanon, from which they would be reimported to Palestine as Lebanese goods), launched a counter-boycott

¹³ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.10.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031.

¹⁴ Ibid.; CID, 20.11.36, periodical appreciation summary 19/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

¹⁵ S. Arzi to A.H. Cohen, 28.10.36, CZA S/25 – 22193; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 220; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 216.

¹⁶ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.10.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.1.37, resume of operations (December 1936), PRO – Air 5/1247.

¹⁷ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 220.

of their own, seeking to fortify and deepen the Labor movement's push for economic autarky.¹⁸

As in the urban centers, the end of the uprising in the countryside was followed by continued communal polarization and disquiet. Although the High Commissioner had intended to disarm Arab partisans after the close of the strike, it was realized that any such policy was far from certain to succeed and, on the contrary, was liable to renew hostilities and plunge the country back into turmoil.¹⁹ In light of their well-known and strenuous objections to the existence of the Haganah and its stockpiles of arms, attempting to disarm the Arabs alone would engender resistance and court folly. When the government raised the issue with the Jewish Agency, the latter's representatives coyly feigned ignorance and refused to cooperate, thereby assuring that no program of public disarmament would be undertaken.²⁰ In consequence, with the evacuation of Fawzi al-Qawuqji and associated forces in late October, most rebel peasants stowed their weapons, returned to their daily lives, and awaited the outcome of the Royal Commission.²¹ A limited number of rebels, or poor peasants with arms, did engage with increasing frequency before the close of 1936 in what the administration termed

¹⁸ Ibid.; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 30.10.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031. The RAF held that the Jewish boycott was managed, at least in part, through a Local Products Association created at Tel Aviv. Segev dates its origins, with a slightly different name, to earlier in the mid-1930s, and his discussion of its activities is rather reminiscent of boycott efforts by Arabs, including patrolling markets and intimidating merchants. See *One Palestine*, p. 389, for details.

¹⁹ Report by the GOC, part III, PRO – CO 733/317/1.

²⁰ CID, 7.11.36, periodical appreciation summary 18/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; David Ben-Gurion, "Britain's Contribution to Arming the Haganah" in *From Haven to Conquest*, p. 372.

²¹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.10.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031. Later those villagers who had been provided arms by the NCs were relieved of them by the same, which stored them (Gush 'Afula Bloc (S. Sherer) to A.H. Cohen, 29.11.36, CZA S/25 – 22193).

brigandage, but such incidents were chalked up to economic and not political motives and therefore treated as less disconcerting by officials.²²

Given these conditions, internal security continued to be a key concern of the colonial state. The High Commissioner was anxious to maintain a sufficient military force in the country, should any resumption of rebellion appear on the horizon.²³ This was all the more urgent since the police had proven so ill-equipped to simultaneously preserve public order, suppress the uprising, and defend the state during the strike.

Arabs in the service, who comprised over 1900 of its 3316 members at the close of 1936, were singled out as generally untrustworthy and liable to side with rebels or bow to their pressure in any future rising.²⁴ Their ambivalence, and in some instances, seditious activities, debilitated the intelligence function of the police during the strike, hobbling its suppression of the uprising.²⁵ Deprived of reliance on the police, the High Commissioner was forced to push for an enlarged permanent military garrison. The GOC, however, recommended outfitting Jewish military or paramilitary units as a substitute.²⁶ During the strike roughly 3000 Jews had been admitted into the police as supernumeraries (known in Hebrew as *notrim*) and sanctioned to use military rifles.²⁷

²² HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.36, #953, enclosure to: CP 1 (37) [CAB 24/267]. Wauchope later directly attributed these activities to rising landlessness (HC to Colonial Secretary, 12.1.37, CP 30 (37), PRO – FO 371/20804).

²³ See the correspondence enclosed in: HC to Colonial Secretary, 26.1.37, PRO – FO 371/20804.

²⁴ HC to Colonial Secretary, 26.1.37, PRO – FO 371/20804; Peel Commission report, p. 192.

²⁵ Peel Commission report, p. 195. The insufficient official loyalties of Arab policemen and the jeopardy they represented to state interests stand as another illustration of the bankruptcy and material dissolution of the British project of forging an integrated state, staffed by Arabs and Jews, within the framework of the doctrine of dual obligation.

²⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 26.1.37, and enclosure, HC to GOC, 15.12.36, PRO – FO 371/20804.

²⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.12.37, CP 1 (37), PRO – CAB 24/267; Ben-Gurion, "Britain's Contribution," p. 372. Ben-Gurion gives the figure of 2863 supernumeraries while the High Commissioner stated 3000.

As auxiliary officers (and hence not counted as part of the regular force) their sole purview was guarding rural Jewish settlements. Although in March 1937 their roles were expanded to include ‘hot pursuit’ outside Jewish areas, the High Commissioner generally believed that using Jewish forces to suppress Arab resistance to the colonial order would only enflame the situation.²⁸ The colonial state’s vexed position on security issues was complicated further in December 1936 when an uncharacteristically agitated Chaim Weizmann openly threatened the government with a Jewish rebellion, should the Royal Commission “throw over the Jews” for the Arabs.²⁹ Although nothing came of it, the incident underscored the administration’s brittle grasp on public order after the strike.

The strength of the garrison in Palestine was determined by late January 1937 at seven battalions, which represented a dramatic drawdown of approximately 80 percent from the 1936 peak of approximately 20,000 soldiers on hand.³⁰ The GOC contended that the lean forces on hand would be sufficient, in combination with the invocation of martial law and recourse to tactics that the High Commissioner had been unwilling to

²⁸ Ben-Gurion, “Britain’s Contribution,” p. 372-73; HC to Colonial Secretary, 26.1.37, PRO – FO 371/20804.

²⁹ HC to Colonial Undersecretary (Parkinson), 16.12.36, CP 1 (37), PRO – CAB 24/267. At a meeting with the High Commissioner Weizmann anxiously gave voice to Zionist apprehensions regarding the Peel Commission. Weizmann forecast only two possible future directions for HMG’s policy: the consignment of the Jews to a minority and the betrayal of the Jewish National Home policy, which would result in a Zionist insurrection, or the redoubled influx of immigrants to the country such that within a few years Jews would reach demographic parity with the Arabs, at which point he averred they could resolve matters themselves. Zionism’s elder statesman was never officially reproached for menacing state security. Commenting on the episode, George Rendel, the head of the Foreign Office’s Eastern Department, suggested that Weizmann sounded “imbued with unreason” and referred to his implicit demand for the admission of 300,000 immigrants over the next two-three years as “insane” (Minute, 2.1.37, PRO – FO 371/20804).

³⁰ Note of a discussion, HC and GOC, with Chief Secretary and Chief of Staff, 26.11.36, and HC to Colonial Secretary, 26.1.37, PRO – FO 371/20804. The exact figure is unclear, but GOC Dill states that the seven battalions (at varying strength, four of which would number less than 550 each) would be well above the 2200 soldiers he regarded as the minimum requisite force.

endorse in 1936, to quell any renewal of hostilities.³¹ While the GOC waxed confident that an unrestrained military was the key to order, HC Wauchope forecast a confrontation larger than that during the strike. In January he noted that “Arab extremists” saw violence and armed conflict as the only path to independence. He expected that a renewed rebellion would immobilize the police (through an assassination campaign against government loyalists) and possibly Arab government employees in general.

The AHC, the mufti, and the reassertion of elite authority

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the close of the general strike was brought about by desperate but emboldened politicians who were greatly troubled by the economic and human losses accompanying the uprising and who feared the prospect of martial law as well as for their own lives. The AHC’s acceptance of the Arab kings’ and princes’ call to end the revolt represented a considerable reassertion of notable authority and prerogative and was assented to by the public. With the rebellion put on hiatus, elites moved to reclaim their customary social and political standing, which had only so recently been diminished by the revolutionary primacy of the popular social classes. Elite opinion returned to its long established preference for the arts of diplomacy and civil engagement with colonial authorities. Foremost among them was the mufti, al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni.

³¹ Note of a discussion, HC and GOC, etc, 26.11.36, PRO – FO 371/20804. As will be discussed in the chapter 10, the GOC was wildly cavalier in his estimation, and in order to crush the revolt at its peak in 1938-39 two divisions (approximately 16,200 men) were deployed, alongside about 9000 police.

In spite of his early reluctance to lead and the later threats to his life, the mufti exited the strike at the head of the national movement.³² Throughout its duration he had paradoxically accomplished what was supposed to be impossible, at once holding onto the presidency of the SMC, a parastatal bureaucracy tied to the colonial government, and chairing the AHC, which oversaw the strike and became the movement's highest leadership body. His status among Palestinians was unparalleled, and both his detractors and ardent nationalists like the Istiqlal were convinced that he had become the central, indispensable leader of the Palestinian people.³³ Indicative of his influence was the fact that his deputy, Jamal al-Husayni, took charge of the boycott campaign.³⁴

In contrast, the political organ of the Opposition faction, the Defense Party, finished the strike in a shambles. The efforts of its leader, the mufti's chief rival, Raghib al-Nashashibi, to embarrass and discredit the mufti during the strike, such as via support for a government employees' strike, had failed miserably. After the strike Raghib Bey contended that the AHC should be disbanded, only to witness its strengthening and conversion into a bulwark of *majlisi* influence.³⁵ Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani left the party within a month while Fakhri al-Nashashibi turned back to organizing workers in Jaffa

³² Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 418; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 217; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*.

³³ Al-Shuqayri, *Araba'un aman*, p. 166. Al-Shuqayri writes that he saw the mufti as divisive and even "evil" (*sharr*), but opined that there was no question as to his preeminence.

³⁴ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.10.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031. Jamal Effendi perhaps had a rival in this role in Fakhri al-Nashashibi, who was a major figure in the Jaffa Chamber at the time, which provided him with a venue through which to compete with Jamal al-Husayni (Chamber of Commerce, Jaffa, 12.36 circular (signed by F. Nashashibi), CZA S/25 – 9873).

³⁵ Arab Bureau information, 15.10.36, CZA S/25 – 22193; CID, 16.10.36, periodical appreciation summary 17/36, PRO – FO 371/20018.

and applied himself within the Jaffan Chamber of Commerce.³⁶ In late December Raghīb Bey attempted to pry Istiqlāl figures from their alliance with the mufti, flattering them as true patriots, but the ploy only earned the former Jerusalem mayor a rebuke.³⁷

Contrary to their reputation for militancy the *majlisi* faction and some of their allies largely endeavored in the post-strike period to prevent a renewal of direct conflict and violence and to contain the popular propensity for action. When three Arabs were murdered in Tel Aviv on 18 October, days after the strike's termination, the NCs and the AHC opposed retaliation.³⁸ At the same time, a band which continued to operate in the lower Galilee clashed with the military at Tarshiha, violating the ceasefire, and was publicly disowned by the Acre NC.³⁹ On 24 October in its first post-uprising meeting with the High Commissioner, the AHC took up the Tel Aviv murders, the question of that city's new port, and the release of the detainees incarcerated during the strike.⁴⁰ The AHC was reported by RAF intelligence to have found the meeting rather agreeable, and the administration undertook a phased release of the political detainees that had been held without charge, some of whom were then subjected to additional terms of internal exile.⁴¹ The AHC's tentative grip on the political situation was quickly shaken,

³⁶ CID, 7.11.36, periodical appreciation summary 18/36, PRO – FO 371/20018; Chamber of Commerce, Jaffa, 12.36 circular (signed by F. Nashashibi), CZA S/25 – 9873.

³⁷ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 250.

³⁸ Arab Bureau information, 18.10.36, CZA S/25 – 22193; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.10.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031.

³⁹ Ibid. Opposed by locals, the band soon laid down its arms and many of its members returned to their homes in Syria (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 30.10.36, weekly summary of intelligence, *ibid.*).

⁴⁰ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 30.10.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031.

⁴¹ Ibid.; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 13.11.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 232-36. According to al-Sifri, 2643 Arabs were arrested during the strike, of which 1646 were convicted of various offenses (*Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 175). It's unclear whether this tally includes the political detainees kept at Sarafand and elsewhere. After his release from Sarafand,

however, when the Colonial Secretary announced the new immigration schedule on 5 November.

Although they had received no direct pledge from British authorities, the AHC and at least some activists had hoped to see a temporary halt to immigration during the period of the Royal Commission's investigation.⁴² The issue of 1800 certificates for the entry of Jewish laborers thus came as a rude surprise and engendered calls for a return to arms, including from Jamal al-Husayni.⁴³ The AHC responded the following day, 6 November, by declaring a boycott of the Royal Commission and denouncing the government's action as a great affront to the Arabs.⁴⁴ The public, romantically described by Ahmad al-Shuqayri as "thirst[ing] for *jihad*" at the time, backed the AHC's stance unreservedly.⁴⁵ The NCs, which do not appear to have been consulted in the matter, broadcast to the public that resistance and death were more honorable than submitting to Zionist designs on the country.⁴⁶

Zu'aytir was ordered to six months of exile at Salfit in the Nablus subdistrict, but he absconded in mid-November (*Yawmiyat*, p. 240).

⁴² The diplomatic efforts of Nuri al-Sa'id and 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi (after his release from detention) both predicated an end to the strike on at least a temporary stoppage of immigration – an idea which HC Wauchope eventually accepted (see the previous chapter and PRO – CP 225 (36), CAB 24/263). The Cabinet rejected this *quid pro quo* in early September and within days the Colonial Secretary sent a letter to Chaim Weizmann declaiming that any cessation of immigration had been agreed to by HMG. The London government's subsequent refusal in mid-September to officially condone the Iraqi diplomatic initiative (for fear of establishing a precedent allowing foreign interference in Palestine) left the AHC accepting the Arab kings' and princes' call without any guaranteed concession (Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 212-13). Nonetheless, both Nuri Pasha and 'Awni Bey were seen to have been given at least implicit pledges for a temporary halt (Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 227; al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 136). Even RAF intelligence admitted that the Colonial Secretary had hinted at such (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 13.11.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031).

⁴³ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 13.11.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031; Wilson, *King Abdullah*, p. 120.

⁴⁴ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 13.11.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031.

⁴⁵ Ibid.; al-Shuqayri, *Arba'un 'aman*, p. 164.

⁴⁶ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.11.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031; Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 149. Differing somewhat from military intelligence, the CID found that most (not all)

Despite the resurgence of militant rhetoric and popular revulsion at the colonial government, the AHC rescinded its boycott of the Royal Commission in early January 1937. While Palestinian elites were divided over the decision's wisdom, the decisive pressure came from foreign Arab leaders who saw no benefit in a boycott and in varied manners pushed the AHC to testify before the Peel Commission.⁴⁷ For his part, Amir 'Abdullah's advance into the breach and willful claim to represent Palestine made many on the committee anxious.⁴⁸ Added to this provocation was stern advice from Ibn Sa'ud of Saudi Arabia, in whom many politicians and activists placed great stock,⁴⁹ who forcefully urged that the AHC to end its boycott or risk being permanently cut off from his kingdom's good offices.⁵⁰ Bereft of international backing and fearing isolation while it was seeking to build greater regional support, the AHC again bowed to the Arab kings' entreaties, and on 6 January 1937 agreed to give evidence to the Royal Commission.⁵¹

Having blocked the submission of testimony and evidence to the Peel Commission for two months, the AHC arrogated to itself sole authority for presenting

NCs backed the Peel Commission boycott (CID, 20.11.36, periodical appreciation summary 19/36, PRO – FO 371/20018).

⁴⁷ The Defense Party and the YC both desired to give evidence before the commission (CID, 20.11.36, periodical appreciation summary 19/36, PRO – FO 371/20018). RAF intelligence quickly perceived that others within the AHC regretted its decision, but the mufti, backed by the *majlisiyyin* and 'Awni Bey, continued to support it fervently (ibid.; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.11.36, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20031). Military intelligence also noted that the organization showed signs of countermanding its own order, since its preparations for giving evidence before the commission never ceased, in spite of its public stance.

⁴⁸ Wilson, *King Abdullah*, p. 120.

⁴⁹ Conversation with Q.L., 23.8.36, CZA S/25 – 22193; Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 432, ft. 53; Michael Eppel, "The Hikmat Sulayman-Bakir Sidqi Government in Iraq, 1936-37, and the Palestine Question" *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 24, n. 1 (1988), p. 32. Eppel observes that the Sulayman-Sidqi coup in Iraq (in late October 1936), and the distrust it aroused, boosted Ibn Sa'ud's standing among Palestinian political circles.

⁵⁰ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 202.

⁵¹ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 153; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 203.

the Arab case.⁵² Unlike the copious, statistically-laden assemblage put forward by Zionist witnesses, the Arab evidence placed before the commissioners generally revisited and honed arguments that the nationalist movement and its spokesmen had long advanced.⁵³ Collectively and individually the Arab presentations focused not on demonstrating their contribution to the country's material development, as did the Zionists', but on principles of equity and the right to self-determination. The prologue to the memorandum submitted by the AHC states plainly that there were two causes to the unrest in Palestine, the Jewish National Home policy and the "deprivation of the Arabs of Palestine from enjoying their natural and political rights." It describes the local Arab movement as national in character and seeking independence, just like the Arabs of other countries in the region. Rehearsing claims relating to the Husayn-MacMahon agreement and General Allenby's public declaration in November 1918 declaiming any British or French imperial intentions in the Greater Syrian region, the memo holds that far from supporting Arab independence in the postwar period, as promised, British rule "totally violated" the "rights and position" of the Palestinian Arabs. It deprived them of self-government (and the institutions necessary for such), refused to allot them a role in the development of public amenities in the country (such as electricity) and subjected them

⁵² Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wwa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 320. Suggestions and relevant evidence were to be sent to the AHC in writing, and it alone would supervise the slate of Arab witnesses to be interviewed.

⁵³ Lacking anything like the parastatal bureaucratic apparatus of the JA, the Palestinian evidence was limited in comparison, both in quantity as well as in type. Of 71 witnesses interviewed by the commission, only 14 were Arabs while 37 were Jewish (the remainder being British) (al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya*, book two, p. 191, ft. 2). The AHC declared itself unconcerned at this imbalance, making a point of stating that it saw no need for extensive statistical or other accounting of the "injustice done to the Arabs by the British administration" or the bias of the latter in favor of Jewish interests in the territory (AHC memorandum to the Royal Commission, 11.1.37, in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 468-69). Nonetheless, the Peel Commission was clearly affected by the forms which the respective bodies of evidence and testimony took, as it readily admitted, and furthermore understood the Jewish corpus to be a kind of proof of the modernity of the *yishuv* (Peel Commission report, p. 125, 143).

to demographic decline in the face of an alien, settler group. Rejecting the dual obligation formula as not only a negation of Palestinian aspirations and British pledges, but as a cause for the declining “rights and position” of the Arabs, the AHC declared that the Mandate could not be reformed, and should be abandoned and replaced with an independent government connected to Britain through a treaty, as in Iraq.⁵⁴

Although the AHC as an organization firmly represented that Arab rights in Palestine were a matter of non-negotiable principle validated by the internationally-approved and League of Nations-sanctioned principle of national self-determination, Arab witnesses took up and elaborated upon the core argument in a variety of fashions. Noting that under British rule the Jewish population had grown eight-fold and grossly exaggerating its simultaneous increase in land holdings, al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni decried what he saw as the grave damage done to the Arabs, including the wholesale elimination of villages on lands sold or transferred to Jewish agencies.⁵⁵ ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi underscored the vagueness of the Jewish National Home policy and concluded that its only clear guiding principle was one of continual expansion, which ultimately necessitated force to overcome the indigenous opposition. When queried about the potential for a territorial compromise (of unspecified form) with the Zionist movement, he pointedly responded by asking the commissioners whether France was willing to

⁵⁴ AHC memorandum to the Royal Commission, 11.1.37, in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 463-69.

⁵⁵ Statement of al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni to the Royal Commission, 12.1.37, in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 470-76, especially 472-74. The mufti contended that Jewish possession of land had grown by a factor of almost 15 under the British. According to government figures, Jewish holdings approximately doubled from 1920-36 (inclusive), while JA figures, disagreeing with those of the government, show growth of some 225 percent over the same period (Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 82).

quiet tension with Germany by surrendering Alsace-Lorraine.⁵⁶ Jamal al-Husayni minced no words in declaring the Mandate “illegitimate and illegal” since it contradicted article 22 of the League of Nations charter (endorsing the principle of self-determination) and indicated that the pernicious bias of the colonial authorities was evident in their use of the term “non-Jews” to refer to the Arabs. This linguistic and categorical slight was “insulting, treacherous, and deceitful,” but moreover illustrated the imperial tendency to see the Jews in Palestine as the land’s true natives, and the Arabs as outsiders, with all the consequences this bore for their respective political, economic, and cultural claims.⁵⁷ The secretary of the Jaffa AWS, George Mansur, outlined the economic hardships endured by Arab workers facing legally-sanctioned discrimination and neglect by the British regime. Not only were public pay-scales and terms of employment unequal between Arabs and Jews, but the state’s commitment to the Jewish National Home and a constant flow of new immigrants both exacerbated Arab unemployment and allegedly depressed Arab wages.⁵⁸ He also protested the decline of the country’s traditional craft industries under colonial rule and counterposed the neglect of Arab villages with state-funded development of Jewish areas, such as by paving roads to service their communities and markets.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Testimony of ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi at the Royal Commission, in *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p. 500-02, 504, 530-31.

⁵⁷ Testimony of Jamal al-Husayni at the Royal Commission, in *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p. 477-80.

⁵⁸ The Zionist contention on wage rates, generally accepted by the government but not always supported by evidence (see Hope Simpson report, p. 95), was that higher Jewish wages and standards of living would gradually compel rises in both for Arabs. This was seen by the Peel Commission to hold some truth, as wage rates for Arabs in Palestine were higher among manual laborers than those received by their peers in neighboring countries (Peel Commission report, p. 127-28). On discrimination in pay and on unemployment see Chapter 6.

⁵⁹ Testimony of George Mansur before the Royal Commission, n.d., in *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p. 586-594. See chapter 6 for more detail.

On the whole, the Arab testimony before the commission was not well-received, as witnesses regularly assailed aspects of British rule and rode roughshod over imperial sensibilities. For instance, when asked about a future Palestinian government's capacity to "assimilate and digest" the 400,000 Jews resident in the country (some 350,000 of whom had entered since the British occupation), the mufti replied in the negative, but insisted that this was a matter for a sovereign national government to decide.⁶⁰ 'Awni Bey was also asked to give an assurance of the future status of Jews in the country but responded impetuously by first declaring that he would prefer to return to the country's pre-occupation demographic balance (with Arabs 93 percent of the population), before clarifying that he did not support the expulsion of Jews as a policy and that his primary objection was to the seismic change in demography since British rule.⁶¹ The Greek Catholic Patriarch, Grigorius Hajjar, argued that Jews were not "a people," much less a national community, but a religious group, and consequently that British policy had confused the issue by treating Jews in Palestine as a nationality.⁶² More disconcertingly, some of the Arab testimony validated German anti-Semitism and appeared to legitimate its image of Jews as a malignant social element. 'Awni Bey, for instance, pointed out that "civilized" German society found it hard to live with Jews when they represented a far smaller proportion of the population than they did in Palestine, and played on the

⁶⁰ ESCO Foundation, *Palestine*, v.2, p. 815-16.

⁶¹ Testimony of 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi at the Royal Commission, in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 528, 531-32.

⁶² Quoted in al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 321-22.

stereotype of Jews as usurers, flagrantly claiming that they were the most usurious group in the Middle East.⁶³

Although illustrative of the explosive sentiment and deep antipathy that Zionism had aroused, the Arab witnesses' fervent critiques of the situation, both rational and irrational, were not music to the commissioners' ears and did not incline them to put stock in a future Palestinian government in which Arabs would predominate. To the High Commissioner's thinking, the Arab evidence was aimed more at stirring up the Arab public, rather than at persuading the commissioners of the justice of their case.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, while the AHC had overtly demanded independence for the first time, HC Wauchope was confident that its appearance before the Royal Commission bought the authorities time and signaled that no rebellion would be forthcoming before the issue of the commission's findings.⁶⁵ The JA's Arab Bureau likewise concluded shortly thereafter that elites were preoccupied with securing diplomatic alliances in and support from the Arab and Islamic worlds and floating grandiose schemes for paramilitary organization.⁶⁶ There was no consensus of elite opinion on the proper course for the movement, and especially as current evaluations held that the strike had failed owing to

⁶³ Testimony of 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi at the Royal Commission, in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 521-22, 527-28. The dynamics of this exchange between 'Awni Bey and the commissioners is revealing in itself. When the former stated his wish to return to the earlier demographic balance, Lord Peel attempted to terminate his testimony. 'Awni Bey managed to carry the conversation further, but was compelled to move away from his initial position and ended with a major concession, offering something in the neighborhood of the assurance the commissioners were looking for – but by this point it was too late to count for much.

⁶⁴ HC to Colonial Secretary, 12.1.37, CP 30 (37), PRO – FO 371/20804.

⁶⁵ Ibid.; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 80.

⁶⁶ For instance, in January 1937 talk circulated of plans to build a 10,000-man military force, to take place over two years (Survey, 15.1.37-28.1.37, CZA S/25 – 22437).

a lack of adequate preparation, the politicians were loathe to consider a new revolt under conditions resembling those of 1936.⁶⁷

These estimations were lent support by a private letter from ‘Awni Bey to the High Commissioner on 10 January 1937 which affirmed the unanimous opinion of foreign Arab leaders on the necessity of preserving Anglo-Arab “friendship.”⁶⁸ Given its diplomatic ambitions, the AHC’s acquiescence to their position revealed a considerable gap between its fiery public indictment of British colonialism and its private willingness to seek a *modus vivendi* with it. In this light, the RAF reported that the AHC was likely to accept far less than the “extreme” demands it put forth publicly.⁶⁹

The pursuit of diplomacy during the Peel Commission interregnum

Though elitist histories have posited that the AHC joined rebel fighters and the public in seeing the period between the termination of the strike and the publication of the Peel Commission’s recommendation of partition as “clearly a temporary truce,” the organization’s support for a renewal of armed struggle was far from certain.⁷⁰ Rather, as a number of accounts make clear, in early 1937 prominent figures within the AHC repeatedly signaled their willingness to cooperate with government. Indeed, for all its varied and sometimes harsh criticism of the authorities, the AHC’s memo to the Royal Commission envisioned a partnership between an independent Palestine and Great Britain whose enduring bonds would be secured through a treaty, as was the case with

⁶⁷ Arab Bureau information, 1.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22193.

⁶⁸ ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi to HC, 10.1.37, subenclosure to HC to Colonial Secretary, 12.1.37, CP 30 (37), PRO – FO 371/20804.

⁶⁹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 18.2.37, resume of operations (January), PRO – Air 5/1247.

⁷⁰ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 216.

Iraq. The dilemma for nationalist elites, much as it had been prior to the strike, was in fashioning a policy through which violence and armed conflict with the colonial power could be avoided while at the same time the Jewish National Home policy could be rejected and repealed. According to a member of *al-Liwa*'s staff, this was the mufti's intent after the strike.⁷¹ Although preparations in the event of future conflict were undertaken by the AHC, which also came to be responsible for the demobilized fighters in exile (discussed below), it itself was largely unconnected to the intermittent violence of the interregnum and generally opposed the continued activity of armed groups.⁷² Using his newly elevated status and the means at his disposal, the mufti returned to his former, moderate posture towards the British regime, even apparently considering the option of settling the Palestine question via partition.

In February 1937 during an AHC meeting with the High Commissioner the mufti and 'Awni Bey both stated their hopes that friendship between the Palestinian Arabs and the British would be rebuilt. The organization agreed it could be more amenable in private with Wauchope, but public opinion did not permit it to be perceived as conciliatory.⁷³ The same month plans for a new delegation to London were initiated.⁷⁴ Picking up where he left off in 1936, Jamal al-Husayni headed the venture, which departed in April and aimed to build support for the Palestinians among British political circles.⁷⁵ Secretly, the group's mission was not only to be present for the government's debate on the Royal Commission recommendations, but to lobby in favor of the partition

⁷¹ Conversation with Y.P. [Yusif Francis], 24.10.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

⁷² Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 429; Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 124.

⁷³ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 205.

⁷⁴ Survey, 5.2.37–11.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁷⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 24.

plan it was rumored to be drawing up, should the plan be found suitable.⁷⁶ The mufti himself intended at one point, but never did, join the group, which, lacking broader approval, traveled under the PAP's imprimatur and not that of the AHC.⁷⁷ As had often been the case in the past, the delegation injected a quietist note into Palestinian politics: it operated a small information office in London, but witnessing the effect of Arab attacks and 'disturbances' in Palestine on its target audience, it periodically asked its compatriots to stamp out the violent activity for fear of further souring the Arabs' image in Britain.⁷⁸

The mufti went some distance towards cooling the atmosphere in Arab Palestine and moderating public discourse. He issued instructions to this effect through the SMC's network of officials and preachers, much to the satisfaction of the High Commissioner.⁷⁹ When he, 'Awni Bey and Raghib al-Nashashibi met with Wauchope again on 1 April, the latter found them to be "more reasonable" than they had been in a year.⁸⁰ Reiterating his desire to cooperate with the authorities and act to keep the peace, the mufti subsequently extended an open hand to government on several other issues of importance.

While key elite leaders strove to put on a good face for the High Commissioner, unrest was budding in the country's northern and central regions. Between February and

⁷⁶ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 172-73. This hidden agenda was disclosed in a late June letter from Jamal Effendi to the mufti that was intercepted by the Palestine government.

⁷⁷ Ibid.; Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 5, CZA S/25 – 22039.

⁷⁸ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 2.6.37, p.1, CZA S/25 – 22039.

⁷⁹ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 205; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 80. For example, the Tulkarm *qadi* visited Bal'a as restive forces brewed elsewhere in the country and informed its residents that the mufti did not sanction violence at the time (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 28.2.37, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20824).

⁸⁰ Quoted in Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 432, ft. 53.

May arrest sweeps netted some 200 individuals allegedly connected to a resurgent political underground (discussed below), bomb throwing in the cities, a spate of attacks on police and Jews, and highway robbery.⁸¹ Overcrowded and suffering poor conditions of confinement, some 180 prisoners at Acre central lockup began a hunger strike.⁸² The move was backed, if not initiated, by Istiqlalists, many of whom had once again come to resent and oppose the mufti and believed that the independence struggle had more to gain through continued confrontation and rebellion than through negotiations.⁸³ When a sympathy strike in Acre and Haifa gained ground and threatened to spread, AHC representatives met with the High Commissioner and reached a kind of *quid pro quo*.⁸⁴ Around 100 prisoners were released.⁸⁵ In turn, al-Hajj Amin offered to assist the government in its plans to destroy a large area of ‘tin town’ in Haifa (on account of its unsanitary conditions and the threat they posed to public health) by resettling the displaced inhabitants on *waqf* land. This relieved the administration of a significant obstacle and helped pave the way for the demolition.⁸⁶

As rumors swirled that the Royal Commission would propose partition, neither the mufti nor the AHC made any public statements on the issue, despite the growing torrent of public condemnation of any such scheme by various municipal councils and

⁸¹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 27.3.37, PRO – CP 109 (37) [CAB 24/269].

⁸² HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.3.37 and 4.5.37, PRO – CO 733/328/10; HC to [Colonial Undersecretary Parkinson], 20.5.37, CP 144 (37), PRO – CO 733/332/11.

⁸³ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 2.6.37, p. 1-2, CZA S/25 – 22039.

⁸⁴ HC to [Colonial Undersecretary Parkinson], 20.5.37, CP 144 (37), PRO – CO 733/332/11. Public mobilization on the prisoners’ issue, and the use of administrative detention in particular, threatened to reignite a broader rebellion, and drew protests from multiple sources and political camps. See “On the Acre prisoners,” 17.5.37, CZA S/25 – 22192, for detail.

⁸⁵ On the Acre prisoners, 17.5.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. Some had already been released by the time the hunger strike escalated pressure on the government (HC to [Colonial Undersecretary Parkinson], 20.5.37, CP 144 (37), PRO – CO 733/332/11).

⁸⁶ HC to [Colonial Undersecretary Parkinson], 20.5.37, CP 144 (37), PRO – CO 733/332/11.

other bodies aired in the press.⁸⁷ Only the advent of a new immigration schedule, amidst widespread economic depression, roused the AHC to publicly rebuke colonial policy, and even this was preceded by another of the mufti's promises of cooperation behind closed doors.⁸⁸

While the public mood worsened over the first half of 1937 as economic hardship continued to mount and as talk of partition circulated, the mufti and most of the functioning members of the AHC strove to temper the situation. Privately, they aimed to recapture their former status as privileged interlocutors for the Palestinians, whose primary asset was, as before, their willingness to dampen resistance to the British regime. Although HC Wauchope recognized the air of conciliation put on by the leading AHC personalities, he was cautious about its depth, in part attributing it to the counsel of Ibn Sa'ud and other foreign Arab leaders who continued to firmly advocate cooperation with the authorities.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the *shabab* and the Istiqlal were known opponents of this agenda, and as the High Commissioner observed, they might well succeed again in sinking it.⁹⁰ In truth, a broader contest was underway during the Peel Commission interregnum, as contending currents and forces competed for influence and, as always, over the power to determine the orientation and outlook of the national struggle.

⁸⁷ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 433-34.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 434.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 432, ft. 53.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

The national movement and the economic crisis

Allusion has already been made to the straightened economic circumstances that much of the Arab public endured after the strike. Although overshadowed by the political struggle, and almost completely neglected in histories of the period, the intervening lull between the strike and the revolt's reignition in fall 1937 was fraught with severe economic anxieties and tensions. A major economic downturn followed the ebullition of 1936 and accentuated the internal social divisions of the Arab community. Though limited in nature and scope, the challenge of popular forces during the strike to the class hierarchy of Palestinian society left a heavy residue and continued to influence social relations and the conduct of nationalist activists and institutions. The new loci of local politics, the AHC and the NCs, found themselves in the center of the brewing storm. Their challenge was at once to put the movement on solid financial footing and to ameliorate the travails of the afflicted and the needy.

One of the first challenges the AHC inherited from the strike concerned the disposition of former fighters, especially those who went into exile after the ceasefire. Before Fawzi al-Qawuqji led his party across the Jordan river in the final *faza* of 1936, rebels complained to the AHC of their quandary: they could not return home, while they also could not continue to draw on support *gratis* from villagers after the truce. They therefore demanded that the AHC provide them with financial subventions, which it agreed to some extent to do.⁹¹ Those forces that exited the country with al-Qawuqji and

⁹¹ Arab Bureau information, 18.10.36, CZA S/25 – 22193. According to JA intelligence, the lack of financial means among demobilized fighters, or their having been accustomed to provisioning by villagers during the insurrection, led to tensions between the two groups as the former leaned on the latter when hospitality was not as forthcoming or cost-free as it had been. This prompted some political figures, most

Fakhri ‘Abd al-Hadi did not, according to the former, receive the salaries and winter clothing that they were promised by the AHC.⁹² Instead they were instructed by it to disperse completely and dissolve the remaining paramilitary units.⁹³ After a short interlude in Transjordan, al-Qawuqji, ‘Abd al-Hadi, and the remnants of their group decamped once more to Baghdad, where the situation devolved further.

During the AHC’s failed attempt to persuade foreign Arab heads of state of the necessity of boycotting the Peel Commission, its delegates in Iraq again negotiated with the small pool of resident ex-fighters and settled on terms of compensation and support while the absence of amnesties hampered the return home of Syrians as well as Palestinians.⁹⁴ According to Sa‘id Thabit, head of the Palestine Defense Committee in Baghdad, which led non-governmental advocacy and fundraising for the Palestinian cause in Iraq, there followed a pattern of scandalous and profligate behavior by the fighters, who were encouraged by al-Qawuqji and ‘Abd al-Hadi to spend beyond their salaries on credit and send the bills to the AHC.⁹⁵ Their expenses were lavish, as represented foremost by ‘Abd al-Hadi, who reportedly received a liver operation free of

prominently Sulayman Tuqan, the mayor of Nablus, to request that the remaining bands decamp abroad to preempt wider conflicts between the fighters and the public. See Band activity memo #4, 1.11.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

⁹² Al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v.2, p. 62.

⁹³ Ibid. Characteristic of al-Qawuqji’s braggadocio, he writes in his memoirs that the British interest in expelling his forces from Transjordan stemmed from his purported (and instantaneously acquired) power there. See p. 62-63.

⁹⁴ Sa‘id Thabit to ‘Izzat Darwaza (Central Relief Committee), 8.2.37, enclosure to Shertok to Tegart, 5.1.38, CZA S/25 – 22447. The correspondence between the Palestine Defense Committee and the Central Relief Committee in this file was intercepted by the Palestine government and translated by the JA’s Arab Bureau at its request. Months later it remained the JA’s greatest proof of the alleged hand of the AHC in rebel activity during early 1937 (Note of interview with Brodetsky and Shertok at the Colonial Office, 23.3.37, PRO – CO 733/333/2).

⁹⁵ Ibid and Sa‘id Thabit to Ahmad Hilmi ‘Abd al-Baqi (Central Relief Committee), 8.3.37, enclosure to Shertok to Tegart, 5.1.38, CZA S/25 – 22447.

charge and, among other things, bought himself a new suit at a cost equivalent to twice the monthly expenditure for a large Baghdadi family.⁹⁶ Even more explosively, members of al-Qawuqji's own Iraqi contingent attacked the Palestine Defense Committee, tellingly demanding that the support monies not be wasted by ertwhile *mujahidin* on – of all things – liquor!⁹⁷ It appears that Fakhri 'Abd al-Hadi was the chief instigator of this sorry situation, which worsened after al-Qawuqji was internally exiled by the Bakr Sidqi-Hikmat Sulayman government in January 1937 to the Kurdish-majority city of Kirkuk.⁹⁸ As Thabit related in a series of plaintive letters written to the Central Relief Committee in Jerusalem, not only did 'Abd al-Hadi behave like an extortionist, he also allegedly embezzled his own men's salaries, preventing them from fulfilling an agreement to vacate Iraq.⁹⁹ Al-Qawuqji too was accused, reportedly by none other than his former confrere and brother-in-arms, shaykh Muhammad al-Ashmar, of pocketing his men's salaries.¹⁰⁰ By April, demobilized fighters in Jenin and Nablus, in al-Qawuqji's former geographic stronghold, threatened to kill the Syrian adventurer over this issue if he ever returned to Palestine.¹⁰¹

It is unclear how, or even if, the strains that developed between former fighters, the two most prominent commanders from the 1936 insurrection, and the AHC were

⁹⁶ Ibid, both letters.

⁹⁷ Sa'id Thabit to Ahmad Hilmi 'Abd al-Baqi (Central Relief Committee), 8.3.37, CZA S/25 – 22447

⁹⁸ Ibid.; Kerr (Baghdad) to Foreign Office, 25.1.37, PRO – FO 371/20804.

⁹⁹ See especially Sa'id Thabit to Ahmad Hilmi 'Abd al-Baqi (Central Relief Committee), 8.3.37, CZA S/25 – 22447.

¹⁰⁰ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 3, CZA S/25 – 22039. Predictably, al-Qawuqji has unkind words for al-Ashmar, claiming that not only had he had contacts with the British, but that he allowed himself to be the pawn of counter-intelligence operations trying to pit the commanders against each other, while also insinuating that al-Ashmar did not have the firmest of nerves, almost breaking camp in Transjordan to flee when it looked as if British forces may attack (*Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v.2, p. 61-62).

¹⁰¹ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 3, CZA S/25 – 22039.

resolved. It seems a given that at least some of the rebel rank and file had cause to question whether their interests would be looked after by egoistic military men and civilian politicians in the event of renewed rebellion, but it is unknown exactly how widespread such sentiments were. Surely the issue caused the AHC and the Central Relief Committee a good deal of grief. Rancorous relations between demobilized rebels and the higher leadership also reflected poorly on the mufti, who was in charge of both organizations. The ongoing squabbles over salaries and stipends sponged up the AHC's funds and, of necessity, added further stress to the already contentious issue of fundraising by the national leadership bodies.¹⁰²

The reliance of the national movement on the deep pockets of merchants and citrus farmers begun during the strike continued in its aftermath. Although some in the wealthier classes gave freely to the NCs and other bodies that gathered funds, the impositions remained unpopular with them, and already in November 1936 the RAF detected a growth of "intimidation" in this regard.¹⁰³ In turn, the resentments of the lower classes that had surfaced during the strike continued to smolder. One likely typical view compared ample Jewish donations for both mutual aid and paramilitary purposes with the stinginess of Arab merchants who refused to support the Arab struggle financially. In the event of a new rebellion, it was rumored that many merchants would even destroy their own goods before leaving for Egypt, Lebanon or elsewhere.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Arab Bureau information, 5.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

¹⁰³ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.12.36, resume of operations (November), PRO – Air 5/1247.

¹⁰⁴ Arab Bureau information, Evaluation of the situation at Jerusalem, 19.3.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

Contrasts between the two communities were exaggerated probably as a matter of course, as evidenced by a rumor recorded in the same report that Zionists had 40,000 men under arms. Such comparisons were hallmarks of a kind of shaming discourse that was used to goad the wealthy into greater contributions.

Cross-class tensions were stoked further by the serious economic downturn that had occurred during the strike, which in truth represented an exacerbation – albeit a sharp exacerbation – of the malaise that had long plagued the Arab community. At the outset, the period following the strike was not purely downcast. Most remarkably, landowners in some areas forgave tenants of half a year's rent, effectively writing down the period of the revolt.¹⁰⁵ Weeks later the Jaffa municipality passed a measure to decrease annual rents by 25 percent.¹⁰⁶ The municipal councils of Tulkarm, Jenin, and Jaffa also lowered taxes.¹⁰⁷ The reinvigorated interest in economic autarky and decoupling from Jewish businesses, and the earnestness with which these aims were pursued, was visible in a number of new economic ventures, including, for instance, a steel works and an import company established in Jaffa and a match factory and a flour mill at Nablus.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, despite these rays of light, the general economic picture facing the Arabs was bleak enough that even as fervent a nationalist as Akram Zu'aytir admitted *post hoc* in his diary that the strike's termination was a matter of economic necessity, implying that a general strike would not be the form chosen for a future uprising.¹⁰⁹

Six months after the strike signs of acute economic depression were abundant. Among the hardest hit zones were Nablus and Jaffa. The Tel Aviv port, which remained

¹⁰⁵ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 210. Zu'aytir, perhaps reflective of his own class privilege, is unfortunately mum on details of this extraordinary development.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

¹⁰⁷ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 17, CZA S/25 – 22039.

¹⁰⁸ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 219, 226; Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 19, CZA S/25 – 22039. An attempt to organize a new bank was also put in motion, much to the consternation of Istiqlalists, some of whom were employed by the Arab Bank, run by Ahmad Hilmi Pasha (Arab Bureau information, 25.11.36, CZA S/25 – 22193).

¹⁰⁹ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 276.

open irrespective of protests by the lightermen and the AHC, seriously damaged the lightermen's fortunes and helped dampen the city's economic recovery. In April 1937 the city's unemployment was estimated by the Jewish Agency at 4000, including 500 lightermen – weighty sums when compared with the official estimate of Arab unemployment countrywide three years earlier of 14,000.¹¹⁰ Jaffan organizations banded together to try to remedy the situation and find employment for those suffering hardship, but little seems to have come of it.¹¹¹ By June the lightermen were so desperate that they offered to afford one third of the positions at the port to Jewish laborers if the Tel Aviv facility would close.¹¹² Workers were not the only ones to suffer. According to *al-Difa* 'property values plummeted all over the south, dropping 30-50 percent in Jaffa, and perhaps 50 percent on agricultural land.'¹¹³ Despite booming citrus exports for the 1936/37 season, prices fell internationally, leaving many orchard owners with large losses.¹¹⁴ Since planters had taken loans against their crops, they risked collateral forfeitures to their lenders. In the event, the Arab Bank, which was heavily invested in citrus, elected not to push through repossessions, but credit lines

¹¹⁰ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 16, CZA S/25 – 22039; Memorandum on employment conditions in Palestine at the end of April 1934, by Commissioner for Migration and Statistics, PRO – CO 733/249/8. In the census year 1931, the Arabs of Jaffa made up approximately 47,500, or roughly six percent, of Palestine's combined Muslim and Christian population of approximately 784,500 (*Survey of Palestine*, p. 151-52). (This sum is an approximation, as it includes British personnel who were not separated out in the census and excludes unsettled Bedouin, who were not tallied).

¹¹¹ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 16, CZA S/25 – 22039.

¹¹² Economic information, 22.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

¹¹³ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 16, CZA S/25 – 22039.

¹¹⁴ Peel Commission report, p. 213-14; Economic information, 22.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. Exports for the 1936/37 harvest were almost 80 percent higher than the previous season.

were generally frozen.¹¹⁵ Some orchard owners were compelled into partial sales of their estates or sales of their homes to meet their repayment obligations while outstanding loans were renegotiated and saddled with penalty interest rates of 20-25 percent.¹¹⁶ Hotels, cafés and restaurants dwindled, consumer spending declined with credit, and the incidence of gambling and prostitution rose.¹¹⁷

At Nablus many small and mid-sized shops closed for lack of capital and building ground to a halt.¹¹⁸ Merchants who had traded or partnered with Jewish concerns sought out new arrangements, but as at Jaffa, a broad credit crunch impeded the potential for economic recovery after the strike.¹¹⁹ Plans for industrialization found financial support among neither banks nor wealthy elites.¹²⁰ As old debts were called to account by public and private lenders, the JA's Arab Bureau noted that "Bankruptcy has... become almost a regular event" in the city.¹²¹ The burden of heavy collective fines from 1936 also weighed on residents.¹²² Disadvantaged workers in the area were further stung by the Public Works Department's refusal to hire them after labor on local citrus estates wrapped up since it assumed many of them were former combatants.¹²³

Conditions in rural areas were no better. During and after the strike peasants throughout the country lost their marketshare in produce among Jewish consumers, with

¹¹⁵ Economic information, 22.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. The Arab Bank's balance sheet was itself wanting from the crisis affecting plantation owners, and it had to turn to Barclays Bank for a loan to cover its own depositors.

¹¹⁶ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 16, CZA S/25 – 22039; Economic information, 22.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., both sources.

¹¹⁸ Arab Bureau information, 24.11.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

¹¹⁹ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 16-17, CZA S/25 – 22039.

¹²⁰ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 5.6.37 [5.7.37], p. 12, CZA S/25 – 22039.

¹²¹ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 17, CZA S/25 – 22039.

¹²² Ibid., p. 16-17.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 17.

nothing to substitute for it.¹²⁴ Government credit facilities had been minimal to begin with and were “curtailed” in 1936; in 1937 they remained, as the administration put it, “stringent.”¹²⁵ In the Jaffa subdistrict rural tenants on *waqf* land demanded a 50 percent cut in their rents, without which they insisted they would go on rent-strike.¹²⁶ The deplorable state of the most impoverished was in turn seen by the administration as a threat to public security since, according to HC Wauchope, “so large a number of landless Arabs are near the border line of starvation.”¹²⁷

While the Palestine government’s inaction in the face of disaster and grave suffering is remarkable, and the state’s taxation policies were excoriated in the press in light of the still sizeable accumulated surplus,¹²⁸ public ire continued to fall on local merchants and elites who were unwilling to extend credit or even to invest in their own business ventures. The general sense of uncertainty shrouding the country’s political future, and the prospect of another uprising, caused the affluent to take a wait-and-see approach and to curb their economic activities.¹²⁹ Moreover, their fear of the NCs and other partisans of the national cause in fact led some to disinvest and convert portions of their holdings into liquid assets with which to pay the levies that were impressed upon

¹²⁴ By one account, before the strike Arabs sold £P 3.657 million in produce, equal to 11% of Arab GDP, to the *yishuv* (Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory*, p. 49).

¹²⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 31. The administration reported that it lent £P 31,551 to 1125 persons in the hill districts in 1937 (p. 35), a very small portion of agricultural population. For background on government lending prior to 1936 see Chapter 5.

¹²⁶ Economic information, 22.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. The local branch of the SMC’s *waqf* department later recommended their request be met (Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 5.6.37 [5.7.37], p. 12, CZA S/25 – 22039), but its outcome is uncertain.

¹²⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 27.4.37, enclosure to CP 127 (37), PRO – CO 733/332/11.

¹²⁸ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 18, CZA S/25 – 22039. At the close of the government’s fiscal year for 1936, in March 1937, the surplus stood at £P 4,835,000. At the time it was projected to fall to £P 2,418,000 over the next fiscal year (*Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 31).

¹²⁹ Arab Bureau information, 24.11.36, CZA S/25 – 22193; Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 14, CZA S/25 – 22039.

them.¹³⁰ After the effusions of 1936 it became more dangerous for the wealthy to refuse to contribute to the national coffers. Spurning the solicitations of nationalist organs, whether the public face of the movement in the shape of the NCs, or clandestine groups like the Black Hand, risked physical assault or even bomb attacks.¹³¹ The result was a vicious circle, where those with capital withheld their resources, were then leaned on by activists and consequently often alienated by the movement (if they weren't already). This in turn led to more pressure being applied on them, deepening their disaffection.

Control of the funds that were raised was as contentious as the methods used in collecting them, and also sparked internecine conflict, much of which came to center on the mufti. The opacity with which national funds were managed had been a cause of concern during the strike. The AHC's treasurer, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha, objected to the mufti's lack of financial accountability in October 1936, and in truth, through the Central Relief Committee the latter had usurped a good deal of the treasurer's functions.¹³² Al-Hajj Amin's hawk-like eye on and constant interest in consolidating control over the movement's pursestrings recalled his many years at the helm of the SMC, where he was habituated to holding discretion over large sums and managing them as he saw fit. This personalized, non-transparent style of financial management had suited his running the SMC as a patronage machine well enough, but transplanted into the national context, raised alarms and stirred indignation at what was seen as his autocratic tendencies.

¹³⁰ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 14, CZA S/25 – 22039.

¹³¹ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 221; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 121-22. For a specific example, see the note of bomb attacks against Hajj Tahir al-Dajani and another individual in: Arab Bureau information, 7.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22122.

¹³² Arab Bureau information, 7.10.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

Not surprisingly some of those who called for more financial transparency were from the Opposition. Two such NC members, Tahir Hanun (Tulkarm) and ‘Abd al-Salam al-Burqawi (Jenin), for instance, traveled to Jerusalem in January 1937 to attest to the poor state of villagers in the triangle region and inquire about the handling of relief funds. They requested a report detailing the Central Relief Committee’s financial dealings and also asked that monies designated for the triangle be managed by Sulayman Tuqan, whose resistance to the domination of the *majlisis* was well-known. The mufti responded by deflecting the issues they raised, advancing a new idea for the SMC to collect £P 5000 for impacted families.¹³³ Similar complaints multiplied in the following months. In February Hebron merchants and youth became embroiled in a row with the Central Relief Committee for much the same reasons.¹³⁴ By April it had become an Opposition touchstone to demand a full account of donations and exactions collected by both public and underground national bodies (i.e. by the NCs, the Central Relief Committee, and rebel groups).¹³⁵

Concerns regarding the relief effort also spilled over onto the NCs, the social role of which had become ambiguous. Their continued involvement in collecting monies for “national” purposes raised the question of their place in relief efforts. A half year after the strike the NCs, in a marked retreat from their previously vigorous assertion of socio-political authority, argued that their responsibility for the impacted and the needy ended with the strike, and that the AHC was the proper venue for the organization and

¹³³ Arab Bureau information, 9.1.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

¹³⁴ Arab Bureau information, 2.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

¹³⁵ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 3, CZA S/25 – 22039. Members of the faction went so far as to actively stoke the discontents of fighters in the northern regions with the AHC.

provision of social support. The Jewish Agency's redoubtable Arabist, Aharon Haim Cohen, touched on the root of the issue when he observed in one of his monthly reports that the NCs had come into being under popular pressure, but now the same population, and by extension its organizational fruits (the NCs), were brought low by what he called the "disgrace" of hunger in Arab society. The crises of Arab impoverishment and dispossession that had advanced under the British in tandem with the growth of the Zionist polity and its institutional and economic strength had not been remedied by the strike, which had brought its own hardships for the Palestinians. While economic depression among the Arabs was unabated in the aftermath, none of the strike's new institutions had anywhere near the economic resources necessary to ameliorate the pitiful condition of the masses, though as the political apparatus of the movement they were looked to as instruments of succor.¹³⁶

There were two overarching motors stoking the cauldron of economic tensions that bubbled throughout Arab society. One was the British-Zionist partnership and the official policies pursued by the government (elaborated in Chapters 5 and 6). The other was the unaddressed, heavily stratified class structure of Arab society as it had developed since the ascendance of merchant capital in the nineteenth century. As during the strike, both of these sets of forces refracted throughout society and its politics, delineating and sharpening deep social divisions. With British policy in a kind of holding pattern awaiting the Royal Commission recommendations, the question of internal social inequality gained great attention. As the burgeoning marginalized

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

population stared down potential starvation, the irresolution of their plight added to the combustible currents coursing among the body politic. Given the upper classes' aversion to radicalism and their distaste for activists' steady demands on their wealth and resources, the stage was set not only for the next challenge to the dual colonial order to again be popularly-based, but for the simmering class conflict within Palestinian society to escalate further.

Mass politics, factionalism, and the internal struggle for leadership

As they had been since the late 1920s youth remained at the heart of the transformation of Arab politics in Palestine, both as an active element driving social change and as a constituency for whose loyalties elite factions competed. The upheavals of the strike had been propelled in part by youth, whose social status had risen accordingly before cresting, in the case of urban youth, who then came under serious public pressure during the uprising's *final six weeks or more* for their perceived distance from the battlefield. This unsettling development, and the eclipse of the immediate revolutionary circumstances that occasioned their extraordinary influence during the strike, took youth back down a peg in stature and appears to have contributed to their disorganization as a constituency during the interregnum period. Along with the rest of the Arab public, youth were varied in political persuasion and held a variety of views on the national movement's strategic options. These two factors, their relative disorganization and their internal political diversity, as well as their demonstrated

political importance and vigor, made youth a principle site of the continuing struggle over leadership, much as they had been before the strike.

Urban spaces were home to the fiercest competition over youth, among which Nablus stands as an exemplar. Nablus is sometimes considered to be an Opposition stronghold, owing to the affiliations with that faction of mayor Sulayman Bey Tuqan and a coterie of powerful merchants. In actuality the city was more mixed, not least because of the strong strain of Istiqlal-influenced youth who were central to its politics in the mid-1930s. In November 1936, a month after the end of the strike, the conflicting tendencies that existed within the national movement became abundantly visible and their internal competition renewed. The release of Akram Zu‘aytir and Mamduh al-Sukhn from Sarafand detention camp was met with acclaim by local youth who were, no doubt, partisans and allies of the Istiqlalist Sports Union Club that had been closed by the authorities. These zealous nationalists used the moment to let it be known that they were ready to return to confrontation and even war. Zu‘aytir was, at this point, hated and envied by many of the city’s leading politicians for his popularity and youth appeal, regardless of the fact that some of the same men had previously worked with him and even had helped inaugurate the general strike. This held not only for mayor Tuqan and fellow DP figures like Ahmad Shak‘a, but for NC colleague ‘Abd al-Latif Salah as well. Matters became more serious after Faysal al-Nabulsi, radical scion of a large and prominent mercantile family, urged that demobilized fighters returning to the city should return to arms, and not only against the colonial state, but against its alleged proxy agent: the national movement’s quietist politicians. City leaders tried to calm Faysal Effendi,

but after he refused to relent, al-Shak‘a and Tahir al-Misri personally attacked him, leading to a wider brawl. Faysal Effendi and his allies were routed in the scuffle, but the extent of their anger towards local elites was revealed in their organization of a rudimentary and ineffective underground whose aim was to assassinate the likes of al-Shak‘a, al-Misri, Tuqan, A.L. Salah, and even, supposedly, heads of the al-Nabulsi family (specifically al-Hajj ‘Abd al-Rahman, head of the local Chamber of Commerce, and Nimr, Faysal’s own uncle!). A JA informant tersely related six weeks after the strike that “The situation is tense in Nablus... the leaders fear for their lives, the merchants for their interests, whereas youth continue with [their] incitement.”¹³⁷

Irrespective of its rougher episodes, the contest for youth mobilization mostly transpired on civic terrain. After the expulsion of Faysal al-Nabulsi and his group, Nablus politicians unveiled a number of new youth and workers’ associations as a means of shoring up and expanding their standing. Sulayman Bey Tuqan managed to pull together a union of taxi drivers in Beisan, Tulkarm, Jenin, and Nablus allegedly comprising 400 members.¹³⁸ He also established a youth association in Nablus called the Cultural Club that counted some 450 young men as adherents.¹³⁹ Additionally, Tuqan and al-Shak‘a formed a workers’ club named after the latter as a competitor to A.L. Salah, who had opened his own youth club in late November and who also sought

¹³⁷ Arab Bureau information, 23.11.36 and 24.11.36, CZA S/25 – 22193. According to the latter report Zu‘aytir was ostensibly involved in Faysal Effendi’s hit squad, but this seems rather unlikely since the former had a positive view of Tuqan’s early role in the strike (*Yawmiyat*, p. 86-87), maintained some kind of relations with Tuqan after the strike (p. 294), and was sharply critical of the assassination attempt on him in December 1937 (p. 341). Other members of the Faysal al-Nabulsi’s failed underground included Ahmad al-Habash, Nasuh Kan‘an, and Fakhri al-Hijawi.

¹³⁸ Arab Bureau information, 24.11.36, CZA S/25 – 22193. As the union did not extend to Jerusalem and Hebron it is unclear whether it would have been a competitor to Salah ‘Abdu’s outfit (with Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani during the strike). The number of drivers reported to the JA may have been exaggerated.

¹³⁹ Arab Bureau information, 1.12.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

to claim the loyalties of the local cab drivers.¹⁴⁰ Al-Shak'a, who was an early supporter of the strike movement before being singled out by the Black Hand, boasted a youth entourage of his own by early 1937.¹⁴¹ Although Zu'aytir says nary a word about it in his diaries, he, al-Sukhn, Wasif Kamal, and others were thought to be trying to reconstitute the Nablus Istiqlal.¹⁴² The first step in this resurrection may have been the reorganization in February 1937 of the Khalid Ibn al-Walid scouts, the Sports Union Club's troupe, which had been disbanded by the government during the strike. The troupe reportedly attracted many former fighters from area villages, who were recipients of the paramilitary training it offered.¹⁴³ Ambitious as ever, Zu'aytir and al-Sukhn also acted in early 1937 to resuscitate the Sports Union Club (also closed in 1936, and occupied by military forces to boot) and to form workers' committees in Nablus, Tulkarm, and Jenin.¹⁴⁴

The organization of popular constituencies took similar forms elsewhere, albeit with varying outcomes. In Safad, for instance, Zionist intelligence reported in February 1937 that youth were propagandizing for renewed rebellion, organizing military training for villagers, and establishing workers' clubs.¹⁴⁵ During the same month the PAP was reported to be planning an organizing drive to bring urban youth into the *Futuwwah*, which had become a kind of paramilitary youth brigade.¹⁴⁶ Six weeks later, however, the discontents of *majlisi*-affiliated youth with their faction's instructions to keep the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.; Arab Bureau information, 24.11.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

¹⁴¹ Arab Bureau information, 14.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

¹⁴² Arab Bureau information, 1.12.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

¹⁴³ Arab Bureau information, 14.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

¹⁴⁴ Arab Bureau information, 21.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

¹⁴⁵ Survey, 19.2.37-26.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

¹⁴⁶ Arab Bureau information, 2.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

peace caught the ear of the mufti. Some members of the *Futuwwah*, the club of Rawdat al-Ma‘arif, and the Arab Sports Club in Jerusalem felt that continued inaction in the face of Jewish reprisals and provocations, “debility” would result and the initiative would pass to the Zionists. They proposed a daytime attack by a contingent of youth on a Jewish neighborhood, but when al-Hajj Amin learned of the suggestion he moved to squelch it by telling his young comrades that an easy victory would be won by the Arabs on “judgment day” and calling for quiet to reign as the PAP’s London delegation carried on its work. Questioned when “judgment day” would come, the mufti responded that this depended on the outcome of the Royal Commission. This answer, the JA’s Arab Bureau reported, was not seen by all of the young *majlisi* adherents as compelling.¹⁴⁷

The most divisive and explosive struggle over popular constituencies at this time occurred in Jaffa, where the head of the AWS, Michel Mitri, was murdered in December of 1936. Mitri had taken over after Fakhri al-Nashashibi established the association and had helped turn AWS into a vital force within the city. Mitri’s assassin was never discovered, but rumors later suggested Fakhri Effendi, who had returned his attentions to organizing laborers after the end of the strike, may have been behind the deed.¹⁴⁸

Charles Tegart, a former police chief in Bengal and counterinsurgency specialist who was brought to Palestine in late 1937 to advise on security affairs and the reorganization of the police force, concluded that ‘Ali al-Qasim, the fair-weather ally of the Zionists and early rebel fighter in 1936, was the gunman, acting at the will of Mustafa Irshayd, member of an influential Jenin-area family – but neither appears to have been arrested

¹⁴⁷ Arab Bureau information: Evaluation of the situation at Jerusalem, 19.3.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

¹⁴⁸ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 293.

for unknown reasons.¹⁴⁹ Mitri had run the organization with an iron grip, according to his deputy George Mansur, who took over its leadership after the former's demise. As a Christian, Mansur faced opposition from the association's majority Muslim rank-and-file, but his position was rendered more precarious after financial straits sent him into the arms of the mufti, after which he was accused of selling the AWS to the *majlisis*. Mansur suspected that both Communists and the Histadrut had a hand in making the organization's life in 1937 one of ceaseless tumult and "anarchy," ending in his ouster from the leadership and the disintegration of the association around the fall of that year.¹⁵⁰

By early 1937 the competition for popular constituencies was compounded by deepening debates over leadership and the national movement's direction. The factionalism of the Jerusalemite families predictably returned with a vengeance after its muting during the 1936 uprising. In Jerusalem itself the extent of the traditional *majlisi-mu'arada* and *majlisi-non-majlisi* divisions was evident in the formation of competing NCs just after the close of the strike.¹⁵¹ The enmity between the parties degenerated into fisticuffs and even, months later, shootings targeting the homes of the rival committees' heads.¹⁵² The *majlisi-mu'arada* rancor made Nabi Musa in 1937 the most raucous ever,

¹⁴⁹ Report, n.d., p. 8, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

¹⁵⁰ Arab Bureau information, 23.9.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. Early in 1937 the AWS sought to join the trend in paramilitary drilling by procuring a trainer through the Syrian youth movement of the National Bloc, known as 'the steelshirts' (Survey, 19.2.37-26.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22437).

¹⁵¹ Arab Bureau information, 27.10.36 and 27.10.36 (two separate reports), CZA S/25 – 22193.

¹⁵² Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 4, CZA S/25 – 22039. See also: Survey, 19.2.37-26.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

according to Zionist intelligence.¹⁵³ Altercations between the camps were based in youth mobilizations and resulted in one stabbing of an Opposition youth and the arson of several buses owned by Salah ‘Abdu’s transport company.¹⁵⁴ Those wishing to stay above the fray chanted for Fawzi al-Qawuqji or called out the names of 1936 battles (such as at Bal‘a); nonetheless, chants regaling the mufti as the “King of Palestine” were also heard.¹⁵⁵

The thinness of the *majlisi* faction’s post-strike claim to the leadership was revealed by February 1937 when the Istiqlalists began to back out of what had previously amounted to a coalition with it. Irritated by what they saw as the mufti’s tendency to amass power in his own hands, they opened talks with Sulayman Tuqan and Ahmad al-Shuqayri, then an influential, independent youth leader from Acre, about trimming al-Hajj Amin’s wings.¹⁵⁶ The Istiqlal’s break with the *majlisis* also related to its leading lights’ assessment that further armed struggle against the state was both inevitable and meritorious. At an AHC meeting in March, the Istiqlal clashed with the *majlisis* over ongoing tit-for-tat Arab-Jewish violence, with the former arguing for a

¹⁵³ Our representative in Nablus, n.d. [probably late June or July], CZA S/25 – 22192. Somewhat oddly, the RAF concluded the contrary and described Nabi Musa as mostly peaceful (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 24.5.37, resume of operations (April), PRO – Air 5/1247).

¹⁵⁴ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 2.6.37, p. 3-4, CZA S/25 – 22039; Nabi Musa information, 30.4.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. JA informants and staff detected a partisan attitude on the part of the government, which acted to break up the brawls by sequestering Opposition youth and activists from the proceeding. See: Arab Bureau information: Nabi Musa procession, 26.4.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

¹⁵⁵ Arab Bureau information: Nabi Musa procession, 26.4.37, and Nabi Musa information, 30.4.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. The mufti requested extra police protection for himself during Nabi Musa,

¹⁵⁶ Survey, 19.2.37-26.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22437. Al-Shuqayri relates in his memoirs that that mufti tried to coopt him into helping prepare evidence for presentation to the Peel Commission, but he rejected the offer and countered by urging the mufti to quit the SMC and become the unfettered leader of the popular movement. Al-Hajj Amin’s bid, he intimates, was also a ploy for scoring a coup against al-Shuqayri’s father, As‘ad, a well-known and eminent clerical opponent of the mufti (al-Shuqayri, *Arba‘un ‘aman*, p. 164-66).

severe response to any incident. The Husaynis and their allies prevailed in the dispute, but the Istiqlal, represented by ‘Awni Bey, warned that the north was prepared for a war of liberation, which only awaited a clear signal to commence.¹⁵⁷

Although it has been overshadowed by discussion of the *majlisi* faction’s resort to political murder against its opponents (see below), the Istiqlal’s split from the mufti’s camp coincided with several threats made against the mufti. In May al-Hajj Amin received two letters warning him that his life was in jeopardy. Both resembled those sent by *Qassamiyun* to their foes, such as Haifa mayor Hasan Shukri. The first underscored the necessity of supporting the prisoners’ hunger strike and stated that the death of any of the prisoners would render the mufti’s life forfeit. The second, more definitive missive was sent during the annual *mawlid al-nabi* holiday (marking the birth of the Prophet Muhammad). It charged that the mufti put his own interests and those of his family ahead of the nation and that his brand of “barren politics” had brought about the prospect of Palestine’s partition. The mufti had forsaken “the commoners” (Hebrew: *ha’amim*) and instead, it was alleged, he planned “to create for himself a kingdom on the hills of the ruins of the Arab nation.” For these reasons, it informed him, he was sentenced to death at the earliest available opportunity. The mufti, who was no stranger to asking the colonial state for protection, transmitted the letters to the police.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Arab Bureau information: Evaluation of the situation at Jerusalem, 19.3.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. Zionist intelligence at the time correctly forecast that the *majlisi* success in fending off escalation was largely pyrrhic, since other Palestinian forces, including the Istiqlalists, didn’t abide by the AHC’s line.

¹⁵⁸ Survey, 4.6.37-17.6.37, CZA s/25 – 22227; Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 2.6.37, p. 2-3, CZA S/25 – 22039. Quotes are from these reports (which are presumably paraphrased), not from the letters themselves.

As the threats to the mufti illustrate, the vitriol that came to infuse the Palestinian political field was fed significantly by the growing speculation that partition would become official policy. The increasingly transparent desire of Amir ‘Abdullah of Transjordan to intercede in Palestinian affairs and ultimately to enlarge his kingdom via merging it with the Arab areas of Palestine also played a critical role in accentuating this trend and in deepening factionalist schisms. As shown in the previous chapter, the amir’s efforts to bring about the termination of the strike tarnished his Arab allies in Palestine and may have contributed to the assassination and attempted assassination of several of their number. Unbowed, ‘Abdullah took his aspirations before the Royal Commission in January 1937 as planned, where he avoided the subject of partition but proclaimed that representative government in Palestine was not incompatible with the Mandate. Departing from the nationalist line in Palestine, he also volunteered to accept Jewish immigration to his kingdom in the future so long as Jews made no claims for special rights or treatment beyond those of other citizens. His testimony impressed the commission and undoubtedly shaped its final recommendations, which wagered that Britain’s best bet for both stable, local Arab allies and a solution to the Palestine conundrum lay with the *amir* and his entourage in the DP.¹⁵⁹

Suspicious in Palestine abounded regarding Amir ‘Abdullah’s intentions. He had long quietly maintained relations with the JA and it was something of an open secret that

¹⁵⁹ Wilson, *King Abdullah*, p. 120-21; Avi Shlaim, *Politics of Partition: King Abdullah, the Zionists and Palestine, 1921-1951* (New York: Columbia UP, 1990), p. 56. It was perhaps known to the commission that ‘Abdullah had previously proposed similar terms to the Jewish Agency, effectively for Jewish autonomy and continued immigration within an amalgamated Transjordanian-Palestinian kingdom, under his own Hashemite crown of course (ibid., p. 51-52). Shlaim notes too that the amir’s avoidance of reference to partition before the commission did not detract from the assumption that he would accept such a policy were it to fulfill his well-known dream of territorial expansion (p. 56).

he sought a *modus vivendi* with Zionism that would benefit his arid and resource-poor kingdom while serving his geopolitical aims.¹⁶⁰ By April 1937 rumors circulated that not only would partition be recommended by the Peel Commission, but that the proposed Arab state would not be independent, but attached to Transjordan.¹⁶¹ Partition was widely unpopular, although some in the Opposition believed it could potentially solve the Palestine problem.¹⁶² The *majlisi* camp saw it as a preconceived Anglo-Zionist conspiracy that would afford for a Jewish state in the near term while leaving open the door to its future territorial expansion at Arab expense.¹⁶³ When ‘Abdullah was invited to Britain for the king’s coronation ceremony in May, it was generally surmised that he was really being consulted about the partition plan.¹⁶⁴ Before departing by steamship from Haifa, he transited through Palestine, where warm receptions by the *mu‘arada* at Jerusalem, Nablus, and Haifa and chants of “Long live ‘Abdullah, King of Palestine” further raised popular apprehensions.¹⁶⁵ On the initiative of Jamal al-Husayni in London, a memo rejecting partition and the extension of Transjordanian sovereignty over Palestine was drawn up and signed by prominent Transjordanian Istiqlalists, including Dr. Subhi Abu Ghanima, a member of the legislative council, and former ‘Amman mayor Tahir Bey al-Juqa, along with a number of tribal heads.¹⁶⁶ The memo, which was also signed by numerous Palestinian personages, elicited a counter-petition

¹⁶⁰ Wilson, *King Abdullah*, p. 103-15; Masalha, *Expulsion*, p. 57-58.

¹⁶¹ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 156.

¹⁶² Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 12, CZA S/25 – 22039.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁴ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 435.

¹⁶⁵ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 156; Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 2.6.37, p. 4, CZA S/25 – 22039.

¹⁶⁶ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 2.6.37, p. 5, CZA S/25 – 22039. Abu Ghanima’s background is noted in: Wilson, *King Abdullah*, p. 111.

backing partition and Amir ‘Abdullah which garnered the approval of Opposition leaders in Nablus, Sulayman Tuqan, Hajj Nimr al-Nabulsi, and Ahmad al-Shak‘a, and found support in the Southern District of Palestine from ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Muzaffar and Shukri al-Taji al-Faruqi.¹⁶⁷ ‘Asim Sa‘id and Mustafa Khayri, the mayors of Jaffa and Ramle respectively and *mu‘arada* backers, also voiced support for ‘Abdullah’s kingship in Palestine.¹⁶⁸

In the enflamed atmosphere surrounding partition, the Opposition’s direct challenge to the mufti was received by the *majlisiyyin* as tantamount to a declaration of war. This extended to Amir ‘Abdullah, who did nothing to restrain the adulation of his Palestinian allies or to disavow partition. In spite of the financial squeeze, the *majlisi* camp reportedly distributed thousands of Palestinian pounds to Bedouin in Transjordan in hopes of seeding the overthrow of ‘Abdullah. When the *amir* returned from London in June and again transited overland through Palestine, the *mu‘arada* again feted him in a large public reception, while the *majlisi* camp rallied his opponents at a mass function in Tiberias. Upon his return home ‘Abdullah ordered the exile of the mufti’s affiliates resident in the kingdom and forced the dispersal of conspicuous gatherings near Karak and ‘Ajlun, before informing High Commissioner Wauchope of the mufti’s plot against his crown. Opposition-backed newspapers in Palestine, and even the vehemently nationalist *al-Difa‘*, assailed the AHC and suggested its replacement.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 2.6.37, p. 5, CZA S/25 – 22039.

¹⁶⁸ Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat*, p. 52.

¹⁶⁹ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 5.6.37 [5.7.37], p. 1-4, CZA S/25 – 22039; Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 207-08. When *al-Liwa*, the *majlisi* standard, hit back, it was tellingly prohibited by the Palestine government from scourging ‘Abdullah (Survey, 25.6.37-2.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22227). Ibrahim al-Shanti, the Istiqlalist proprietor of *al-Difa‘* despised the mufti and saw him as a traitor,

With whatever scheme actually existed against ‘Abdullah having accomplished little more than handing him a pretext to crackdown on Transjordanian dissidents, the Opposition in Palestine soon became the object of deadly assaults. Salah ‘Abdu, one of its key youth leaders who had already been recently hospitalized after violence between Jerusalem’s competing NCs erupted in May, was the target of a bomb attack in mid-June, but was unharmed.¹⁷⁰ Fakhri Nashashibi faced an assassination attempt in Jaffa on 30 June after speaking at meeting.¹⁷¹ As Hillel Cohen describes it, “He survived miraculously; he raised his hand to scratch himself and the bullet aimed at his head lodged in his arm.”¹⁷² ‘Isa al-Bandak, YC and DP member and then mayor of Bethlehem, was the next to be targeted when his house was shot up on 3 July, injuring his wife, their daughter, and a maid.¹⁷³ As Cohen underscores, these attacks were no coincidence, and were intended to dissuade members of the Opposition and the public more generally from any endorsement of partition, which *al-Liwa* had condemned as treachery.¹⁷⁴ They were also, it should be added, stirred by Amir ‘Abdullah’s willingness to promote himself, via his allies in the DP, as future head of state of Palestine after its partition and the annexure of its Arab regions by Transjordan – a

according to his cousin, Kamil al-Shanti. To rid himself of Ibrahim Effendi for the time being, al-Hajj Amin proffered a position on the PAP’s London mission, which he accepted (Conversation with Kamil al-Shanti, 9.4.37, CZA S/25 – 22192). This seems to have contributed to tempering the tone of *al-Difa* ‘towards the government as well (Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 207).

¹⁷⁰ Arab Bureau information, 8.2.37 and 10.5.37, CZA S/25 – 22192; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 122.

¹⁷¹ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 1.7.37, #310, PRO – CO 733/341/10. According to this telegram the assassin was known, though no name is mentioned and no account that I know of identifies the assailant. Akram Zu‘aytir recorded in his diaries that a rumor related the incident to the Michel Mitri murder (*Yawmiyat*, p. 293).

¹⁷² Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 122.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

future that was anathema not only to the *majlisi* faction, but to the predominant opinion among an increasingly nationalist Arab public.

With internecine violence again spilling across the national stage, the shunning of the Opposition for having broken with the nationalist platform (independence under treaty with Britain) was completed when the AHC declined to address or condemn the attacks.¹⁷⁵ Following the advice of ‘Abdullah, the DP withdrew from the AHC just prior to the publication of the Royal Commission’s findings – a move which was seen as preparing the ground for the Opposition’s acceptance of partition and its elevation to positions of power and authority under the anticipated new order.¹⁷⁶ The British military not inaccurately predicted a wave of further political assassinations directed by the mufti’s faction would follow,¹⁷⁷ but, as will be returned to below, the Defense Party unexpectedly all but self-destructed over the terms of the partition proposal put forward by the Peel Commission. Nonetheless, the damage it had done to itself through its *a priori* approval of partition haunted its members afterwards and sealed their reputations as national renegades and outcasts during the two-year insurgency that followed.

Preparations for renewed hostilities

With many discontented at the fruits of the 1936 strike it wasn’t long before preparations for a new round of conflict were afoot. This took two forms: the operation of clandestine hit squads and the organization of rural paramilitary cadres. Given the

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 5.6.37 [5.7.37], p. 4, CZA S/25 – 22039; Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, 157-58; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 206-07; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 229; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 81; Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 250-51.

¹⁷⁷ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 207.

widespread assent to general demobilization upon the termination of the strike, and the internal tensions cross-cutting the revolt, it is little surprise that the former were first to reappear.

Although the struggle for sovereignty pitted Arab forces against the colonial state and Zionism, its exigencies had emboldened nationalist partisans to strike as well at fellow Arabs who deviated or were perceived to deviate from the movement's principles. As we have seen, this is hardly an unusual circumstance within national liberation struggles, and may generally be considered a variation, if coarser and harsher than in some other cases, on the epiphenomenon of pressing. That is, the partisans of internal coercion strove to unify the body politic and to intimidate anyone breaking ranks. They also sought to eliminate those they deemed traitors, and perhaps foremost those whose relations with the police, the military, or other state authorities posed a danger to themselves, their activities, or what they defined as the national or religious cause.¹⁷⁸

Popular discipline after the strike appears to have first pertained to the boycott. A small gathering at Tulkarm within weeks of the strike's end reputedly called for the liquidation of all elements that continued to do business with Jews.¹⁷⁹ Another such meeting held shortly thereafter in November 1936 at Haifa, and continued for a second day at Tulkarm, possibly involving the Black Hand, got farther than the first. It broadened the scope of culpable conduct to include mixing with Jews, drafted plans for a

¹⁷⁸ Here it should be noted that epithets like "traitor" (*kha'in*) and "deviant" (*kharij*) were malleable and polysemic. As will be shown in the next chapter, death was not always the punishment for those branded traitors, and a fair degree of flexibility and individual interpretation, as well as opportunities for repentance, came into play in the rebel courts and other insurgent venues through which personal conduct came to be regulated according to nationalist norms.

¹⁷⁹ Band activity memo #4, 1.11.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

team of six assassins (half of whom would be Syrian and half from Jenin), and assembled a list of some 30 candidates for execution, composed primarily of prominent merchants (Zuhdi Abu Jabin of Jaffa, Hajj Tahir Qaraman of Haifa, Shukri Bey al-Taji al-Faruqi of Ramle), police (Fa'iz Idrisi at Jerusalem, Hasan Makawi at Acre, Mahmud Habab at Jenin), and others (Sa'id Darwish of Maliha). Notably involved in the planning were a group of Jaffans: Sa'id al-Khalil, secretary of the YC, Mustafa Rashad, and a member of the Abu Laban family.¹⁸⁰

A number of NCs were soon reported to run hit squads or possess the authority to order an assassination. In January former Jaffa mayor and NC veteran 'Umar al-Bitar reportedly ordered the execution of an Arab police tracker from Bayt Dajan. The officer asked for mercy and was instructed to pay a £P 100 fine to atone for his transgressions.¹⁸¹ More is known about an underground that centered on Haifa, which the JA connected to its NC and particularly to Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim. In early 1937 the NC-Haifa reputedly had hit squads established on a cellular model, numbering no more than four persons each, with some 40 people allegedly forming the city's Black Hand.¹⁸²

By February, British intelligence determined that the Haifa underground was operated by the *Qassamiyun* and their allies, who had twice attempted after the strike to reorganize into civic youth associations, but had failed to receive state approval.¹⁸³ Although al-Hajj Ibrahim had close ties to the *Qassamiyun* it is unclear what links the

¹⁸⁰ Band activity memo #5, 12.11.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

¹⁸¹ Survey, 15.1.37-28.1.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

¹⁸² Committee of the 'Afula Bloc to A.H. Cohen, 20.1.37, and Arab Bureau information, 16.3.37, CZA S/25 – 22192; Survey, 15.1.37-28.1.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

¹⁸³ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 247. These short-lived surrogates were the Arabian Youth League (*Fityan al-jazira*) and the Youth of the Prophet Muhammad Society.

NC had to the organization.¹⁸⁴ Charles Tegart's files name shaykh Husayn Hamadi, al-Hajj 'Abdullah Abu Yunis, and shaykh Salih Abu Hishmeh as ringleaders of the Haifa underground and responsible for planning assassination plots in the area.¹⁸⁵ They worked with fellow *Qassamis* shaykh Farhan al-Sa'di and shaykh Yusuf Abu Durra, who obtained religious sanction for the various assassination orders through shaykh Muhammad al-Ashmar, who issued *fatwas* from his residence in Damascus that were conveyed back to Palestine before the operations were undertaken.¹⁸⁶ When the police uncovered the network in February they arrested as many alleged perpetrators as they could locate, rounding up over 50 men including shaykh Hamadi and shaykh Hishmeh.¹⁸⁷ Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim recalls with a note of pride, and some embellishment one suspects, that "any youth" with the "faintest of connections" (*adna 'allaqa*) to him was picked up in the sweep, though he himself was not detained at the time.¹⁸⁸ The underground continued to flourish despite this blow, and reputedly passed into the hands of several men from Balad al-Shaykh: Ghazal Hasan Yunis, shaykh Muhammad al-Atris, and shaykh Muhammad al-Dinasi, along with shaykh Muhammad al-Mughrabi. This group used Jenin as a base as well as Haifa and worked with key *Qassami* and 1936 veterans: shaykh 'Atiya 'Awad, Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir, and shaykh

¹⁸⁴ Zionist intelligence reports cited here allege that the NC paid salaries to the assassins, but Tegart's files make no mention of this. Arabic memoirs used herein, including that of al-Hajj Ibrahim, also shed no light on the subject.

¹⁸⁵ Memorandum, n.d. [late 1937], p. 2-4, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

¹⁸⁶ This remarkable arrangement is described in *ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁷ Arab Bureau information, 17.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22192; Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 221. A local scout leader and an Istiqlalist journalist were among the others apprehended.

¹⁸⁸ Al-Hajj Ibrahim, *al-Difa' 'an Haifa*, p. 163.

al-Ashmar.¹⁸⁹ Shaykh Farhan was later suspected by the CID to have been the chief mastermind of the wave of assassinations in the north in 1937.¹⁹⁰

The Haifa group built an expansive network of contacts and associates that incorporated an ideologically and socially diverse array of individuals. Tegart's papers show that the attorneys Mu'in al-Madi and Badri al-'Idi assisted its operations and collected money for it. Ironically, one of its major sources of funding was Hajj Tahir Qaraman,¹⁹¹ the wealthy entrepreneur and NC-Haifa veteran who was on several hit lists. Qaraman not only paid regular "subscriptions" to the group, but employed shaykh Farhan's nephew and shaykh al-Mughrabi, and financially supported shaykh 'Atiya's family and two other nephews of Farhan, thereby helping to preserve his own life.¹⁹² Various religious figures and Muhammad Hashim al-Khatib of the Society to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice¹⁹³ also gathered money for the organization, which was laundered through Syria before finding its way back to the Black Hand's coffers. Contacts with labor were maintained through PAWS leaders 'Abd al-Hamid Haymur and Sami Taha and through other employees of the Palestine Railways. Dr. Sa'id Odeh,

¹⁸⁹ Memorandum, n.d., p. 4, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

¹⁹⁰ CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 11, enclosure to: HC to Colonial Secretary, 4.5.38, PRO – CO 733/370/9 [hereafter: CID, Terrorism: 1936-37].

¹⁹¹ Qaraman's business interests were varied and including tobacco growing and cigarette manufacture, packaging, nails, and quarrying (Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 91).

¹⁹² Memorandum, n.d., p. 4-5, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c ; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 124-25.

¹⁹³ Memorandum, n.d., p. 5, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c . The involvement of the Society to Promote Virtue, or one of its members, should not be taken to connote the mufti's complicity, much less command, over the Haifa underground. Quite to the contrary British military intelligence recorded that al-Hajj Amin, through the Tulkarm *qadi*, offered in late February to pay for information about the Black Hand at Haifa from Bal'a villagers, who perhaps it was believed were more closely associated with it (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 28.2.37, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20824). A number of Zionist intelligence reports from the time corroborate the mufti's distance from the underground by noting his preference for quiet before the Royal Commission report (e.g. Survey, 19.3.35-25.3.35 [1937], CZA S/25 – 22437; Survey, 4.6.37-17.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22227; Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 2.6.37, p.1, CZA S/25 – 22039).

a shadowy figure fingered by the authorities as the originator of the assassination campaign in 1936 and integral to its subsequent history, was close with labor constituencies, the *Qassamiyun*, and even the communists (through Mahmud Hashim al-Ashqar). At some point prior to fall 1937 the organization developed intelligence sources inside both the police and the RAF and, at its apex prior to the major crackdown on the national movement in September, it was reputed to have established an infrastructure of contacts throughout most of the Arab cities of the north along with the triangle, Jaffa, and Ramle.¹⁹⁴

Besides its intimidation of figures like Qaraman, the Haifa group's exploits were aimed, much as they had been in 1936, at police and informers. With deadly persistence the *Qassamiyun* hunted down Arab police and witnesses related to the Nahalal trial, executing three of 11 targets struck at in the first months of 1937.¹⁹⁵ Attempts were made to assassinate inspector Mahmud Habab at Nablus in November 1936 and DSP Cohen, a much-hated antagonist of Arab activists and radicals in Haifa, in January.¹⁹⁶ In the eyes of their perpetrators, the crowning achievement of these attacks was surely the

¹⁹⁴ Memorandum, n.d., p. 4-7, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c. Local organizers and pointmen (not assassins themselves) are named in this memo by location: Jaffa: Mustafa Irshayd, Mahmud Mughrabi (a.k.a. 'Azzum); Ramle: Nimr al-Masri, Mahmud 'Ala al-Din; Tulkarm: Farid al-Hamdallah, Shaykh Amin (brother of 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad); Nablus: Akram Zu'aytir, Mamduh Sukhn, someone named Khayri; Jenin: Fadl al-Tahir, Farid Irshayd, Sa'id al-Ya'qubi, Mustafa al-Muslih (from Maythalun), Diyab al-Danun; Nazareth: Salih Uthman 'Awnallah, Raja al-'Abbushi, Muhammad Sa'id Saffuri; Beisan: Farid Fakhr al-Din; Acre: the brothers Anwar and Ahmad al-Shuqayri, Subhi al-Khadra. Hamdallah, 'Ala al-Din, Zu'aytir, Khadra, and Ahmad al-Shuqayri, representing four different urban centers, are all identifiable 1936 NC members; their membership in the Black Hand network, if accurate, recalls the NCs' previous involvements in armed struggle and suggests that they may have helped grow the organization to the formidable shape it was reputed to have in late 1937.

¹⁹⁵ CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 10, PRO – CO 733/370/9; Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 221. Zu'aytir describes the killing of one witness, police officer Salim Faris (who Zu'aytir mistakenly refers to as Faraj), in February 1937 (*Yawmiyat*, p. 282-83). Discussed in chapter 6, the bombing at Nahalal colony in 1932 and subsequent investigations shut down Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir's group, itself an offshoot of al-Qassam's.

¹⁹⁶ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 226, 278. Interestingly, Mustafa Irshayd was identified by Tegart as responsible for the attack on Habab (Memorandum, n.d., p. 10, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c).

assassination of CID officer and *Qassami* foe Halim Basta in April 1937. Basta was known to leak information to the JA, but by 1937 he was ironically reported by the Arab Bureau, probably with a dollop of exaggeration, to be petrified of the underground and unwilling “to lift a finger” against them.¹⁹⁷

Just a week before Basta’s killing, attackers who may have emanated from the Haifa underground sought to kill ASP J.A.M. Faraday at Nazareth, notorious for his lethal role in the suppression of the 1933 Jaffa demonstration.¹⁹⁸ Also in April a bomb was thrown at the family home of a *mukhtar* from Battir south of Jerusalem. The *mukhtar*, a member of the Abu Ni‘ma family, had provided information that led to the martyrdom of Sa‘id al-‘As and the rebel defeat at the battle of Khudr in 1936 and had been an asset of the JA since the 1929 uprising.¹⁹⁹ The former police instructor and scout trainer Farid Abu al-‘Uyun was assassinated in May in Tulkarm for having served as a secret informant for the prosecutor’s office in 1936.²⁰⁰ Other than police and informers, the perpetually maligned Hasan Shukri, along with his son-in-law, were targeted by would-be assassins, but escaped, while a relative of Hajj Khalil Taha’s was not so fortunate, and was slain in January in Haifa.²⁰¹ Whether or not each of these

¹⁹⁷ Arab Bureau information, 3.3.37, CZA S/25 – 22192; Survey, 19.3.35-25.3.35 [1937], CZA S/25 – 22437. According to Tegart’s files, one of Basta’s assassins was a 20 year-old nephew of shaykh Farhan, Ahmad Muhammad al-Sa‘di, who the elder kept from becoming a supernumerary police officer. Two other Black Hand gunmen were identified in the operation (Memorandum, n.d., p. 6, 9, and Statement of Ahmed Mohamed el Sa‘adi, 26.11.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c). An ‘Arab al-Zubaydat *mukhtar* also believed some of his fellow tribesmen from the Marj Ibn ‘Amir were involved (Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 155).

¹⁹⁸ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 96.

¹⁹⁹ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 22, 117-18, 121. JA intelligence reported that the family’s implication in al-‘As’s death was well known (Arab Bureau information, 22.4.37, CZA S/25 – 22192).

²⁰⁰ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 289.

²⁰¹ CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, appendix F, p. 5, PRO – CO 733/370/9; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 121. The Hasan Shukri and Taha incidents were credited by the CID to the *Qassamiyun* (CID, *ibid.*).

attacks can be traced directly to the Haifa underground, there is little doubt that the network took the lead in promoting violence against collaborators and state authorities.

The repeated assaults on and executions of police contributed to the force's dysfunction. Serving the colonial state too loyally became a grave personal hazard for Arab officers and morale diminished in response. Shawki Bey Sa'd, for instance, the replacement for slain CID officer Ahmad Na'if and Basta's assistant, allegedly knew who some of the underground's members were but was too afraid for his own life to act – even before Basta was killed.²⁰² Police in other areas, such as Jaffa, were reported to suffer the same paralysis for the same reasons.²⁰³

At about the same time that the current of assassinations began to swell, signs of renewed paramilitary organizing became conspicuous. The *Qassamiyun* had an obvious hand in this in the north, but they can only claim partial credit for what was a more widespread phenomenon. The JA's Arab Bureau fretfully reported in February 1937 that "every village" had a committee charged with preparing residents for combat. Beyond the hyperbole, its informants first noted the activity of the *Qassamiyun* under shaykh Farhan, shaykh 'Atiya, and Ibrahim al-Khalil al-Jundawi from Shafa 'Amr in the north, and that of 'Abd al-Rahman 'Ali al-Hajj Khalil from Lifta, west of Jerusalem.²⁰⁴ Reports of bands forming and of urban and rural organizing for armed conflict throughout the cities and countryside of northern and central Palestine as far south as

²⁰² Arab Bureau information, 3.3.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

²⁰³ Arab Bureau information, 3.4.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

²⁰⁴ Survey, 5.2.37-11.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22437. British military intelligence believed that shaykh Farhan and shaykh 'Atiya had amalgamated their forces following the strike, but no real detail is available on the subject (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 28.2.37, weekly summary of intelligence, appendix B, PRO – FO 371/20824).

Jaffa, Jerusalem and Hebron multiplied in late winter and early spring, as did sightings of Arab men conducting paramilitary drilling, for instance in the vicinity of the Nuris and Nahalal blocs, situated at opposite ends of the Marj Ibn ‘Amir.²⁰⁵ Existing estimates show that the armed groups were modest in size, generally ranging from 12-30 men, sprinkled across various villages, towns, and cities.²⁰⁶ The largest force cited in any report from the time was that of veteran commander ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad, who lived with 40-50 men at the grace of supportive villagers.²⁰⁷

The growth of armed bands, and particularly the activities of the *Qassamiyun* set off wild rumors on occasion, such as after shaykh Farhan, flanked by shaykh ‘Atiya, al-Jundawi and Wasif Kamal of the Nablus Black Hand repaired to Damascus around the end of February. There it was widely believed that the Palestinians held consultations with shaykh Muhammad al-Ashmar, who, according to one version of events, retained 4000 men waiting for battle.²⁰⁸ Rumors broadcasting the immanent arrival of large reinforcements seem intended to bolster local paramilitary organization, yet the numbers of non-Palestinian Arabs recruited in early 1937 for the anticipated insurgency were, in reality, scanty. For example, other reports concerning al-Ashmar estimated his retinue at about 25 men.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 22.3.37, resume of operations (February), PRO – Air 5/1247; Surveys, 19.2.37-26.2.37, 27.2.37-4.3.37, 6.3.37-12.3.37, 12.3.37-18.3.37, 19.3.35-25.3.35 [1937], CZA S/25 – 22437

²⁰⁶ Reports in *ibid.*

²⁰⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 28.2.37, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20824. Military intelligence reported that ‘Abd al-Rahim was lining his pockets at villagers’ expense, but this doesn’t sound particularly characteristic of his *modus operandi*.

²⁰⁸ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 28.2.37, weekly summary of intelligence, appendix B, PRO – FO 371/20824; Surveys, 19.2.37-26.2.37 and 12.3.37-18.3.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

²⁰⁹ Arab Bureau information, 29.12.36, CZA S/25 – 22193; Survey, 12.3.37-18.3.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

Not without some cause, the Jewish Agency believed the Istiqlal was greatly responsible for the paramilitary undercurrent. In December 1936 its informants reported that the party decided after a series of meetings in Jerusalem to advocate the return to arms and to fund the new campaign through levies on the wealthy.²¹⁰ Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim and ‘Awni Bey appear to have been the two most active members on this front. Al-Hajj Ibrahim and his militant comrades twisted the arms of the moneyed classes looking for both immediate and future payments to the cause.²¹¹ Haifa and Nablus merchants received letters from “Palestine rebels” demanding cash, and when merchants in the former tried to convene a meeting in March to oppose the exactions and the attacks on themselves and their families, Mu‘in al-Madi intervened. With the aid of several local merchants, al-Madi agreed to discuss the situation with the mufti, who many presumed was responsible for the hostile atmosphere in which they lived.²¹² Unassociated merchants weren’t the only source of cash for the Haifa underground and the bands; al-Hajj Ibrahim, for example, was reported to have personally donated some £P 400 to clandestine groups.²¹³ Though most of the JA’s reports concern fundraising, British intelligence also intercepted letters in March written by the *Qassami* Mahmud al-Salim which used ‘Awni’s name (and that of ‘Abd al-Latif Salah) to seek recruits in Transjordan for operations intended to harass Jewish colonies.²¹⁴ Probably because of the party’s general view that only armed resistance would bring political concessions, the JA’s Arab Bureau believed that the newly emergent or reconstituted bands were the

²¹⁰ Arab Bureau information, 29.12.36, CZA S/25 – 22193.

²¹¹ Survey, 19.2.37-26.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

²¹² Ibid.; Survey 12.3.37-18.3.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

²¹³ Survey, 19.3.37-25.3.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

²¹⁴ Arab Bureau information, 19.4.37, featuring Hebrew translations of the documents.

fruit of the Istiqlal's labors, but by mid-year it conceded that the bands, such as they existed, bent to no specific political authority or party.²¹⁵

In contrast to the Istiqlal, the *majlisi* faction was much more hesitant to earnestly prepare for any further confrontation. A search of its NC's offices at Jerusalem in February turned up arms and bombs, but these may well have been intended for use in its ongoing war with the rival Opposition- and neutral-backed NC and against the *mu'arada* in general.²¹⁶ The faction's contingency plans for a new rebellion were overweening and highly unrealistic. They called for a total war against Britain and Zionism which would be facilitated by monthly levies on all Arab merchants and the conscription of one man from every family in the country in which there was more than a single adult male.²¹⁷ As noted above, the mufti issued instructions through the SMC that called for quiet, and when this precipitated discontent from the ranks of *majisi* youth, he intervened in March to halt any motion towards violence following a number of Jewish attacks on Arabs, urging the young men to arm themselves but otherwise to await the outcome of the Royal Commission. This was generally his position throughout the interregnum, as even the JA's Arab Bureau internally admitted.²¹⁸ Indeed, the mufti's strategy in the first half of 1937 put overwhelming emphasis not on the practicalities of any local preparation for a future uprising, but on his long-preferred course of pursuing foreign alliances as a means of attaining diplomatic leverage. It was for this reason that al-Hajj Amin

²¹⁵ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, CZA S/25 – 22039; Survey, 4.6.37-17.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

²¹⁶ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 28.2.37, weekly summary of intelligence, PRO – FO 371/20824. The *majisis* even claimed these items were planted in the offices by DP operatives.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ See above.

attempted to plan an international Islamic conference in the Hijaz on the model of the 1931 Islamic congress, although Ibn Sa‘ud’s coolness to the idea and willful distance from the Palestine imbroglio prevented it from moving forward.²¹⁹ As late as mid-June the *majlisi* leadership was still betting on its operatives in London to deliver a political victory, following encouraging noises from the latter that such was possible.²²⁰ Only in the second half of June did the continuous rumors regarding the prospect of partition finally push the mufti to meet with Muhammad al-Ashmar and shaykh ‘Atiya while on a visit to Syria to seek the support of the National Bloc there.²²¹ The mufti’s public tone grew more bellicose and he memorably threatened to “declare war on the British on the 8th [of] July” if the Royal Commission failed to satisfy the national demands of the Palestinians, but the meetings with the *Qassami* and 1936 veterans appear to have been inconclusive.²²²

The laggardly and half-hearted interest in a potential new insurrection may well have had much to do with the mufti’s pessimism on the question. Months earlier while speaking to Lord George Lloyd, the conservative former mayor of Bombay and High Commissioner of Egypt, al-Hajj Amin reiterated what the AHC had said in 1936: that the Palestinians had no hope of military resistance against the British empire. This comment was not offered merely to cajole or flatter British officials, but rather reflected

²¹⁹ Survey, 19.2.37-26.2.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

²²⁰ Survey, 4.6.37-17.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

²²¹ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 206.

²²² Ibid. Darwaza claims in *Hawla al-haraka* that preparations for conflict, including endeavors by the mufti, were underway for months before the assassination of Acting DC-Galilee Andrews in September, but mentions only the trip to the Hijaz, which hardly seems to rate in this regard. He then ascribes the attacks by Arab forces in 1937 before the Peel Commission report, against Arab, British, and Jewish targets, as “individual incidents” (*hawadith fardiyya*) carried out by the “zealous,” with no mention of any links to the *majlisis* (192).

the mufti's genuine assessment of the balance of forces, which he maintained in private months later after the revolt had been relaunched.²²³

While the head of the AHC commingled national with partisan interests and led his followers back to the realm of traditional elite politics and its diplomatic fantasies – the failure of which had produced the 1936 uprising – the underground and possibly some fraction of the reestablished bands went into action. The CID was of the opinion, though lacking proof, that the *Qassamiyun* were responsible for a number of assaults on Jews in the north in early 1937. In February a Jewish doctor was murdered in Beisan and another colonist was killed at Beit Alfa to the west. In the former case two men suspected of the attack were arrested, along with Farid Fakhr al-Din, a PAP man and YC member who was later thought to be a Haifa underground agent in Beisan, but no evidence was found so they were placed under bond. The Sakhina Arabs, a nearby Bedouin group, were implicated in the Beit Alfa incident but again no evidence was located. The most serious of these attacks occurred in March near Yavne'el, a settlement in the Tiberias region where two Jews were killed and another severely injured. Tracking dogs led police to two Bedouin encampments, those of the Dalayki and the 'Arab Nasr al-Din, and then to Tiberias itself. When searches turned up no proof of involvement, the police acted on the notion of collective guilt, banishing five Bedouin elders, arresting seven others under the Prevention of Crimes Ordinance, and assessing a collective fine in cattle and sheep.²²⁴ Employees of the Palestine Electric Company,

²²³ HC to Colonial Undersecretary (Parkinson), 30.3.37, PRO – FO 371/20806; Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat*, p. 56.

²²⁴ CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, appendix F, p. 6-7, PRO – CO 733/370/9.

owned by Pinhas Rutenberg, were also attacked in March in the Jordan valley.²²⁵ In all, the government recorded 39 attacks on Jewish colonies, which it deemed instances of terrorism, in the first three months of the year.²²⁶

Noting the uptick in violence and agrarian crime affecting the country at the time, the High Commissioner reported to London in late March on the reemergence of armed bands, which he described as small groupings of “bandits.”²²⁷ Several measures were taken to curb their activity. Since the police derived little cooperation from rural areas where the public was “in general sympathy” with the rebels, the Palestine government issued a new Defence regulation under the recently promulgated Palestine (Defence) Order-in-Council, 1937, allowing for the establishment of police billets at village expense – the punitive police posts of previous years – “in areas where the inhabitants had failed to render all the assistance in their power to the police or other authority for the purpose of suppressing disturbances.”²²⁸ By the end of 1937 such outposts had been erected in 80 villages, almost half of which were in the Jerusalem District and slightly fewer in the former Northern District, which was split in two (Galilee and Acre; Haifa and Samaria) mid-year.²²⁹ The HC directed the GOC to increase TJFF patrols in the principal areas of increased rebel activity, particularly in the

²²⁵ Note of an interview w/ Herbert Samuel, 7.4.37, PRO – CO 733/333/2.

²²⁶ *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 11. It is worth observing that the loaded term “terrorism” now so ubiquitously employed in describing violence or other forms of resistance by Palestinians was only rarely used during the revolt to describe Jewish violence against Arabs.

²²⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 27.3.37, CP 109 (37), PRO – FO 371/20805.

²²⁸ HC to Colonial Secretary, 27.3.37, CP 109 (37), PRO – FO 371/20805; *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 12. The 1937 Order-in-Council superseded the previous 1931 and 1936 Orders that had been in effect (*ibid.*), and rebranded provisions made thereunder (edicts, for all intents and purposes) as Defence regulations, in place of their former appellation as Emergency regulations. First quote from the first source, second from the latter.

²²⁹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 14. No statistics are available to show how many of these punitive posts were erected in the spring.

Beisan subdistrict around ‘Ein Herod, Beit Alfa, and among the Ghazawiyya Arabs and other Bedouin, and in the Galilee around the Kfar Tavor and Sajera colonies as well as Faradiya, Maghar, and Rameh villages. A looser chain of command and closer cooperation between local civil and military powers – on the model of 1936 – was also initiated, so that ADCs, in concert with local military commanders, could initiate action without reference to higher military or civilian officials. At the head of the effort to quell the unrest was Lewis Y. Andrews, a rising star of the Palestine administration, who was given charge of the Galilee.²³⁰

Andrews, an Australian who had served in Palestine during World War I and was fluent in Arabic, was a natural choice for the job.²³¹ Described as a “born administrator” by fellow ADC-Nablus Hugh Foot, Andrews “had friends in every village and knew more of what was going on below the surface in the political life of the country than any other official.”²³² He knew the tribes of the north well, was adept at putting pressure on them, and in several instances he aided the transfer of substantial areas of disputed lands from Arab to Jewish hands.²³³ Not surprisingly he developed a reputation as a pro-Zionist official among the Arabs, and was esteemed by some Zionists such as Yehoshu‘a Hankin, head of the PLDC land purchasing agency.²³⁴

²³⁰ HC to GOC, 5.3.37, enclosure to HC to Colonial Secretary, 19.4.37, PRO – CO 733/333/2.

²³¹ Foot, *A Start in Freedom*, p. 43; Arab Bureau information, 28.9.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

²³² Foot, *A Start in Freedom*, p. 43-44.

²³³ Arab Bureau information, 28.9.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. As noted in chapter 3, Andrews was involved in the transfer of the Huleh concession (about which see also Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 96). Around July 1937 he was instrumental in persuading Bedouin in the Beisan region to forfeit 8-10,000 dunams of land claimed by Zionists (HC to Colonial Undersecretary (Parkinson), 19.7.37, PRO – CO 733/332/11).

²³⁴ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 96.

Under Andrews's hand, the new countermeasures, along with expanded role accorded to Jewish supernumeraries noted above, temporarily curbed the bubbling rebel offensive against Jews.²³⁵ Attacks on Jewish colonies fell in the second quarter of 1937 by 60 percent.²³⁶ Though welcome news for the colonial state, HC Wauchope was not entirely sanguine, admitting that landlessness, unemployment, and hunger were so widespread as to render the future maintenance of "order" uncertain.²³⁷

Rebel forces and currents quickly adapted to the changed conditions. Their attacks on Jewish targets continued, but with the latter's defenses bolstered in the most active areas of rural unrest, insurgent forces turned their animus back on the apparatus of the colonial state. Attacks against the police and military grew from four in the first quarter of 1937 to 35 in the second, and in fact total assaults on Jewish and British targets rose after the government's stepped-up campaign of suppression in the north.²³⁸ The most remarkable incident came on 13 June in Jerusalem when an assassination attempt was made on R.G.B. Spicer, the Inspector General of Police. Three assailants in peasant attire shot up his car in broad daylight and escaped. The IG was unscathed, but went into retirement not long afterwards.²³⁹ Armored cars were sent into the streets, searches conducted, and at least one arrest made,²⁴⁰ but the CID and the JA came to differing conclusions about the real perpetrators. The JA's Arab Bureau, fed by their

²³⁵ HC to Colonial Secretary, 27.4.37, CP 127 (37), PRO – CO 733/332/11.

²³⁶ *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 11.

²³⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 8.4.37, extract, and HC to Colonial Secretary, 27.4.37, CP 127 (37), PRO – CO 733/332/11.

²³⁸ *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 11. There were at least 45 attacks on British, government, and Jewish targets in the first quarter and 54 in the second.

²³⁹ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 293.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

informant from Battir, believed the *majlisiyyin* were behind the plot, which was supposed to have killed both the IG and Amir ‘Abdullah, who was in Palestine at the time.²⁴¹ The CID later attributed the affair to the *Qassamiyun*.²⁴² Other attacks soon ensued, among them another attempt on the life of ADC Foot in Nablus in late June.²⁴³ By this point, a greater confrontation loomed.

The Peel Commission report and the recommendation to partition Palestine

As the weeks wore on in late spring the High Commissioner became convinced that HMG’s policy in Palestine was no longer sound. Faulting Zionist economic exclusivism as well as Palestinian nationalist sentiment for the predicament, he opined to the Colonial Undersecretary on 20 May that “racial feelings are now so high that to continue to carry out our present policy will soon prove impossible except by suppression of the Arabs and the maintenance of a large and permanent garrison.”²⁴⁴ Despite this, the highest civilian and military officials of the Palestine government informed authorities in London in June, even up to a fortnight before the Peel Commission report’s release, that they did not anticipate an immediate recrudescence of rebellion. This was the evaluation of both the High Commissioner and the GOC.²⁴⁵ Wauchope believed that the Arabs would be shocked by the Peel report, but misgauged the depth of public sentiment. GOC Dill overestimated the breadth of appeal of the pro-

²⁴¹ Arab Bureau information, 16.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

²⁴² CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, appendix F, p. 9, PRO – CO 733/370/9.

²⁴³ Arab Bureau information, 25.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. See also: Survey, 25.6.37-2.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

²⁴⁴ HC to Colonial Undersecretary (Parkinson), 20.5.37, CP 144 (37), PRO – CO 733/332/11.

²⁴⁵ GOC to HC, 14.6.37, and HC to Colonial Undersecretary (Parkinson), 15.6.37, CP 169 (37), PRO – CO 733/333/2; GOC to Chief of Imperial Staff, 29.6.37, CP 174 (37), PRO – FO 371/20808.

partition, pro-‘Abdullah constituency, believing it to represent the majority opinion. In keeping faith with his estimation that the mufti was the greatest potential spoiler among the Arabs, he suggested that any new uprising could be defanged by al-Hajj Amin’s “removal” from the scene.²⁴⁶ The Jewish Agency, which had been immersed in secret lobbying concerning the Royal Commission’s policy prescriptions, also failed to predict the scale of the backlash that partition would cause. Ever suspicious of the mufti, he was nonetheless judged in mid-June to be watching and waiting for the commission’s findings, and even to be acting as a restraint on violence. Only the Istiqlal was considered by the Arab Bureau to be pushing for armed struggle (via the *Qassamiyun*) and “riots.”²⁴⁷

The Palestine government took broad steps ahead of the Royal Commission report’s unveiling to preempt the possibility of another uprising. Recalling the pressure placed on Arab state employees during the strike and the ambivalent conduct of many in the police force, the administration prepared plans to replace Arabs in critical sectors of the state service (railroads, telegraph, and other posts) with Jews in the event they refused to carry out their duties.²⁴⁸ More overtly and in a clear show of force, the military undertook maneuvers in the vicinity of cities and population centers and reoccupied Palestinian schools and homes as bases.²⁴⁹ The government also lent priority to a program of surreptitiously buying arms from Arabs in the central hills and the north. This effort met with some success given the intensity of local poverty, until it was

²⁴⁶ GOC to Chief of Imperial Staff, 29.6.37, CP 174 (37), PRO – FO 371/20808.

²⁴⁷ Survey, 4.6.37-17.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

²⁴⁸ HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.6.37, PRO – FO 371/20811.

²⁴⁹ Arab Bureau information, 25.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22192; Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 5.6.37 [5.7.37], p. 5, CZA S/25 – 22039.

discerned that the buyers were working for the colonial state. Religious rulings were issued comparing selling weapons to the government with selling one's own body or selling women as chattel, but when these denunciations failed to stem the sales other steps were taken. Arab purchasers moved into the market, buying up arms. Meanwhile, the bands themselves assaulted and made examples of 'traitors' in Qalqilya and Tulkarm. Penitent local figures and shaykhs then offered public admissions of the error of their ways, foreswearing them in oaths taken on the Qur'an. The vigorous response of popular elements, which also included the press, had the desired effect and the government's initiative withered on the vine.²⁵⁰

Above all of these specific measures was the question of imposing martial law, which, after having been much debated and finally approved by the Cabinet in 1936, remained a constant and interminable subject of official discussion. By this point it was generally concluded that while for technical and practical reasons (greatly involved with the civil courts) no formal declaration was likely, the Order-in-Council afforded for the delegation of certain powers to the military, wider than those given them in 1936, which would be adequate for counterinsurgency purposes.²⁵¹

Arab activists and politicians also geared up for the report's issue, though internal divisions continued to overshadow them. Frustrated with the *majlisi* camp but seeing no alternative to working with it, the Istiqlal met the mufti in Gaza in early June to discuss the prospect of partition and the DP's estranged position within the

²⁵⁰ Ibid., both sources (Evaluation, p. 5-6).

²⁵¹ For instance, see Minute by Rendel, 19.10.37, commenting on Damascus (MacKereth) to FO, 17.10.37, and Minute by Rendel, 21.10.37, commenting on Note of discussion, Rumbold and R [Vansittart], 20.10.37, PRO – FO 371/20817.

movement. Together they decided that peaceful means of resisting partition and urging national consensus would be advanced if possible, but force would be employed if persuasion failed to secure the agreed aims.²⁵² Yet only days later ‘Awni Bey assailed the AHC for lassitude and inaction.²⁵³ The AHC had by the spring become a virtual preserve of the mufti and his backers.²⁵⁴ This development rendered it, in the High Commissioner’s estimation, almost defunct.²⁵⁵ The DP largely ceased to participate in it before its formal withdrawal from the organization in July. Bent on an autocratic path, the mufti continued to pay little mind to his critics, ignored calls for financial transparency, and arranged meetings with state officials and took decisions without consulting fellow committee members.²⁵⁶

Far from projecting his hegemony over society, the mufti’s power-grab alienated peasants as well as elites. This was poignantly illustrated at a popular celebration for former Jenin district officer ‘Izz al-Din al-Shawa, who was fired by the government for aiding the rebels in 1936. Local leaders and urban figures were notably absent from the event in Silat al-Dahr in early June, owing to villagers’ anger at being neglected after the strike. In contrast, al-Shawa was feted as a man of the people and a standard-bearer of rural interests. Attendees called for him to join the AHC as their representative and

²⁵² Arab Bureau information, 7.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

²⁵³ Arab Bureau information, 9.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

²⁵⁴ Evaluations of the situation among the Arabs, 26.4.37, p. 10, and 5.6.37 [5.7.37], p. 5, CZA S/25 – 22039.

²⁵⁵ HC to Colonial Secretary, 27.4.37, CP 127 (37), PRO – CO 733/332/11.

²⁵⁶ Evaluation of the situation among the Arabs, 5.6.37 [5.7.37], p. 5, CZA S/25 – 22039.

demanded new blood, closer to youth and the countryside, be seated on the committee.²⁵⁷

Beyond its importance as an index of the AHC's debilitated credibility, this episode suggests more broadly that a major fissure separated rural from urban populations, at least in some regions. This was irrespective of the reinvigorated investment of urban youth in working among and mobilizing villagers into unions, youth groups, and paramilitary circles, noted above, and was undoubtedly colored by the class antagonism of impoverished peasants towards the urban elite with which the cities in general were identified. Consequently, depictions of the peasantry at this time, or during the insurgency phase of the revolt from late 1937-39, as peons heeding the influence or propaganda of urban youth and politicians are mistaken, and erroneously substitute top-down and urban-centric understandings of Palestinian society for what were more complex realities.²⁵⁸ In short, the underlying socio-economic and socio-political tensions wracking the most divided urban and rural areas were at least as important in frustrating the coalescence of greater national unity as intra-elite disputes and factionalism.

²⁵⁷ Arab Bureau information, 9.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22192; Survey, 4.6.37-17.6.37, CZA S/25 – 22227. Swedenburg relates from his fieldwork researching the Great Revolt's place in Palestinian historical memory that the *majlisi* faction and the mufti were often treated as metonymns for the national struggle among former villagers, who at the same time attributed *effendis* as a corporate group with the ills of factional infighting (*Memories of Revolt*, p. 85). While this is undoubtedly so, it is also clear that neither the mufti nor the AHC were universally revered, and it is misleading to write off villager opposition to the *majlisi* camp's actions, as Swedenburg does, as merely the effect of Opposition-aligned clientage networks (ibid.). As his own work suggests, the broad peasant resistance to the monied interests of urban elite power – which transcended factions – was evident in the generalized critique of the *effendiyya*. Setting aside the curious and perhaps *post facto* exemption given to the *majlisis* by his interviewees, it is this oversimplified view of a world split between churlish (and well-to-do) urban *effendis* and the villagers that continued to thwart *majlisi* and elite claims to leadership among the rural majority.

²⁵⁸ E.g. Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*.

The release of the Royal Commission report, together with an official Statement of Policy, on 7 July 1937 did much, paradoxically, to reunify Palestinian politics. Based on the most comprehensive examination of the situation in Palestine conducted until that time, the Peel Commission heaped praise on the *yishuv* and accepted the Jewish Agency's contentions that Zionist colonialism was of great benefit to the Arabs. Discounting Arab witnesses such as George Mansur, the report stunningly concluded that: "The economic position of the Arabs, as regarded as a whole, has not so far been prejudiced by the establishment of the National Home."²⁵⁹ This held for the peasantry as well as for the elites, as it fancifully posited that "the *fellaheen* are on the whole better off than they were in 1920."²⁶⁰ In classical Orientalist style it juxtaposed the modern Jewish colonial enterprise and its "most remarkable" cultural and economic achievements with the supposed backwardness of the predominantly rural Arab population, of whom it perceived "the great majority [were] still wedded to their old primitive ways."²⁶¹ Nonetheless, the commissioners recognized that the Palestinian national movement was not the mere conjuries of malicious agitators, as was alleged by the JA. Moreover, their report validated the Arabs' longstanding rejection of the dual obligation rubric for British rule, finding that "the existence of the [Jewish] National Home, whatever its size, bars the way to the attainment by the Arabs of Palestine of the same national status as that attained, or soon to be attained, by all the other Arabs of

²⁵⁹ Peel Commission report, p. 129-130, quote on 130. On the *yishuv*, see p. 113-124.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 125, 128.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 113-124 (especially 116-17 on the *yishuv*'s cultural attainments), 127.

Asia.”²⁶² The Mandate as it was constituted was thus unworkable, and the report held out little hope of reconciling rival Arab and Jewish national aspirations in Palestine.²⁶³

As is well known, the principal recommendation of the Peel Commission was for Palestine’s partition into a Jewish state and an Arab entity (misleadingly labeled a state) to be attached to Transjordan, with the British retaining a Mandatory enclave in Jerusalem and, temporarily, over other areas of strategic importance.²⁶⁴ The Jewish state was to be erected in a narrow strip along the length of the coastal plain from Be’er Tuvia south of Jaffa northwards, widening in the north to encompass much of the subdistricts of Nazareth and Beisan and the entirety of the Galilee. It would be established on 5 million dunams, versus the approximately 1.375 million dunams in Jewish hands by the close of 1937, thereby nearly quadrupling the holdings that the Zionist movement had amassed over 55 years of activity.²⁶⁵ Although the projected state was allotted around 15 percent of the country’s territory, the coastal plain and the Galilee held its richest, most fecund lands, where even years later in 1945 Jewish ownership largely paled in comparison with that of the Arabs.²⁶⁶ Perhaps the gravest blow delivered to the Arabs

²⁶² Ibid., p. 144, 146; Official communiqué 10/37, 7.7.37, reprinted in *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 38 [hereafter Official communiqué 10/37].

²⁶³ It is perhaps worth highlighting that the Peel Commission did not judge the Mandate’s competing commitments to be irreconcilable based on the oft-made Palestinian argument that their “rights and position” in the country (safeguarded under article 6 of the Mandate covenant) were being damaged economically, but that their respective drives for national sovereignty, implicitly and explicitly predicated on majoritarian logics, were mutually exclusive.

²⁶⁴ On the territory to be retained under Mandate, see Official communiqué 10/37, p. 39.

²⁶⁵ Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 88; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 82.

²⁶⁶ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 228; Farsoun and Aruri, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, p. 70. Of the northern subdistricts, Jewish landownership in 1945 ranged from 3 percent in the Acre region, to 18 percent in that of Safad, 28 percent in Nazareth, 34 percent in Beisan, 35 percent in Haifa, and topped off at 38 percent in Tiberias subdistrict. The same year in Tulkarm (the only coastal subdistrict lying between those of Haifa and Jaffa) their ownership reached 17 percent. Arab formal ownership ranged from 42 and 44 percent in Haifa and Beisan subdistricts upwards to 87 percent in the Acre region; in the Tulkarm subdistrict, which had been a priority zone for Jewish acquisitions for years, it

under the partition scheme was, however, its call for ‘population exchange,’ by which was chiefly meant the evacuation of 250-300,000 Arabs from the regions allotted to the Jewish state.²⁶⁷ According to Nur Masalha, this plank of the partition scheme, seen by Ben-Gurion, Weizmann, and Moshe Shertok as crucial to the plan’s successful implementation, was the fruit of an effective, quiet lobbying campaign spearheaded by Ben-Gurion.²⁶⁸ The Arabs of the Galilee and the coastal areas were expected to vacate their orchards and fields and, if possible, resettle in the arid desert and semi-desert regions of Beersheba, the Jordan valley, and Transjordan.²⁶⁹ For the Arabs, the Peel Commission argued, the scheme offered the benefits of “finally [being] delivered from the fear of being ‘swamped’ by the Jews and from the possibility of ultimate subjection to Jewish rule.”²⁷⁰

The brief Statement of Policy issued alongside the summary of the Royal Commission’s conclusions accepted the latter’s general formulation and the recommendation for partition, thereby heralding the death of the dual obligation doctrine. It did not endorse the specific parameters of partition proposed by the commission, favoring the policy’s prior approval by the League of Nations. It also warned directly that “serious disorders” in the interim would be met with a delegation of

stood at 78 percent. Arab figures here do not include remaining *miri* parcels, which were also in Arab possession, though claimed by the state as public domains. All figures from Farsoun and Aruri.

²⁶⁷ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 159; Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 68.

²⁶⁸ *Expulsion*, p. 56-57, 60-62, 66-67.

²⁶⁹ Official communiqué 10/37, p. 40.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

powers to the military (short of martial law), much as threatened in September and October 1936.²⁷¹

The terms of the partition plan came as a great shock to the Arabs. Far from the “surgical operation” the Peel Commission purported it to be, the proposal aroused deep indignation even in quarters friendly to the British, and did much to reignite the revolt.²⁷² Surprisingly, its scheme subsumed areas inhabited by prominent Opposition leaders within the boundaries of the projected Jewish state. Party leaders whose faction had publicly endorsed partition months earlier and welcomed Amir ‘Abdullah as their future king were repaid, as it were, with an evacuation order. This tactical error – displaying a singular lack of judgment on the part of the commissioners – held profound ramifications and drove the Opposition to reject the partition scheme and to distance itself from Amir ‘Abdullah, who all too eagerly accepted it.²⁷³ Shaykh As‘ad al-Shuqayri of Acre and ‘Umar al-Bitar of Jaffa, esteemed leaders of the *mu‘arada*, were among the first to denounce the plan, which the AHC summarily dismissed on 8 July.²⁷⁴ Sensing an opportunity to repair the factional schism that had grown in the spring, the AHC invited the DP to rejoin its ranks. Though the DP refused the entreaties, Raghib Bey al-Nashashibi offered to collaborate with it on central issues affecting the nation,

²⁷¹ Official communiqué 11/37, 7.7.37, reprinted in *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 41.

²⁷² Peel Commission report, p. 368.

²⁷³ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 440; Wilson, *King Abdullah*, p. 123. ‘Abdullah ineptly tried to strike a bargain with the mufti by offering him the premiership in Greater Transjordan, but was rebuffed (Wilson, p. 123).

²⁷⁴ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 160; AHC communiqué on the Royal Commission’s partition scheme, 8.7.37, in *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p. 600.

and his party issued what some have regarded as a more forthright rejection of partition than that of the AHC.²⁷⁵

A wave of condemnation quickly spread throughout the country. The reaction in the Galilee was pungent, as British officials recorded: “Christians, Moslems, Fellahin and landowners are probably more united in their rejection of the proposal than they have ever been before. Their common feeling in this district is that they have been betrayed and that they will be forced to leave their lands and perish in some unknown desert.”²⁷⁶ Sentiment elsewhere was in general agreement.²⁷⁷ Many ‘*ulama* quickly declared that support for partition was heresy²⁷⁸ and even moderate Christians who had not previously opposed the government found cause to do so in the new policy.²⁷⁹ *Al-Liwa* reiterated the *majlisi* view that backing partition was treasonous, and the *majlisis* seized on the fiery leanings of the ‘*ulama* to broadcast a *fatwa* which asserted that any Muslim lending their voice to partition was a *kafir* (infidel).²⁸⁰ Both the HC and the

²⁷⁵ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 160; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 81. Accounts differ on the Opposition’s rejection of the partition plan. While most see the inclusion of the Galilee and other regions in the Jewish state as its cause, Zionist intelligence reported that “frenzied youth” pushed the party’s leaders to denounce the scheme (Arab Bureau information, 15.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22192). Others, including Husayn Fakhri Khalidi and the RAF, held that the Opposition was compelled by the threats made against them (al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 364; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 22.7.37, resume of operations (June), PRO – Air 5/1247). The failure of reconciliation between the DP and the AHC appears to rest at least equally with the mufti, who reportedly rejected modest terms offered by the DP for the committee’s reunification, including provision for consulting members before taking decisions and for rotating chairmanship of the organization’s meetings (Arab Bureau information, 19.7.37 and 21.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22192).

²⁷⁶ Quoted in Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 208.

²⁷⁷ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 207; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement* p. 228. For a sampling, see the enclosures to HC to Colonial Secretary, 23.8.37, PRO – FO 371/20817.

²⁷⁸ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 122. See also the description of an event at Isdud at which villagers took a militant oath against partition, land sales, and cooperation with the government (p. 123).

²⁷⁹ Survey, 16.7.37-22.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

²⁸⁰ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 122; Arab Bureau information, 15.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

AHC were bombarded by protest statements pledging to resist partition by force.²⁸¹ To this end, functionaries of the Society to Promote Virtue and Prohibit Vice urged peasants to arm themselves and worked alongside village scouts to unify public opinion against the Peel Commission plan.²⁸² The NCs were reformed and expanded, and for the first time (some) urban committees included sizeable rural memberships or majorities.²⁸³

Amidst the outpouring, internal recriminations flowed. The announcement of the Royal Commission plan led not only to condemnations of British policy, but of the AHC and the Arab heads of state for bringing on “the disaster” of partition and for having brought the 1936 uprising to a (false) close.²⁸⁴ Akram Zu‘aytir, likely articulating the thoughts of other radical youth, believed that the AHC’s immediate public statements on 8 and 9 July were watery because they continued to look to the Arab kings and princes while omitting any explicit call for resistance.²⁸⁵ The *majlisi* camp predictably looked elsewhere for blame and, not without cause, settled on the DP. Years later ‘Izzat Darwaza wrote in a private letter that he saw the DP’s withdrawal from the AHC as providing the British with a pretext to back the former as “moderates” (*mu‘tadilin*) while disregarding the AHC as “extremists.”²⁸⁶ Given its public association with partition, the DP’s position in the aftermath of the official announcement was nothing short of calamitous. Death threats were again made against Opposition politicians – which may

²⁸¹ Arab Bureau information, 15.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

²⁸² Arab Bureau information, 19.7.37 and 21.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

²⁸³ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 208.

²⁸⁴ Al-Shuqayri, *Arba‘un ‘aman*, p. 170.

²⁸⁵ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 299-300.

²⁸⁶ Quoted in al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu‘assasat*, p. 364-65. After the rebellion had been rejoined, *Filastin* pointedly rebutted this labeling of Palestinian nationalists, saying that as regards partition and the national demands, no such internal division existed (Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 190).

well have emanated from outside the *majlisi* faction as well – and a renewed campaign of political assassination, much as had occurred in June, soon followed.²⁸⁷

Caught off guard by the vehemence and breadth of the new policy's rejection by the Arabs, the government struggled to find its feet. The GOC proposed paying Raghīb Nashashibi a £P 10,000 bribe to bring him back into alignment on partition, which he and Ya'qub Farraj had continued in private to accept in principle after 7 July, but Raghīb Bey in particular was not seen as courageous or reliable enough.²⁸⁸ With little potential seen in the Opposition, the authorities in London and the Palestine administration agreed that the time had come to take drastic measures against the mufti. Action on this front had long been contemplated and debated between Jerusalem and London.²⁸⁹ Though al-Hajj Amin was cooperative throughout much of the first half of 1937, and sometimes played his old role as an aid to government and conciliator of radical Arab tendencies, the colonial state and the government in London believed after the issue of the Peel Commission report that the cause of order would benefit from his exile.²⁹⁰ This decision did not owe to any "proof of undesirable activities," as HC Wauchope admitted. In fact at the time both Raghīb al-Nashashibi and David Ben-Gurion had more robustly denounced the partition plan than the mufti. Nonetheless, a message the latter sent abroad calling for Arab aid in the fight against "Imperialism and Jewish colonization and

²⁸⁷ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 229.

²⁸⁸ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 444, fn. 98; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 229; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 82.

²⁸⁹ For instance, in late 1936 the High Commissioner had considered plans to diminish the powers of the SMC and thereby rein in the mufti, but the idea was set aside owing to legal complications (Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 422).

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

partition” was seized on as a pretext for his arrest.²⁹¹ The effort to nab the mufti at the AHC’s headquarters in Jerusalem on 17 July was botched and he appears to have been tipped off; hurriedly he took sanctuary inside the *al-Haram al-sharif* compound, where he correctly surmised the authorities would be unwilling to stage a major police raid.²⁹² Though the High Commissioner presented options through which to pursue his arrest, the Cabinet stayed his hand, preferring to wait for an opportune and less embarrassing moment.²⁹³ The *Haram* was put under “a kind of siege,” with police posted in the vicinity equipped with orders to arrest the mufti on sight, but the latter exploited the situation to the fullest, conducting his affairs from within the protected confines of the compound, without much hindrance, for several months.²⁹⁴

The colonial authorities’ bid to stifle the popular ferment extended beyond the mufti, but here too its efforts misfired. On 26 July the Palestine administration issued a draconian Defence regulation banning the right of private assembly without a permit. All meetings and gatherings, whether private or public, were placed under the control of district police chiefs.²⁹⁵ Perhaps more so than the attempted arrest of the mufti, this regulation illustrated the state’s scramble to regain the initiative, yet its sweeping scope was matched by the government’s hopeless inability to enforce the measure.

While colonial officials spun their wheels, HMG had already chanced upon the greatest brake on Arab activism. Its decision to submit the Royal Commission’s

²⁹¹ Ibid., ft. 99.

²⁹² Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 181; Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 445; Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 82.

²⁹³ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 445-46.

²⁹⁴ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 181-82; Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 251. Quote from Nafi.

²⁹⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 13. Rather unusually, this alarming order elicited almost no reaction from London. The Foreign Office, for instance, noted its promulgation with nary a comment (PRO – FO 371/20813).

conclusions to the League of Nations, rather than move directly to implement them, played right into the diplomatic aspirations of the Arab political class. In spite of both the popular uproar over partition and the colonial authorities' preemptive moves to clamp down on Palestinian political life, Arab elites seized on upcoming hearings before the Permanent Mandates' Commission, ultimately terminating in September, in a last-ditch effort to avert a new uprising. While preparations for a potential return to arms were ratcheted up, the majority of active elites devoted their energies to diplomacy.

From the outset, the AHC toed a cautious, if not entirely docile, line. In a meeting on 8 July with the High Commissioner, Arab leaders pledged to control the community's "hotheads," while impressing on Wauchope that this was no easy task in light of the despair and desperation afflicting it.²⁹⁶ Its first communiqué, the same day, closed with a plea to maintain order while "preserv[ing]... every confidence in victory in the end."²⁹⁷ When grassroots pressure emerged for action against the government, the AHC deflected it on account of the League of Nations hearings.²⁹⁸ Its public political line and approach to the partition crisis remained staid but firm. In its long-form rebuttal of the Royal Commission recommendations, delivered in a memorandum on 23 July, the AHC refrained, as al-Hut points out, from directly criticizing the proposal to unite fragments of Palestine with Transjordan under the Hashemite crown.²⁹⁹ Though it did take great exception to the proposal to eject, or in the parlance of its Zionist architects, to 'transfer,' Palestinians from the areas allotted to the Jewish state, believing that a grim

²⁹⁶ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 437, quoting Taggar.

²⁹⁷ AHC communiqué on the partition scheme, 8.7.37, in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 600.

²⁹⁸ Arab Bureau information, 19.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

²⁹⁹ *Al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 363. The memorandum is available in English in PRO – FO 371/20810, and in Arabic as an appendix to al-Hut, p. 753-760.

and bloody conflict would follow any such effort, it continued to uphold the position that it staked out during the Peel Commission hearings calling for independence under a treaty of friendship with Great Britain.³⁰⁰

Hoping to bar the League of Nations from consenting to partition, the AHC nominated a delegation in late July consisting of ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi, Jamal al-Husayni, Dr. ‘Izzat Tannus, and the Lebanese Arab nationalist and Syrian revolt veteran, ‘Adil Arslan, to represent the Palestinians at Geneva.³⁰¹ They would not make their case alone. On 9 July, two days after the unveiling of the partition scheme, the AHC issued a plaintive call to the Arab heads of state for Arab and Muslim solidarity.³⁰² One by one the Arab states came out against partition, with only Egypt’s Wafdist government (though not the country’s intellectuals or popular constituencies) failing to publicly censure it – excepting of course Transjordan.³⁰³

More remarkably, the AHC embarked on secret negotiations with Jewish leaders. According to Yahoyada Haim, the period after the Peel Commission witnessed the most intensive contacts ever between representatives of the two communities.³⁰⁴ In the most notable parley, Jamal al-Husayni, close ally of the mufti, conducted discussions in London with former Palestine Attorney General and *bete noir* of the national movement, Norman Bentwich, in July. Jamal Effendi was reported to offer unprecedented concessions, including recognition that Jews had as much right to be in Palestine as

³⁰⁰ AHC memo on RC report and 7 July Statement of Policy. 23.7.37, p. 9-10, 20, PRO – FO 371/20810.

³⁰¹ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 307.

³⁰² AHC telegram to the Arab kings and princes, published in *Filastin* on 9.7.37, in *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p. 601.

³⁰³ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 230-31.

³⁰⁴ *Abandonment*, p. 100.

Arabs, approval of their “moral right” to immigrate to Palestine, and approval of unspecified but limited immigration.³⁰⁵ Beginning in June, the talks, some of which went on in Geneva, lasted into August and involved all of the members of the AHC’s delegation to the League of Nations.³⁰⁶ Another, more abortive effort was initiated, again supposedly with the mufti’s blessing, by Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim with Haim Kalvarisky, but was terminated after their first meeting.³⁰⁷ The London-Geneva talks fell far short of Zionist demands, which rejected any cap on immigration lower than 60,000 a year (the 1935 peak).³⁰⁸ Moreover, the sudden Arab interest in bilateral talks was thought to be little more than a ruse through which an Arab-Jewish understanding, or its prospect, could be used by the Palestinians to undercut or vitiate partition.³⁰⁹ Nonetheless, as Michael J. Cohen suggests, the London talks revealed that a representative of the AHC, and a key *majlisi* leader at that, was prepared to go to great lengths, and to contradict the nationalist doxa and platform of the Palestinian national movement, for the sake of arriving at an interim accord.³¹⁰

³⁰⁵ Michael J. Cohen, “Secret Diplomacy and Arab Rebellion in Palestine, 1936-1939,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* v. 8, n. 3 (July 1977), p. 390.

³⁰⁶ Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 101. These talks followed prior meetings held in the U.S., the U.K., and Geneva with a different group of Arabs: the Lebanese writer Amin al-Rihani, Ibrahim Shatara, president of the Arab National League in the United States, and Dr. Tannus, the only overlapping member. Judah Magnes, president of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, was instrumental in their proceedings.

³⁰⁷ Cohen, “Secret Diplomacy,” p. 391-92.

³⁰⁸ This line was the result of discussions in 1936 during the strike involving Musa al-‘Alami. See *ibid.*, p. 385-87.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 391. Cohen even deems Jamal Effendi “the first active Arab politician with influence to voice willingness to come to terms with the Jews.” His reading of specific proposals on immigration made by different Arab parties in separate negotiating bids as demonstrating the insincerity of “the Arabs” (p. 390-91) is, it should be noted, greatly erroneous, since it presumes that the different negotiators were somehow working in concert with one another, when this is not what his discussion demonstrates. Abetting this pseudo-conspiratorial view is an underlying tendency in the article, and elsewhere in M.J. Cohen’s works, to present “the Arabs” as a monolithic and undifferentiated group, rather than as a complex set of actors embodying a variety of political and ideological tendencies (i.e. just as was the case for “the Zionists”).

Escalating tensions, political assassination, and the drift towards conflict

After receipt of the recommendation for partition the politicians' turn to diplomacy represented a race against time. The intermittent violence of the first half of the year was largely out of their control, much as it had been during the 1936 rising.³¹¹ As attacks against the police, the military and Jewish settlements continued in the third quarter of the year, the Arab political class remained divided over the prospect of a new uprising.³¹² The *majlisi* faction generally adhered to its June agreement with the Istiqlal and supported a new revolt if partition was approved by the League of Nations.³¹³ On the other side of the fence, the Opposition, disorganized as it was, steadfastly rejected a return to hostilities, warning of the dangers that military rule would bring.³¹⁴ Although youth were hardly of uniform opinion on the issue, at least one JA report considered them to be a hardline constituency which rejected the idea that an Arab-Jewish understanding could preempt partition and believed instead that arms alone would bring about its demise.³¹⁵

There is some indication that sections of the peasantry were little disposed towards another costly insurgency.³¹⁶ Perhaps with this in mind, the Istiqlal and the

³¹¹ The only potential exceptions to this rule were those Istiqlalists and NC members who were part of the Haifa underground.

³¹² Paradoxically the third quarter featured fewer Arab assaults on British and Jewish targets than those of the first half of the year (*Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 11), yet owing to the growth of lethal Arab-Jewish tit-for-tat violence and its concentration in Jerusalem after the partition recommendation events took a different course than they had earlier in the year in the north.

³¹³ Arab Bureau information, 21.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

³¹⁴ Ibid.; Survey, 16.7.37-22.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

³¹⁵ Arab Bureau information, 2.8.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

³¹⁶ Survey, 16.7.37-22.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22437. One early Zionist intelligence report specified that it was peasants in the Jerusalem and Ramallah areas which were not keen on a potential revolt (Arab Bureau intelligence, 19.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22192), but subsequent information collected by the Arab Bureau also pointed to reluctance in the north around Haifa (Survey, 12.9.37-16.9.37, CZA S/25 – 22227).

majlisis focused their preparations in July abroad, and on Syria in particular. This decision likely had much to do with widening the conflict with and its cost to Britain in the event of renewed hostilities, and Syria especially provided a friendly environment (through the National Bloc-led civil government) and proximate location from which to organize a campaign. Mu‘in al-Madi became the AHC’s “ambassador” in the Arab world and worked to assemble foreign fighters in both Syria and Iraq. In Syria he was assisted by Wasif Kamal, the local Palestine Defense Committee (headed by Nabih al-‘Azme), and Muhammad al-Ashmar.³¹⁷ In Baghdad al-Madi set up an office to register volunteers, and early reports received by the JA were that foreign recruiting was going well.³¹⁸

As external preparations moved into a higher gear, the offensive against the DP that had opened in June grew more lethal and was paralleled by assassinations of *simsars*, Arab police, and others deemed to be collaborators. Opposition leaders quickly hired bodyguards for their homes and persons, but this proved of little solace.³¹⁹ On 19 and 20 July well-known land dealers from the al-Qasim and al-Shanti families were slain in Haifa and Jaffa.³²⁰ An attempt on the life of Isma‘il Najjar, *mukhtar* of Lifta and Opposition member, enraged the *mu‘arada* at the end of the month, but the party did little about it and some of its leading members soon fled abroad.³²¹ In August two Arab

³¹⁷ Arab Bureau information, 21.7.37 and 27.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad and Salim ‘Abd al-Rahman were also later alleged to be involved in organizing Syrian volunteers (Arab Bureau information, 19.8.37, CZA S/25 – 22192).

³¹⁸ Survey, 16.7.37-22.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22437; Arab Bureau information, 3.8.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

³¹⁹ Arab Bureau information, 15.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22192; Survey, 16.7.37-22.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

³²⁰ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 123.

³²¹ Ibid.; Arab Bureau information, 2.8.37 and 12.8.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

police officers and the *mukhtar* of Bir Zayt village were killed.³²² The same month Hasan Hanun from Tulkarm, a *simsar* and Opposition figure, was killed on a day that he was scheduled to close another sale to Jews.³²³ September opened with the high profile murder of Ibrahim Bey al-Khalil, the head of the Muslim Association of Haifa who was known and distrusted by nationalist youth for his contacts among Jews.³²⁴ His assassination was attributed by the CID to the Haifa underground, and specifically to Ahmad Muhammad al-Sa‘di working with the assistance of shaykh Yusuf Abu Durra.³²⁵ ‘Abd al-Salam al-Burqawi of the Jenin NC, who had helped initiate the Opposition call for greater financial transparency within the national movement, was killed mid-month.³²⁶ These two assassinations had a disastrous effect on already sagging Opposition morale; Hasan Shukri and Sulayman Tuqan bolted from the country.³²⁷ Other attacks in September included the slaying of an Arab policeman at Acre and an Arab with ties to Jewish businesses at Safad, while a magistrate from Beisan had his car sprayed with bullets.³²⁸ Although the mufti has generally been credited for the murderous campaign that enveloped his Palestinian rivals between 1937-39, a more

³²² *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 7. Working from CID’s catalogue of known Jewish attacks and reprisals against Arabs in its spring 1938 report (CID, *Terrorism: 1936-37*, appendix B, p. 1-2, PRO – CO 733/370/9), it appears that these murders were part of the ongoing wave of attacks by Arabs on those accused of collaboration.

³²³ Arab Bureau information, 21.8.37, CZA S/25 – 22192; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 123. His brother, another land dealer, was also injured. According to Cohen, ‘Ali al-Qasim was suspected of perpetrating this attack.

³²⁴ CID, *Terrorism: 1936-37*, appendix F, p. 9, PRO – CO 733/370/9; Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 230.

³²⁵ Memorandum, n.d., p. 8, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c. In an illustration of police ineptitude (or penetration by the rebels), Abu Durra was apprehended shortly afterwards, but was quickly released from custody. Seikaly notes that the mufti also had an axe to grind with Ibrahim Bey concerning the Istiqlal *waqf* in his home city (p. 212, ft. 43).

³²⁶ Zionist sources trace the killing to the mufti (Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 124), but the police determined that the Haifa underground was responsible (Memorandum, n.d., p. 10, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c).

³²⁷ Arab Bureau information, 21.9.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

³²⁸ CID, *Terrorism: 1936-37*, appendix D, p. 11-12, PRO – CO 733/370/9.

diverse set of antagonists was at work during the summer of 1937, punishing collaborators and harshly policing national conduct.

Besides sparking collaborator killings, the Royal Commission report also brought on cross-communal strife and heightened local organizing for rebellion. After three Arabs were killed in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa, and Arab bands attacked Public Works Department encampments and government transport in late July, the government issued the aforementioned regulation empowering police to disallow any private meeting or public gathering.³²⁹ Sniping at Jewish colonies increased in August, and violence escalated to kill or injure an estimated 20 people, Arabs and Jews, in incidents in the second half of August and early September.³³⁰ As Abu Gharbiya emphasizes, rebel actions in July and August did not derive from orders given by the mufti camp, which intended any return to revolt to be launched with a concerted, spectacular series of attacks.³³¹ The state responded to the worsening situation by initiating a new arrest wave targeting Arabs. Some 400 or more were picked up without charge or evidence under regulations permitting administrative detention and sent to the al-Mazra'a prison camp north of Acre.³³² The AHC issued a statement at the end of August dissociating itself from the ongoing violence and reiterating its call to the public to maintain order, but the

³²⁹ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 307.

³³⁰ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 182, *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 7-8. Darwaza places the spiraling rounds of bloodletting to the last two weeks of August, but the CID's registers of events include a number of serious attacks in the first days of September (CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, appendix B, p. 1-2 and appendix D, p. 10, PRO – CO 733/370/9).

³³¹ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 98.

³³² Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 182. 'Awni Bey had feared a similar scenario right when the Peel Commission findings were unveiled, worrying that a decapitating arrest sweep could leave youth leaderless (Zaslani to Shertok, 7.7.37, CZA S/25 – 22552). The rebel movement was, however, both too widespread and too acephalous for such a tactic, as it had been in 1936.

OAG doubted that the AHC could restrain the militant Arab elements.³³³ Facing criticism in London, Colonial Secretary Ormsby-Gore redoubled his call for the mufti's head and for the suppression of "his gang," privately holding al-Hajj Amin responsible for post-Peel violence.³³⁴

By this point some hands did reconsider the lurch towards rebellion. Influenced by the secret talks with Jewish leaders at Geneva and elsewhere, a wing within the AHC had come to believe that an Arab-Jewish understanding offered the greatest potential of staving off partition.³³⁵ Opposing this view was an array of forces and factors and a gathering sense of momentum. The NCs of Jerusalem and Jaffa and activists and politicians in Acre adopted the PAP's position backing a new rebellion if the League of Nations approved the Royal Commission's recommendations.³³⁶ Nablus again became an epicenter of rebel organization, with meetings conducted by radicals, villagers, and former fighters in Maythalun and elsewhere.³³⁷ Weapons were being smuggled into Palestine in large quantities from Syria.³³⁸ The prisoners at Acre were included in planning and were consulted on at least a weekly basis by activists.³³⁹

³³³ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 11.9.37, and AHC communiqué, 31.8.37 (as enclosure), PRO – CO 733/341/20. He said the same for the JA, believing that official Jewish protestations and statements against retaliation and offensive attacks were also not liable to sway militant Zionist forces.

³³⁴ Quoted in Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 452-53. The JA also bayed for the mufti's capture and exile (OAG to Colonial Secretary, 22.9.37, and Joseph to Weizmann, 22.9.37 (forwarded to Deputy Colonial Undersecretary Shuckburgh), PRO – CO 733/332/11).

³³⁵ Survey, 13.8.37-19.8.37, CZA S/25 – 22227. It is possibly for this reason that Darwaza devotes a significant amount of attention to the ZO's discussions on partition at Zurich at its annual conference and to the marginal position of the Magnes group there (*Hawla al-haraka*, p. 177-80, especially 179-80).

³³⁶ Survey, 13.8.37-19.8.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

³³⁷ Arab Bureau information, 19.8.37, 25.8.37, and 3.9.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

³³⁸ Arab Bureau information, 19.8.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

³³⁹ Arab Bureau information, 30.8.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

Even in the churning environment of late summer and early autumn the elite and middle class nationalists who foremost claimed the leadership of the movement continued to extend an olive branch to the British empire. Their final invitation to the colonial power to avert a full resumption of conflict took the form of a conference held at the summer resort town of Bludan in Syria on 8-9 September 1937. Initiated by Nabih al-‘Azmeḥ in an effort to produce greater pan-Arab support and unity on the Palestine issue, the confabulation drew some 450 people, including Arab ex-officials, such as Naji al-Suwaydi, the former Iraqi Prime Minister who was elected president of the proceedings, and M.A. ‘Alluba Pasha of Egypt, former Minister of Culture and Education, but no state delegations. It was the largest single gathering of the Palestinian political class to date (with 124 representatives present) and was attended almost exclusively by an extended roster of landowners, lawyers, merchants, and, to a lesser extent, teachers. Inadvertently, it also became the final forum in which the Opposition commingled with the AHC and the *majlisiyyin*. Showing deference to the Palestinians themselves, the conference’s resolutions echoed the positions of the AHC’s representatives before the Peel Commission, adding that Palestine was “an indivisible part of the Arab nation” and envisioning constitutionally-guaranteed equal rights for Jewish citizens in an independent Palestine.³⁴⁰ Although al-Suwaydi declared to the conference that Britain must choose between alliance with Zionism and alliance with the Arabs, the British consul in Damascus, Gilbert MacKereth, reported that “contrary to expectation [the] general tone [of the congress] was not anti-British – although

³⁴⁰ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 366-67. On the Palestinian attendees and their social and political background, see p. 894-96.

vehemently anti-Zionist.”³⁴¹ The Foreign Office staff agreed, with one minute observing that the final resolutions were “Remarkably moderate.”³⁴² In evaluating the conference, and with the benefit of hindsight, al-Hut compared it unfavorably to the Zionist Organization’s convention in Zurich, pointedly declaiming the lack of an executive apparatus and hence of any practical action to advance the Bludan platform.³⁴³ Some youth elements, including a clutch of Palestinians, dissatisfied with what they saw as the tepidness evinced at Bludan, convened a smaller gathering afterwards, yet it restricted itself to promoting attacks on Jews and on Arabs cooperating with the British.³⁴⁴

The British government made no reply to the Bludan conference. Within a week, the Palestine administration attempted to pivot away from the overriding political issues of the day. In its final bid for grace from the underclasses, it announced the write-down of seed, fodder, and earthquake relief loans totaling £P 136,875.³⁴⁵ The motion had little if any effect. If Nablus is any indicator of things, the public had much more to worry about in the dearth of available credit, since local merchants weren’t offering the customary advances on the coming harvest. No wonder then that the unemployed rabble of peasants, youth, and workers in the city’s vicinity were reported by one JA informant to be restive and itching for the opportunity to plunder their class superiors.³⁴⁶ When the PMC of the League of Nations approved partition – in principle – the same month,³⁴⁷

³⁴¹ Ibid., p. 367; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 209. Quote from Kayyali.

³⁴² Minute on Damascus (MacKereth) to FO, 11.9.37, PRO – FO 371/20813.

³⁴³ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 368-69.

³⁴⁴ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 209.

³⁴⁵ Official communiqué 15/37, 15.9.37, ISA (2) 567-1m.

³⁴⁶ Arab Bureau information, 31.8.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. Complacently, this report neglected to note that the *yishuv* and the British authorities would be front and center as objects of popular wrath.

³⁴⁷ Cohen, “Secret Diplomacy,” p. 392.

the conditions were in place for the most complex and extensive Arab uprising in the history of the Palestine Mandate.

Conclusion: the consequences of partition

The year-long interlude that followed the 1936 strike was marked by a diminution of popular forces' self-organization and political power and by a bifurcation in the domain of Arab politics. Having retaken the reins at the end of the strike, elites repositioned themselves as leaders of the national movement, swinging the balance of power vis-à-vis popular forces temporarily back in their favor and onto their turf. The return of elites to their focus on the arts of diplomacy split the political field more clearly than during 1936, when the revolt had subordinated the basis for diplomacy in the service of national demands. During the Peel Commission interregnum elite diplomatic initiatives and engagements – testifying before the Royal Commission, negotiating and cooperating with the colonial state, lobbying in London, and the politicking vis-à-vis Amir ‘Abdullah – did not derive from popular politics and activism. Horizontal constituencies were still integral to the factions' pursuit of power and hegemony, but the latter had resumed enough strength to resurrect their former *modus operandi*. This was a shared vocation, irrespective of political leanings, and even included Istiqlalist politicians like ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi.

The relief brought on by reprising their customary role as the Arab spokesmen and diplomats for Palestine soon dissipated as elite politics hit a new nadir. The fleeting show of unity attained in 1936 with the formation of the AHC was replaced by a climate

of intemperate and vicious internecine competition. As Salim Tamari has argued, this swing away from greater cooperation (strained as it was) back to the primacy of family and faction describes a pattern witnessed throughout the Mandate wherein popular effusions periodically displaced factionalism from its dogged grip on (elite) politics, but only temporarily, with the weakening of popular activism followed by the recrudescence of factionalism.³⁴⁸ In this case the post-strike resurgence of factional animosities was also unique for the role played in it by Amir ‘Abdullah.

The *amir*’s self-aggrandizing insertion of himself into the debate on Palestine’s future was devastating for the national movement and set off a volatile chain reaction. The Opposition backed ‘Abdullah, and with him, the explosively contentious notion of partition, lending both greater credibility in the eyes of the Royal Commission.³⁴⁹ The *majlisi* leadership, and quite possibly other elements, responded with a campaign of political murder. These developments had disastrous consequences, especially for the insurrection that began again in the autumn of 1937. While the ruthlessness of their opponents has received due attention for sundering the movement and smashing the prospect of national cohesion,³⁵⁰ the *mu‘arada* were anything but innocent in the affair. In the eyes of one young observer, the DP’s withdrawal from the AHC and association with partition ultimately did more to “abort[] the revolution” – by locking it into a cycle

³⁴⁸ “Factionalism and Class Formation,” p. 194.

³⁴⁹ This is not to say that either Amir ‘Abdullah or the Opposition camp in Palestine proved decisive in the commission report that followed, which clearly bore the stamp of Zionist campaigning, in spite of the buyers’ remorse that temporarily afflicted Labor Zionism when the final shape of the recommendations were revealed.

³⁵⁰ E.g. Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, especially p. 63-64, 97, 122-26, 145-68.

of internal violence – than the British military.³⁵¹ Exaggerated as we may conclude this view to be, its truth lay in underscoring the tremendous damage caused by the Opposition's dramatic break from the national consensus that had existed since 1921 (modified during the Peel testimonies only by the call for a treaty with Britain). When partition was unveiled, the fury already surrounding the Opposition broke even harder, sending the DP running for cover, reversing itself and readopting the national line as articulated by the AHC. But at that late hour the distrust of the Opposition and the rage over the terms of partition were too great for the *volte face* to overcome; the bloodletting of the *mu'arada* soon intensified, as it would during the insurgency phase of the revolt.

Outside the circles of high politics, the popular pulse that drove the 1936 uprising was not dead, but attenuated. Many of its partisans were back on their heels, with the core constituencies exhausted and financially depleted (peasants and workers) or fractionalized and dissipated (youth). Fighters returned to their villages or towns, or slowly made their way back from exile in the case of a few, to find their livelihoods in the same, or even worse, disrepair as they had left them. Uncertainty hung like dense fog over the future. What little Arab investment there was had no visible effect on the troubled economy and credit was scarce. More land was put up for sale by Arabs in 1937-38 than had been on offer in 1934-35, and the JNF claimed to have been proffered tenders on 200,000-300,000 dunams during 1936-37.³⁵² The crises of landlessness and unemployment that had preceded the strike only grew worse, and as they did the resentments of the poor, the destitute and the dispossessed percolated, settling not only

³⁵¹ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 97-98.

³⁵² Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 95; Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 203.

on the dual colonial order, but on the Arab upper classes and the well-to-do. Immiserated, abject, and lashed by hunger and malnutrition, the state of the downtrodden in the countryside was, as HC Wauchope recognized, tinder for the fires of insurgency. Nonetheless, the colonial state was unresponsive; extending its record of prior neglect, it did almost nothing to alleviate the bleak conditions of the Arab masses.

The most ideological and committed elements from the rural insurrection's military leadership in 1936 – the brethren of shaykh 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam and other veteran commanders such as 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad – were among the earliest partisans to reorganize. By 1937 paramilitary drilling by local groups proliferated in areas of the countryside and included townsmen. Attentive to the strength and resilience of clandestine networks, the *Qassamiyun* helped to construct a diverse shadow organization, beginning in the north, which united a subset of workers, peasantry, NC activists, and radical urban professionals and elites. As the politicians wrapped themselves up in the Royal Commission, the Haifa underground acted on its own initiative, demonstrating the continued determination of popular anticolonial forces to advance a strategy based in confrontation. Internally, with respect to the Arabs, it sought to eliminate its enemies (i.e. those of the *Qassamiyun*) and to extricate the population from both British and Zionist colonial forces in Palestine by enforcing increasingly rigid national norms of personal conduct. Its primary instrument in doing so was an assassination campaign against 'traitors.' Externally, there is little doubt that the underground was greatly involved in the growing tide of harassment, sniping and attacks targeting the military, the police, and the *yishuv* during the first half of 1937.

The Palestine administration's efforts to extirpate the organization fell short, although they offered a preview of the cat-and-mouse interaction that developed over the next two years of insurgency, whereby the preponderance of coercive powers and military force at the disposal of the state was often eluded by flexible rebel outfits displaying strong capacities for concealment, adaptation, and geographical mobility.

The conditions prevailing in 1937, and not least the unrest stirred up by the Haifa underground and other rebel forces, continued to negatively impact the *yishuv*.

Immigration extended its precipitous drop from 1935, with the official count for 1937 standing around 10,500, but the Histadrut's tallies show only 4464 remained of this number by early 1938.³⁵³ So-called "capitalist" immigration – those bearing £P 1000 or more – also declined from 2970 individuals in 1936 to 1275 in 1937, deepening its slide from 6309 persons in 1935.³⁵⁴ Land purchases from Arabs increased from 18,146 dunams in 1936 to 29,367 dunams in 1937, but financial difficulties prevented purchasing agencies, led by the JNF, from taking greater advantage of the vast Arab lands reputedly on offer.³⁵⁵ New planting (by both Arabs and Jews) in citrus, which comprised 84 percent of the country's exports in 1935, came to a virtual halt.³⁵⁶

Though harmed by the disquiet and instability following the Arab rebellion of 1936, the *yishuv* consciously resumed its settlement project in 1937, establishing

³⁵³ The official count was 10,536, but later estimates by the Israeli government put the total slightly higher (*Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 50; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 39). The Histadrut based its calculations on the total entries of Jews as immigrants and under tourist visas (which were frequently used as a pretext for clandestine immigration), minus the total emigration of all classes to arrive at a net figure (Histadrut Executive Committee minutes, 15.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22437).

³⁵⁴ *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 30.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50; Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 95. Three-quarters of the purchases in 1937 were bought in lots of 100 dunams or more (in 43 transactions); the remainder was acquired in purchases of lesser quantities from 383 vendors (*Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 76).

³⁵⁶ *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 30; Peel Commission report, p. 213.

between 14 and 17 new colonies, many of which were located in the outlying zones of its existing territorial framework.³⁵⁷ By building in the Beisan subdistrict and the Galilee as well as the coastal plain, Zionists hoped to expand the boundaries of a future Jewish state in any partition scheme. Bespeaking the insecurity of rural colonies in the wake of the Arab rebellion, the new settlements were, in line with growing tendencies within the Zionist movement, increasingly militarized. Constructed in the style known as *homa umigdal* (stockade and tower), the colonies established during the Arab revolt took the form of forts, understood as territorial footholds, that were embedded in and intended to penetrate a hostile countryside. The development of the *homa umigdal* model was part of a broader shift towards a militarized view of Palestine's geography and the emergence of a new offensive ethos for Zionism.³⁵⁸

The British rulers of Palestine were eager to resolve on a new direction for their beleaguered policy. As crosscurrents buffeted the country in 1937, key officials and the members of the Royal Commission convinced themselves that the situation was so intractable as to require a dramatic shift, yet somehow pliable and fluid enough to allow a bold new initiative to reconcile and dispense with the conundrums and contradictions that earlier policy had created. They also mistook the relative quiet of the Arabs after the furor of 1936 for passivity. In spite of the grand thinking behind the drive to define a new policy, the prior pattern of permitting Zionist counsel to shape the outcome (visible in the 1931 MacDonald letter and the 1936 jettisoning of the legislative council scheme)

³⁵⁷ Bein cites 14 new settlements (*Return to the Soil*, p. 484) while the government of Palestine registered 17 (*Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 51).

³⁵⁸ Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory*, p. 55-56; Shapira, *Land and Power*, ; Fakher Eldin, "Communities of Owners," p. 155-58. Some older accounts tend to represent the new form taken by colonies as more or less defensive, e.g. Bein, *Return to the Soil*, p. 483-95.

and British misperception of Arab sentiments (exaggerating the extent of Opposition influence) together consigned the results to ignominy.

The Peel Commission's partition plan became a debacle of the first order. Its belated public endorsement by the Zionist movement and consistent championing by the Colonial Office were hardly enough to make it viable, or to overcome the consequences of its blithe disregard for the opinions and national aspirations of the Arab majority. The grand redrawing of sovereignty, geography, and demography that the plan envisioned, in the best tradition of liberal imperialism, liquidated a good measure of the political assets and other advantages held by the British in the situation with the Palestinians. The Arab political class was not seriously preparing for a renewal of armed conflict and both of the principal factions were seeking pathways for cooperation with the authorities towards a negotiated settlement. The radicals acted on their own and with growing strength in 1937, but they did not command the loyalties of the public, which itself had drawn down its political activities, waiting in large measure on the Royal Commission. The Peel Commission's plan upended this balance of forces. The scheme's treatment of the Arabs as so many pawns on an imperial chessboard, its gross abrogation of Arab property owners' rights (over lands assigned to the Jewish state), its elevation of Amir 'Abdullah as sovereign over the Palestinians (and within an overwhelmingly arid, semi-desert kingdom), and of course, the overt endorsement by the British empire for the first time ever of the creation of a Jewish state in part of Palestine – all shook the weary and disorganized popular classes back to life. The plan's many bombshells (as far as the Arabs were concerned) and the colonial authorities' scramble to repress the popular

revulsion it caused catalyzed the dramatic expansion of Arab resistance that followed. Partition became an albatross around the necks of British policy-makers who struggled with it at some length before it was finally torpedoed. But by such time the British grasp on Palestine had itself come fundamentally into question, as the Arabs waged what would be the most urgent, expansive, and vigorous campaign in the history of the Mandate to overthrow imperial rule and vanquish the Zionist movement.

Chapter 9: Rolling back the colonial regime: state-formation from below and the ascent of the rebellion

On Sunday, 26 September 1937, as he was leaving evening mass in Nazareth the Acting District Commissioner for the Galilee, Lewis Andrews, was gunned down along with a British policeman by four assailants who quickly escaped. Known for his partiality towards the Zionist project as well as his formidable administrative skills, Andrews had been aware that he was on a so-called blacklist, marked for assassination. His murder was a well-planned set-up, relying on false word, conveyed through one of his many intelligence contacts (“a close Arab friend”), that he was no longer at risk.¹ The hit-men were associates of shaykh Farhan al-Sa‘di, whose forces reprised the role they had played in 1936 when they helped set the Great Revolt in motion.² Captured, interrogated, and tortured by Charles Tegart and his deputy, A.W. Riggs, one of the gunmen, Muhammad Naji Abu al-Rubb, a peasant from Qabatiya, declared: “I am a religious man and I thought that I would be doing a national service if I helped to kill Mr. Andrews.”³ Muhammad Naji, known as Abu Ja‘b, needed little convincing of the deed’s virtue, since he agreed with the view of his co-conspirator, ‘Abdullah Muhammad of Saffuriya, that Andrews was a harsh foe “oppress[ing] the nation” and a

¹ Foot, *A Start in Freedom*, p. 44.

² Statement of Mohamed Niji Abu Rub [Muhammad Naji Abu al-Rubb], 30.11.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

³ Second statement of Mohamed Niji Abu Rubb, 30.11.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c. The torture of Muhammad Naji, and 25 others by name, is noted in a letter from Subhi al-Khadra to Akram Zu‘aytir, dated 17 August 1938 (in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 493-95), which implicates Riggs. Bahjat Abu Gharbiya holds that the latter was the central figure responsible for the torture of prisoners (*Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 98), but the authority for such conduct emerged from higher sources. Though British officials and politicians vociferously denied allegations of torture in public and in private, DC Keith-Roach admits its occurrence in his memoirs and attributes it to Tegart (*Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 191). It is possibly due to torture that Muhammad Naji gave up the names of a host of his associates, especially as he was initially uncooperative (CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 14, PRO – CO 733/370/9).

fervent advocate of partition.⁴ After the shooting, Muhammad Naji and his comrades fled Nazareth and arrived in Haifa by daybreak before splitting up. He was arrested in October after Nablus notables informed the police that he was “of bad character” and probably a “terrorist,” and his subsequent “confessions” in late November disclosed the plot on Andrews and identified its perpetrators.⁵

Andrews, the highest British official slain by Palestinian rebels, was posthumously deemed by the Cabinet to have been the “most promising member of the Palestine Civil Service,” and his assassination precipitated a massive crackdown on the national movement.⁶ Undaunted by the absence of tangible leads, the colonial state rapidly jettisoned any semblance of legal protections for the colonized population and embarked on a repressive course of liquidating resistance to imperial policy. Al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, whom Colonial Secretary Ormsby-Gore had recently referred to as a “black-hearted villain,” was immediately (and incorrectly) blamed by officials for the execution.⁷ Claiming that “Many of the Arab Higher Committee are known to be terrorists,” William Battershill, the Officer Administering the Government, urged that the AHC and NCs be banned and that the mufti, still holed up in the *Haram* compound, be officially ousted from his posts.⁸ Suspicion of involvement in “terrorism” and,

⁴ Second statement of Mohamed Niji Abu Rubb, 30.11.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c. The phrase is attributed to ‘Abdullah. One wonders whether Muhammad Naji or ‘Abdullah referred here in Arabic to the *umma*, a plastic and polysemic term at the time which was occasionally used as a synonym for nation, but it is impossible to know from the translation (which is signed by Riggs). Andrews had been attached to the Royal Commission during its Palestine sojourn (Extract of conclusions, Cab 35 (37), 29.9.37, PRO – CO 733/332/11).

⁵ CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 13-14, PRO – CO 733/370/9; above statements by Muhammad Naji, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

⁶ Extract of conclusions, Cab 35 (37), 29.9.37, PRO – CO 733/332/11.

⁷ Colonial Secretary to OAG, 8.9.37, PRO – CO 733/341/20.

⁸ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 29.9.37, PRO – CO 733/332/11.

tellingly, opposition to partition, were substituted for evidence of lawbreaking and became grounds for administrative detention.⁹ Battershill's advice was quickly followed: the primary organs of the national movement (the NCs and the AHC) were outlawed on 1 October, the Palestine government took charge of the SMC, and a rolling onslaught of arrests ensued. The transformation of the colonial state into an increasingly militarized and illiberal apparatus hostile to the indigenous population's political aspirations, and often to the Arab public as a whole, continued apace thereafter.

The second phase of the revolt has often been depicted as suffering from a kind of leadership void. With the elite bosses and middle class spokesmen of the movement driven into exile, imprisoned, or laying low, the country's streets were left "totally free of first and second tier leaderships."¹⁰ The banning of the strike's recognized leadership councils, the NCs and the AHC, deprived the rebel movement inside Palestine of its political framework.¹¹ Most accounts see the exiles that reestablished themselves abroad in Lebanon and Syria as the rebellion's orchestrators and the deposed mufti at their helm as its political godfather. Although the exiles' distance from the hills and streets of Palestine where the most intensive phase of the armed struggle raged is often acknowledged to have limited the extent of their authority, the prevailing elitism of the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 375. Others making the same basic argument include: Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 299; Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 78; Stein, "Rural Change," p. 164; Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 156; Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 426.

¹¹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 242.

literature casts them – reflexively but with great insistence and regularity – as the movement’s “higher” leadership.¹²

A second trope in the literature on the insurgency phase of the revolt, hand-in-glove with the view that its leadership was located abroad, finds fault with the absence of a unified military command and structure. With the exiles unable to fully impose themselves over the unruly peasant cadres, and with no commander inside Palestine enjoying clear preeminence, the revolt took on a decentralized character that is read as a major shortcoming. The decentralized and semi-fragmentary quality of the insurgency, and the movement’s other alleged weaknesses,¹³ have sometimes been attributed to the peasant cadres’ social background. Basheer Nafi exemplifies this strain of argument well: “Though never short of courage and determination, neither [the peasant fighters’] understanding of social order nor their political experience qualified them for a leading national role during a highly sensitive period.”¹⁴ Bereft of elite and educated leaders on the ground, the peasant brigades not only lacked a proper military strategy, says one version of this of argument, but their campaign was essentially devoid of “vital social and political achievements” *in toto*, leaving behind only memories and images of individual courage and chivalry.¹⁵

¹² E.g. Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 236, 259, 300-01; Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 251, 253; Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 238-39, 242. These assessments are based in part on the statements of key figures in the exile network, such as ‘Izzat Darwaza. See below and see the next chapter.

¹³ See chapter 10.

¹⁴ *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 260. In turn, the peasants’ importance within the insurgency “was a reflection of the urban notability’s failure to overcome its traditional reluctance to challenge symbols of power and authority, and the fragility of the middle classes.”

¹⁵ Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 242. In a further testament to the power of elitist modes of analysis, Musa not only laments the exiles’ inability to exercise adequate control over the unruly field commanders but faults the former for the supposed absence of an overarching military strategy, which they alone are presumed to have been capable of crafting (p. 241).

I will present a different argument here. Where others have stressed the continuity of Palestinian political leadership irrespective of the changed circumstances, I will suggest that greater emphasis is due to the institutions of the rebellion and to the dynamics and processes that supported it. Primacy lay not primarily with the mufti, who became the movement's figurehead, but with those stalwart peasants and workers who took up arms and, in their greatest hour, liberated vast regions of the country. They fought the British bravely and with self-sacrifice, but equally important, they sought to regenerate their society from the ravages of peripheral capitalism and the dual colonial order. Their movement was not, contrary to commonplace conceits, devoid of governing structures or organizing principles beyond those derivative of the rural *zu'ama* and the *hamula*. The renewal of the revolt in 1937 rekindled the drive towards state formation from below that accompanied the general strike of 1936. In the insurgency phase of the revolt this process attained its greatest vigor and widest application. Rebels established courts and local administrations, collected taxes, conscripted fighters, levied all manner of assistance, ran a formidable intelligence apparatus, managed systems of provisioning, moving and sheltering their men and institutions, and of course, organized paramilitary formations. Many of their institutions were emergent and variable, inseparable from the flux and instability of the contexts in which they were produced, and in part for these reasons they have been almost totally ignored within the existing scholarship.¹⁶ Yet these institutions, I argue, lay at the heart of the challenge that the rebels posed not only

¹⁶ Another major reason for this, I hasten to add, is the age-old problem of adequate sources. However, as I will suggest herein, even the documentary sources I have relied on (let alone the oral sources tapped by scholars such as Mustafa Kabha and Nimr Sirhan) have more to tell us than has been admitted.

to the British colonial regime, but to the Arab social order and the political dominance of the middle and upper classes as well. State formation from below generated momentum for the insurgent movement and helped to accrete growing masses of the population to the revolutionary cause. The brief counter-state that rebels erected in opposition to the Mandatory government, the outlines of which were in the making from the revolt's resumption, became the national movement's center of gravity and ensured that its armed partisans were preeminent. At the height of the insurgency's power, the repressed question of social inequality and class oppression that had overlain the general strike returned, joining the rudiments of a social revolution to the political struggle for independence and Arab sovereignty. Paradoxically, the sources of the rebel movement's strength – its counter-state infrastructure and its espousal of social justice for the lower class majority – ultimately added to its divisiveness and undermined its cohesiveness.

The crackdown

At the time of Andrews's killing the national movement was suffering from indirection. During the year between the general strike and the opening shot of the new revolt, the national forces had succumbed to fragmentation, the authorities accepted the Peel Commission's recommendation for partition, and economic depression prevailed. While paramilitary activity and social mobilization reemerged in 1937, they remained a minority trend. Instead, elites renewed their embrace of high politics only to find themselves violently divided over the prospect of partition and the question of unification with Transjordan under the Hashemite crown. Though adamantly opposed to

the extension of Amir ‘Abdullah’s rule to Arab Palestine, *majlisi* leaders put great and unwarranted stock in public and private diplomacy, with the Arab states as well as the British, and showed scant interest in a return to arms. Illustrating their distance from the popular movement of 1936, both before and after partition was announced the *majlisi* camp, ‘Awni Bey ‘Abd al-Hadi, and other elites secretly entered into the most extensive contacts and negotiations undertaken with Zionists during the Mandate. When partition threw open the gates of public outrage, popular forces remained in a state of relative disorganization while elites directed their attentions abroad for answers to the national predicament at home. Setting themselves against the reigning quietism and disarray of much of the political scene, the *Qassamiyun* and Haifa underground again acted as the revolt’s spearhead, striving to rekindle the insurrection and reactivate the popular anticolonial struggle.

With the government’s endorsement of partition the AHC’s circumstances deteriorated. Following the government’s failed attempt to capture the mufti, the AHC realized that it too might become a target and moved its meetings inside the *Haram* compound.¹⁷ The RAF found the mood of Palestinian leaders (by which it meant elites) in August and September to be glum, and noted that their dejection sprung from the lack of regional enthusiasm or interest in their cause.¹⁸ The absence of greater engagement in the Arab world represented a blow to the *majlisiyyin* and the Istiqlalists, who each favored strategies based in, or at least drawing on, regional mobilization and the construction of a broad pan-Arab front. The hesitancy and internal preoccupations of the

¹⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 25.8.37, resume of operations (July), PRO – Air 5/1247.

¹⁸ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 21.9.37, resume of operations (August), PRO – Air 5/1247.

Arab heads of state and leading political parties like the Wafd in Egypt limited regional governments' reactions to the threat of partition, eliciting statements of condemnation but little else, and the Bludan conference failed to change this balance of affairs.

When word of Andrews's killing broke, the AHC and many notables offered their condolences and some attended his funeral. The gesture was hardly enough to temper the reaction of the government which, under the stern hand of the Acting High Commissioner and in fear of the consequences on official morale of any further attempt on the lives of high officials,¹⁹ seized on the moment. The banning of the NCs and the AHC was accompanied by a swift onslaught of detentions, which then carried on as a rolling campaign throughout the fall. OAG Battershill gave conflicting reports of the initial number of arrests, first claiming around 200 "terrorists" and undesirables had been swept up, but then revising the figure downward to 117 on 29 September.²⁰ Notables, preachers, *qadis*, *shaykhs*, and at least one mayor as well as the predictable roster of politicians, NC members, street activists, and fighters were among the detained.²¹ The new DC-Galilee, Alec Seath Kirkbride, observed that practically all of the northern notables were interned for some duration.²² Unlike the 1936 suppression, those picked up in late 1937 were liable to be beaten and tortured, perhaps particularly those held at the Mazra'a facility north of Acre, which the state referred to as a "concentration

¹⁹ OAG to Shuckburgh, extracts, 12.10.37, PRO – FO 371/20817.

²⁰ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 27.9.37, PRO – CO 733/341/20; OAG to Colonial Secretary, 29.9.37, PRO – CO 733/332/11. Al-Hut's account supports the lower range, counting 106 arrestees (*al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 372).

²¹ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 99; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 372; Husayn F. Khalidi diary extract, 2.10.37, reproduced in Ghandour, *Discourse on Domination*, p. 173.

²² A.S. Kirkbride, *A Crackle of Thorns: experiences in the Middle East* (London: John Murray, 1956), p. 100.

camp.”²³ By November Mazra‘a (also referred to as Acre camp) was at maximum capacity, holding 320 prisoners in eight “huts,” while overall 520 prisoners were in detention under the Defence Regulations.²⁴ Weeks later Palestinian sources put the number of detainees at 800, which roughly matched the official total of Arabs interned throughout the year (816) under the Defence Regulations and the Prevention of Crime Ordinance.²⁵

Among the initial arrests were four members of the AHC – Husayn F. Khalidi, Fuad Saba, Ahmad Hilmi ‘Abd al-Baqi, and Ya‘qub al-Ghusayn – who, along with Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, were deported to the Seychelles islands for internment.²⁶ An arrest warrant was issued for Jamal al-Husayni, but he eluded capture and escaped abroad. Those members of the committee who were outside the country at the time, such as ‘Awni Bey (at Geneva) and ‘Izzat Darwaza (in Baghdad), were hit with exclusion orders barring their return. Faced with the state’s dragnet, some political activists and figures fled, seeking sanctuary beyond the bounds of Palestine. This group rapidly grew sizeable and Akram Zu‘aytir, who had already gone into exile before the

²³ Political information on the situation among the Arabs, #21, 13.10.37, CZA S/25 – 22192; Syro-Palestine Committee pamphlet, “Arab internees in the Palestine prisons,” 29.11.37, PRO – FO 371/21872. The first instance of police torture that Zu‘aytir records preceded the slaying of Andrews, but followed the partition announcement (*Yawmiyat*, p. 306).

²⁴ OAG to Colonial Secretary, #512, 3.11.37, PRO – CO 733/332/10.

²⁵ Syro-Palestine Committee pamphlet, “Arab internees in the Palestine prisons,” 29.11.37, PRO – FO 371/21872; *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 14.

²⁶ Husayn F. Khalidi diary extract, in Ghandour, *Discourse on Domination*, p. 167-74. Hardly the image of the hardened terrorist, Khalidi's diary shows that he was on very friendly terms with DIG-CID Rice and DSP Riggs, who arrested him, even readily cooperating when asked about Jamal al-Husayni's whereabouts (p. 168-69).

Andrews assassination, notes that in early October the border police held some 1000 arrest warrants for individuals believed to be abroad.²⁷

The government justified its actions by claiming that the NCs, the AHC, and the mufti were menaces to public security and associated them with what it referred to as an escalating “campaign of terrorism and assassination.”²⁸ British authorities persisted in laying the blame squarely on the *effendiyya*, continuing to depict well-off urban and educated elements as malcontented agitators and the core of the nationalist current in the country.²⁹ This representation of Palestinian nationalism as the province of urban elites rankled some rural partisans, including notables and *mukhtars* as well as peasants, who on several occasions protested directly to the District Commissioners that they were just as earnest and zealous in their national identification and fealty as their urban brethren.³⁰ Moreover, the government was aware that Andrews was not killed on account of the AHC or the NCs. Privately but rather quickly, and before firm evidence was in hand, the deed was chalked up to shaykh Farhan and his men³¹ and the *Qassamiyun* were soon seen to be behind the surge of rebel actions, particularly in the north.³² Zionist intelligence also tied the Andrews killing to Farhan’s men almost immediately.³³

²⁷ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 336.

²⁸ Official communiqué 16/37, 1.10.37, ISA (2) 567-1m.

²⁹ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 335.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 335-36; Political information on the situation among the Arabs, #13, 5.10.37, CZA S/25 – 22192; al-Shuqayri, *Arba‘un ‘aman*, p. 180-81.

³¹ Political information on the situation among the Arabs, (no #), 3.10.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. As noted in the previous chapter, the CID later attributed shaykh Farhan with masterminding assassinations in the north in 1937 (CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 11, PRO – CO 733/370/9).

³² OAG to Shuckburgh, extracts, 12.10.37, PRO – FO 371/20817; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 377.

³³ Arab Bureau information, 28.9.37, CZA S/25 – 22192. This report claims that the Haifa branch of the Arab Bank, run by Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, worked in conjunction with the *Qassamiyun* on the plot.

Despite the fact that both the government and the Jewish Agency had reason to believe that the perpetrators were still at large in October, each entertained the idea that the crackdown on the national movement had nipped the possibility of renewed rebellion in the bud. The JA saw in this move “tacit confirmation that the Arab Higher Committee was responsible for the unrest” and, true to form, believed that without the head of the proverbial snake, there could be no return of the insurrection of 1936.³⁴ A fortnight into the arrest campaign the OAG marveled in surprise at what he depicted as the calm and quiet prevailing in the country and forecast that aside from the continued possibility of assassinations, no major disorder was on the horizon.³⁵

Activists and the political class were clearly caught off guard by the scope and strength of the colonial state’s preemptive strike and the frenzy of detentions succeeded in incapacitating the movement’s public organs. Bayan al-Hut notes that after the initial crackdown the “specter of partition” hovered everywhere amidst the “silence” enveloping the Arab public.³⁶ The silence of the Arabs wasn’t only the effect of shock, but owed to a series of press orders, beginning with a media blackout on the 1 October events and followed by suspensions of various newspapers.³⁷ The press was also forbidden from discussing the replacement of the banned national associations and from transmitting or commenting on statements by the mufti.³⁸ News about events circulated by word of mouth but the OAG believed that the rebels lacked adequate support for a

³⁴ Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 124-25.

³⁵ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 9.10.37, #462, PRO – FO 371/20816.

³⁶ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 375.

³⁷ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 210; Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 209. In the second half of 1937 the government closed *al-Liwa* for 84 days and *al-Difa’* for 31 for reports “likely to endanger the public peace” (*Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 17).

³⁸ Zu’aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 336.

broad uprising, and noted that the arrest wave was greeted with approbation by commercial circles and, somewhat more mutedly, by rural notables.³⁹ As JA intelligence subsequently observed, many notables and others kept their heads down, fearing that they too would be interned if they did so much as submit a petition of protest against the crackdown.⁴⁰ Still, the DP issued a statement in early October condemning the arrests, though the administration barred it from publication in the newspapers.⁴¹

After the first detention sweep and before the AHC and the NCs were banned, youth pushed for demonstrations, but the mufti threw cold water on the motion.⁴² Instead a general strike was called on 2 October, though it too was speedily curtailed at the hands of the mufti after only two days.⁴³ Though the comparatively mild reaction of nationalists to the first stage of the crackdown was reassuring for the Palestine administration, it took false comfort in the situation. As in 1936, the government's attempt to decapitate the rebel movement through arrests of urban leaders failed to halt insurgent momentum, and attacks on police, military, and Jewish targets rose in October to more than triple those recorded for any preceding month of 1937.⁴⁴ The police attributed the surge in incidents to a small group of perhaps ten Palestinian exiles in Damascus who were organizing fighters there, though the numbers of men they were reported to have mustered for combat (50-60) were modest in the extreme.⁴⁵ The OAG

³⁹ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 9.10.37, #462, PRO – FO 371/20816.

⁴⁰ Political information on the situation among the Arabs, #30, 22.10.37, CZA S/25 – 22192.

⁴¹ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 335.

⁴² Survey, 24.9.37-30.9.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

⁴³ Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 210. Zionist intelligence contended that the strike was initiated by youth and the mufti, but after lackluster results, it was cancelled (Survey, 1.10.37-7.10.37, CZA S/25 – 22227).

⁴⁴ CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 18 and appendix A, PRO – CO 733/370/9.

⁴⁵ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 12.10.37, #466, PRO – FO 371/20816.

separately noted that the resurgence of armed action was concentrated in the north, managed locally by the *Qassamiyun* in league with the Damascus-based exiles, and its operations were planned for effectiveness.⁴⁶ The October offensive peaked mid-month with a coordinated series of attacks mostly in the Jerusalem and Latrun areas. The airfield at Lydda was struck and state offices (for customs and passports), along with the wireless station, were arsoned.⁴⁷ Simultaneously a train was derailed and attacked at Ra's al-'Ayn (on the Haifa-Lydda line) and Gaza rail lines were bombed.⁴⁸ The bulk of the multi-pronged assault, which also featured sniping attacks, occurred on 15 October, and its manifold character led the RAF to compare the situation to the 1936 revolt.⁴⁹ Though it opined that only days later "conditions were practically normal," on 17 October rebels carried out a daring raid on a police post at al-Dhahiriyyeh, a village in the Hebron subdistrict, making off with rifles and ammunition.⁵⁰ The government reported to London that the rebel party had been sizeable, but according to the JA's sources, it was comprised of 12 men under the leadership of 'Isa al-Batat, who served as commander of the Hebron region until his death in May 1938.⁵¹ Though the rebel formations soon encountered difficulties in returning the country to full-scale insurrection, the Dhahiriyyeh raid and the pronounced return of armed operations offered a foretaste of the onslaught that soon beset the colonial state.

⁴⁶ OAG to Shuckburgh, extracts, 12.10.37, PRO – FO 371/20817.

⁴⁷ *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 9.

⁴⁸ Ibid.; OAG to Colonial Secretary, 15.10.37, #471, PRO – CO 733/332/10.

⁴⁹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.10.37, resume of operations (Sept), PRO – Air 5/1247.

⁵⁰ Ibid.; *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 9.

⁵¹ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 20.10.37, #484, PRO – CO 733/332/10; Political information on the situation among the Arabs, #34, 28.10.37, CZA S/25 – 22192; Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 224.

The exilic leadership and its ambitions

Just prior to the mid-month barrage in October, al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni escaped from three months of informal captivity within the *Haram* compound's confines. Disguised as a woman, he was secreted out of the Old City and made his way to Jaffa, where he was taken by skiff to Lebanon.⁵² A Lebanese marine force intercepted his boat and when his identity was discovered, he was prevented from traveling to Damascus as he had planned to do and put under loose surveillance in a suburb of Beirut, Dhuq Makayyil.⁵³ Ironically, the OAG had forecast that the mufti would elude capture and exit the country only days before his surreptitious flight.⁵⁴ The OAG and other colonial officials had already argued that the Syrian authorities should deport those that the Palestine government named as leaders of and responsible parties for the renewed hostilities on its side of the border, but the French saw in the situation an opportunity to repay the British for their less than cooperative stance a dozen years earlier during the Syrian uprising, when rebels north of the border found refuge in Palestine and Transjordan. Consequently, despite frequent beseeching, the French were reported by the British Foreign Office to quickly grow annoyed, or as one missive put it, "bored" with the repeated stream of requests for action against Palestinian exiles in French Mandate territory, and chastised the British for not preventing the alleged perpetrators from exiting Palestine.⁵⁵

⁵² Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 459.

⁵³ Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 253.

⁵⁴ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 9.10.37, #463, PRO – FO 371/20816.

⁵⁵ See Downie (Colonial Office) to Foreign Undersecretary, 14.10.37, and minute by Baggallay, 15.10.37, PRO – FO 371/20816; quote from Baggallay.

On paper the AHC continued to exist, though it was stripped of most of its members and became a mouthpiece for the mufti and his associates in exile. It was maintained as a diplomatic front and used to publicly respond to official statements made by British authorities, such as the 4 January 1938 announcement of the Woodhead Commission, whose mission was to study the technical feasibility of implementing partition.⁵⁶ It also served to maintain a semblance of continuity for elites desirous of directing the movement, though its banning by the administration led it to use third parties, predominantly the AWC, to communicate its opinions and views to the Palestine administration.

Among the exiles, an indisputable closing of the ranks occurred around al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni. The Husaynis were “widely identified with the national struggle,” in spite of their mixed career as its representatives.⁵⁷ Sensitive to this discrepancy between image and reality, Ahmad al-Shuqayri was pleased to learn of the mufti’s dismissal from his posts and hoped that he would take up the movement’s leadership forthrightly and unreservedly, instead of with one foot in the nationalist camp and one foot inside the colonial regime.⁵⁸ Perhaps even more telling was Akram Zu‘aytir’s conversion. In January 1938 he described his change of heart to his brother ‘Adil: “Hajj Amin today is the only person who Arab eyes follow. Under such conditions, either a patriot cooperates with him or he does nothing.”⁵⁹ Although in areas distant from Jerusalem the

⁵⁶ For the Woodhead Commission’s terms of reference and background see Appendix A to the *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 40-42; for the AHC’s response see its letter to the Prime Minister, 11.1.38, in *Watha’iq al-muqawama*, p. 604-09.

⁵⁷ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 85.

⁵⁸ Al-Shuqayri, *Arba‘un ‘aman*, p. 173.

⁵⁹ *Yawmiyat*, p. 349.

former mufti possibly had less resonance, in general he cut a charismatic, pious, and stalwart figure among much of the peasantry, who found his “personalist, familial, Islamic-populist appeal” agreeable to rural sensibilities.⁶⁰ Unlike many elites, the former mufti had a reputation unsullied by association with land sales or other unsavory activities. On the contrary, he was known as a defender of the peasantry and its land rights, as was evident by his orchestration of the SMC’s land campaign. His unparalleled status in the countryside helped secure his position as the movement’s head and deter would-be challengers.⁶¹ His aura was so clean in this respect that it extended to his middle and upper class aides and associates, whose backgrounds normally would have been found suspect by peasant fighters.⁶² Ensconced under semi-house arrest at Dhuq Makayyil, the plight of the former mufti (often still referred to by all parties as “the mufti”) became a symbol of Arab Palestine’s stymied political aspirations. There he endeavored as best he could to exploit his situation and to assert his will over the national struggle and over his homeland’s fate.

Continuing to underestimate the escalation of events, OAG Battershill and RAF intelligence depicted al-Hajj Amin’s departure from Palestinian soil as diminishing his authority.⁶³ The OAG, laying the blame for the spiking violence squarely, if vaguely, at the feet of the deposed mufti, further persuaded himself that ongoing turbulence did not

⁶⁰ Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 290; Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 64-65. Quote from Khalaf.

⁶¹ Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 64-65.

⁶² Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 85; Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 290-91.

⁶³ OAG to Shuckburgh, extracts, 12.10.37, PRO – FO 371/20817; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.10.37, resume of operations (Sept), PRO – Air 5/1247.

portend a revolt – an opinion that was shared by Zionist intelligence.⁶⁴ The mufti later claimed to be a driving force of the new rebellion, and the mid-October spate of incidents did follow on the heels of a meeting in the *Haram* compound at which he alleges that he instructed assembled band leaders and others to renew the uprising in full.⁶⁵ Yet even if it is allowed that some in the Jerusalem and central regions heeded his call, others acted independently.⁶⁶ In fact strong evidence exists against the mufti's claim of personal responsibility for the revolt and its reignition.

Insight into the mufti's pretensions, and the obstacle they found in independent-minded rural commanders, is apparent in the testimony given to the CID by Diyab Ibn 'Abd al-Hamid Fahum, a Nazarene employee of the Co-operative Societies Department.⁶⁷ After the crackdown had begun Diyab was summoned by Rasim al-Khalidi, first head of the YC and an official in the Jerusalem section of the Co-operative Department, who impressed upon him the task of transmitting £P 100 to shaykh Farhan and villages in the north in order to create a "disturbance." Upon receipt of part of the funds, shaykh Farhan erupted in fury when he learned of its purpose, bellowing "Curse their fathers the procurers, I am not at the orders of Jerusalem," before complaining of the paltry sum which was allotted him (£P 30). According to Diyab, Farhan told him

⁶⁴ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 16.10.37, #476, PRO – FO 371/20817; Survey, 15.10.37-28.10.37, CZA S/25 – 22437; Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 124-25.

⁶⁵ Taggar, *The Mufti*, p. 459; Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 239 (citing the Haganah's official history), 349-50. Abu Gharbiyya notes that the mufti's crew pushed for 14 October as the date to rekindle the revolt (*Fi khidam al-nidal*, 103) but gainsays the idea that the mufti was responsible for the renewed insurrection over the next two years by pointing to the earlier activities of rebels acting on their own volition after the partition recommendation (98-99). Ahmad al-Shuqayri agrees with this view, adding that the *Qassamiyun* were the real progenitors of the second phase (*Arba 'un 'aman*, p. 172).

⁶⁶ Yasin explicitly underscores that al-Batat acted on his own initiative (*al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 182).

⁶⁷ The following is based on: Statement of Diab Ibn Abdel Hamid Fahoum [Diyab Ibn 'Abd al-Hamid Fahum], 19.1.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

that he had tried previously to obtain money from the mufti and from ‘Ali al-Husayni, to no avail. “In Jerusalem the leaders receive all the money and they swallow the money up themselves,” the shaykh averred.⁶⁸ Moreover, Farhan saw the urban politicians’ attempt to exert influence over the rural patriots and to use them as footsoldiers with tremendous cynicism, asking rhetorically, “Doesn’t Haj[j] Amin want us to start the trouble because he has been dismissed from his post?” The *Qassami* veteran’s contempt for the mufti’s fair-weather embrace of the rebellion was obvious and unalloyed, declaring brusquely, “If I can get hold of haj [sic] Amin I will put his turban under my feet and I will fix him up.” Given the gulf between shaykh Farhan and his would-be patrons, it is little wonder that the whole affair came to naught, much to the consternation of Rasim Effendi. Ultimately, the clumsy attempt to make of the rebels cheap guns for hire is as revealing of the political class’s arrogance as it is of the latter’s distance from the insurgents whom it wished to instrumentalize and assert power over.

Never short of ambition, the leading exiles quickly sought to rectify their tenuous connection to the new uprising and to shore up their status within the movement. With nationalist activism banned in Palestine after Andrews’s assassination and droves of organizers abroad, new centers of political gravity were created at the mufti’s place of residence in Lebanon and in Damascus. A small public relations outfit headed by Akram Zu‘aytir had already been opened as the Palestine desk of the Arab National

⁶⁸ In a separate account of the conversation between Diyab Effendi and Farhan, another witness quoted the shaykh as exclaiming: “Thirty pounds is insufficient, what can I do with that. [sic] It is not enough to buy two clips of ammunition. Other people keep the money for themselves and we are the ones who go out and fight.” See Statement of Abdul Rahman Abdul Hamid Abdul Khalek [‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Hamid ‘Abd al-Khaliq], 21.1.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c. Diyab was a poor choice of messenger since he admitted to pocketing at least a quarter of the funds with which he was entrusted.

Information Office (*al-Maktab al-qawmi al-‘Arabi li-di‘aya wa-l-nashr*) in Damascus, run by Fakhri al-Barudi, youth leader of the Syrian National Bloc.⁶⁹ In November 1937 after consultations with the mufti and others, ‘Izzat Darwaza established what became known as the Central Committee for the Jihad (CCJ; *al-Lajna al-markaziyya lil-jihad*), the aims of which were to organize, supply, and direct the revolt.⁷⁰ The CCJ, with Darwaza at its helm, became the primary organ of the *majlisi* exiles. This arrangement ostensibly came about because of the surveillance under which the mufti was placed, but as Ahmad al-Shuqayri relates in his memoirs, the palatial home taken up by the mufti teamed with minions and acolytes and bustled with constant meetings and activity, little of which seemed to garner French interference.⁷¹ The CCJ’s members shifted over time, but its principals were mufti loyalists, a number of whom were his relations: Ishaq Darwish, Munif al-Husayni, and shaykh Hasan Abu al-Sa‘ud came to be based in Lebanon with the mufti, while Mu‘in al-Madi, ‘Izzat Darwaza, and ‘Izz al-Din al-Shawa were among its chief officers in Damascus, which served as the organization’s operational seat.⁷²

The new body had a formidable array of tasks on its plate, and as it discovered, only limited means by which to exert itself over headstrong in-country rebels. Some field commanders regarded the mufti as the country’s rightful leader and cooperated

⁶⁹ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 332, 335, 338, 345; Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, p. 276.

⁷⁰ Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 257.

⁷¹ Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 233; al-Shuqayri, *Arba‘un ‘aman*, p. 184.

⁷² Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 232; Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 257. Both of these accounts rely on Darwaza for the CCJ’s composition. Porath provides a rather different list of members, including Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir, ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, Jamal al-Husayni, and Akram Zu‘aytir in addition to Darwaza (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 243). Zu‘aytir’s memoirs, unpublished when Porath wrote, make no mention of being a CCJ officer.

freely with the CCJ, but others were less enthused about taking orders from the urban upper classes and the *effendiyya* with which the exilic leaders were identified, much less those that were far from the battlefield. Most prized their own independence and were reluctant to cede it. Prominent insurgents that were closest to al-Hajj Amin and the exilic leaders included not only ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, cousin of the mufti and a famous martyr of 1948, and ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq, who became the mufti’s most ruthless and famous servant in Palestine, but Hasan Salameh, whose command extended to vast regions of southern and central Palestine, the *Qassami* veteran Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir, and other *Qassamiyun* whose commands were mostly in the north.⁷³ On the other hand, the self-appointed “general commander” of the revolt and its most regarded leader before his demise in March 1939, ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad (Abu Kamal), developed a reputation for independence and later clashed with the CCJ. In general, relations between the exilic leadership and the fighters in the field fluctuated greatly over time and varied by region, by commander, and as conditions changed on the ground in Palestine.

Darwaza later contended, one suspects rather optimistically, that the CCJ was successful in imposing itself over the field commanders in a majority of instances in which it sought to do so, reckoning its orders were followed perhaps 60 percent of the time.⁷⁴ Shahada Musa, author of perhaps the most comprehensive account of the revolt, weighs in against Darwaza’s claim, arguing that the CCJ’s authority was circumscribed, in the final analysis, by its distance from both combat and the everyday toils and rigors

⁷³ Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 240.

⁷⁴ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 236.

lived by the fighters.⁷⁵ Interestingly, the Haganah's official history asserts that external leaders had little control over the paramilitaries or their commanders, thereby controverting, or at least complicating, the commonplace Zionist view of the mufti as the rebellion's leader – a view also shared for different reasons by a good number of Palestinian and Arab scholars.⁷⁶ As reviewed below, British views split on the question of the exiles' influence, but the new High Commissioner, Harold MacMichael, became a major proponent of the mufti thesis, despite mounting evidence that rebels in Palestine acted with great autonomy and self-reliance.⁷⁷

The CCJ's greatest leverage over the fighters was the material support it provided them in terms of arms and funding. Its earliest links were to Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir, shaykh 'Atiya and Abu Kamal.⁷⁸ Commanders and fighters were happy to take what came their way but the materiel and funds supplied by the external leaders wound up being modest. Darwaza states that at most over the first six or so months of its existence the CCJ pulled in £P 4000 per month. Incoming monies were quickly spent not only on the rebels, but on covering costs related to external diplomacy and lobbying

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 237-38, 242. At the same time, Musa argues that the mufti acted as the overarching political authority, and in true patriarchal fashion, even the "spiritual father" standing behind the revolt (p. 232; 238, 302). Military leaders in the field consequently had little influence over political decision-making (p. 232).

⁷⁶ *Toldot haHaganah*, v. 2, pt. 2, p. 763, cited in Haim, *Abandonment*, ft. 16, p. 147. Arab scholars sharing in the mufti thesis for phase two of the revolt include al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p.; Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 253; Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 232, 238-39, 302. For unexplained reasons Haim contradicts the Haganah's account, arguing that the overall balance of forces favored external lines of command (p. 125). Contemporaneous reports, it is worth noting, almost uniformly portray the mufti as leading the movement, usually without any evidence.

⁷⁷ In mid-May, for instance, two months after taking up his post, MacMichael concluded that the mufti and his men were the chief factor blocking the restoration of order. In the same evaluation he freely admitted that he had no corroborating evidence to back up his claim, simplistically chalking this up to the mufti's care not to tie himself to a paper trail (HC to Colonial Secretary, 12.5.38, PRO – FO 371/21877).

⁷⁸ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 233, 236.

among the Arab states. Added to this was approximately £P 1000 per month dispensed by the mufti to the rebel commanders. Darwaza himself claimed that the rebels were largely dependent on fundraising from within Palestine, with external sources accounting for perhaps only one-tenth of the revolt's operating funds.⁷⁹ British intelligence reports generally corroborate the view that the exiles' financial contribution to the revolt, and that external funding was slight.⁸⁰ On the materiel front the weapons and ammunition gathered and smuggled into Palestine by the CCJ were also wanting. The rebels suffered a permanent dearth of ammunition, and what they did receive was sometimes of very poor quality – so much so that it was attributed with causing large battlefield losses.⁸¹

The exiles also did themselves no favors by advocating the appointment of a non-Palestinian to head the military effort and take up the post of supreme field commander. The position was offered to Muhammad al-Ashmar, al-Qawuqji's lieutenant, Amin Ruwayha, an Iraqi advocate of the Palestine cause with strong links to Germany, and

⁷⁹ Darwaza, *Mudhakkirat Muhammad 'Izzat Darwaza* (Beirut: Dar al-gharb al-Islami, 1993) v. 3, p. 123. It is more than a little ironic that Musa, who cites Darwaza on the CCJ's monetary connection to the insurgents and who fawns hagiographically over the mufti (ghosting him in as the national movement's perpetual leading light, regardless of circumstances and irrespective of the activism of other figures, let alone constituencies), writes that al-Hajj Amin helped bankroll the rebel movement in the 1937-39 phase (*Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 236, 239).

⁸⁰ In January 1938 the CID recorded slender receipts to CCJ coffers. Contributions from Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco totaled £P 2800 (CID, 27.1.38, periodical appreciation summary 1/38, PRO – CO 733/359/10). The new High Commissioner was persuaded that Iraq was the chief source of foreign funding (HC to Shuckburgh, 27.4.38, PRO – FO 371/21876), yet reports suggest its contributions were equally modest. One put the total at £ 1100 by mid-1938 (Baghdad (Peterson) to FO, 4.6.38, PRO – FO 371/21877), while another cited by Nafi put the total at £ 8000 by late October 1938 (*Arabism, Islamism*, p. 257).

⁸¹ Conversation w/ M.Q. from Nablus on 2.5.38, CZA S/25 – 22191. The rebels' ammunition was sometimes "rusty" and defective, failing them, as this report bluntly puts it, "at the decisive hour." Other reports note complaints that bullets from Syria were full of wood and soil (CID, 18.10.38, intelligence summary 73/38, PRO – CO 733/359/10). The issue was so serious that Ezra Danin judged poor ammunition to be one of the decisive factors in the revolt's eventual failure (Introduction to the first edition, *Te'udot*, p. vii).

possibly to al-Qawuqji himself.⁸² The first two declined, while inside Palestine mention of al-Qawuqji continued to stir serious misgivings in the rebel camp, with some commanders reputedly threatening to resign if he returned.⁸³ The exiles' enthusiasm for a foreign commander was a slight to the local leaders that had fought since 1936 and something of a vote of no-confidence in them. It may also have been rooted in class bias against the modest origins of the field leadership. The mufti network pushed this agenda as a means of unifying the rebels and placing them within a more organized, hierarchical framework that would, ideally, make them subordinate to the "political" echelon as well as a more effective fighting force.⁸⁴ The fact that the exiles continued to solicit these men even into the summer of 1938 when the rebellion hit full stride only amplifies the impression that it was bound up with seeking control over the guerillas.⁸⁵

Musa argues that notwithstanding its shortcomings, the CCJ was able to "impose its presence" and to earn the regard of the band leaders as their "guide." To do so, however, required pressure that was unbecoming of a popular rebellion's political

⁸² Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 243; Arnon-Ohana, "The Bands in the Palestinian Arab Revolt, 1936-1939: Structure and Organization," *Asian and African Studies* 15 (1981), p. 237-38; Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p.237. Al-Qawuqji tells a different story. He relates that the mufti's group first pinned their hopes, before Andrews's assassination, on Muhammad al-'Ajluni, an anti-'Abdullah Jordanian officer, but his endeavor was snuffed out by the Transjordanian government before the Palestine revolt was renewed. After Bakr Sidqi was killed in Iraq and al-Qawuqji was released from internal banishment under the succeeding government of Jamil al-Midfa'i, he says attention fell on him. Al-Qawuqji, along with 'Izz al-Din al-Shawa representing the CCJ, entered negotiations with Germany for aid but these went nowhere. He was led to believe the command would be his by Darwaza, but this never materialized (*Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 73-76). Akram Zu'aytir backs al-Qawuqji's account of being snubbed, which he thought was a grave mistake, and himself blamed the situation on the mufti's power-hungry attitude (*Yawmiyat*, p. 358-60; 516). Others inside the mufti camp, including Jamal al-Husayni, also favored sending al-Qawuqji back into the field, to no avail (*ibid.*, p. X).

⁸³ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 243.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ E.g. Survey, 3.6.38-9.6.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

leadership and created friction between the internal and external actors.⁸⁶ By contrast, Nafi more soberly observes that “the CCJ was unable to exercise a definite authority over the rebels.”⁸⁷ Setting aside the stronger ties of certain commanders to the exiles, each of these general propositions rings true in different moments. During the reorganization of the revolt, through early 1938, the exiles may have been of some utility to the fighters (through the channels mentioned above) and hence may have had a stronger measure of leverage and input. In the long ascent throughout much of 1938 the development of autonomous governing institutions, a counter-state to the colonial regime, generated internal momentum that unquestionably shifted decision-making power into the hands of partisans in the hills and fields of Palestine. As discussed below, this left the CCJ and the exilic network struggling to maintain its influence, which it did foremost by trying to lay down standards of conduct for the rebels in order to prevent field commanders or their underlings from acting as warlords. In the closing months of 1938, after a second division of military reinforcements arrived, the tide turned against the uprising. The coincident restart of a diplomatic process intended to bring the rebellion to a negotiated close, and the battering which top commanders and rebel forces took in this period, appeared to lend the exiles greater influence again, yet it would probably be an exaggeration to think that they exercised tangible controls over the ambitious subcommanders crowding the field.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 237-38.

⁸⁷ *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 260.

⁸⁸ This is returned to below and in the next chapter.

Resumption of the rebellion

When the Qassamiyun assassinated Lewis Andrews in 1937 conditions in the countryside were not as propitious as they had been in April 1936. The surge in armed activity against British and Jewish targets in October was followed by an ebb in November as the rebels endeavored to reestablish themselves in parts of the country.⁸⁹ For some weeks the Palestine government overestimated its own position and underrated the brewing revolt. In mid-November Acting HC Battershill reported to London that in spite of the reappearance of guerillas, the “day to day routine of Palestine life has not been outwardly disturbed.”⁹⁰ Counter-measures taken by the colonial state slowed the rebellion’s spread, but after a brief lull rebel ranks grew and the insurgency gathered force.

The British regime had considered aspects of the 1936 uprising and was determined to deny the rebels the sanctuary and support provided by a cooperative village environment. As in 1936 it both pressured select villages and regions and offered incentives for loyalty to the state. This time its tactics, based more on stick than carrot, had a greater initial effect and rebels did not find broad bases of support in late 1937 as easily as they had done so the previous year. British strategy was keyed to the village level and operated in part through the *mukhtars*. As noted in chapter 8, police billets had been erected in at least 80 villages by the close of 1937, half of which were in the Jerusalem district, while most of the rest (35) were in the Galilee and Samaria districts. To tighten the state’s control over the northern region, given both its prior history and its

⁸⁹ CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, appendix A, PRO – CO 733/370/9.

⁹⁰ Narrative dispatch #3, OAG to Colonial Secretary, 18.11.37, PRO – CO 935/21.

proximity to the exiles active in Damascus, a surveillance system was instituted to monitor the movement of persons among the villages. Registers were opened in each village to record all individual entries and exits, of both villagers and non-residents.⁹¹ These appear to have already been in place when the revolt began again (or shortly thereafter), and were managed by the *mukhtars*, who were thus pressed into being eyes and ears of the state security services.⁹² The registers system was subsequently expanded to villages in other regions of the country known to be or suspected of being amenable to rebel cadres. Reliance on the *mukhtars* was not a sure-fire bet for the administration, and their cooperation remained far from uniform,⁹³ but in the early months of the revolt's rekindling, many were dissuaded from embracing the new insurrection.

The wavering attitude of northern *mukhtars* and villages owed not only to increased surveillance, punitive police posts, and residual hesitations regarding the rebels themselves and the economic and other costs of supporting them, but also to a tangible dose of repression. The state responded to the Dhahiriyyeh raid by imposing a £P 2000 fine on the village – a sum usually reserved for cities – which it collected through a seizure of its sheep. Some of its men were also bound over under the Prevention of Crimes Ordinance and required to report to the local police on a daily basis, and a number of rough searches were conducted in the region as the state sought

⁹¹ Notes of meeting with the Chief Secretary, 31.12.37, enclosure to Chief Secretary to IG-Police, 5.1.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

⁹² Ibid.; OAG to Colonial Secretary, 22.10.37, #491, PRO – FO 371/20817.

⁹³ Record of meeting on public security on 7.1.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

out al-Batat's band.⁹⁴ At Lydda the arsons at the airfield and wireless station elicited a manifold response: at least two houses were demolished in the city and in each of two neighboring villages, Quleh and Rantis; part of the city's unpaid collective fine from 1936 was reimposed (though the £P 250 sum was modest in comparison with the penalty on al-Dhahiriyyeh); Lydda was placed under 23 hour/day curfew for four days; and nearly 50 men were arrested.⁹⁵ The administration's response to the Dhahiriyyeh attack reportedly struck fear into villagers far and wide.⁹⁶ A month later the OAG reported to London that the steady effort to punish villages that "shelter[ed] malefactors" and disturbed the peace had resulted in a suppression campaign which he judged to be "drastic in the extreme," but "essential" for the sake of order.⁹⁷

Al-Hut relates that the first problem besetting the rebels' new organizing drive was the colonial state's intimidation of the *mukhtars* and the consequent diminishment of safe harbor, recruits, and supplies that this entailed.⁹⁸ Faced with this conundrum, the rebels in turn also pressured or even sought to eliminate uncooperative *mukhtars*.⁹⁹ At Tirat Haifa, for example, where a loyalist *mukhtar* had been assassinated in 1936, another *mukhtar* was shot for urging that the village remain closed to rebels.¹⁰⁰ Despite their occasional strong-arm tactics, the rebels were not immediately able to overcome the

⁹⁴ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 20.10.37, #484, PRO – CO 733/332/10; Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 113.

⁹⁵ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 19.10.37, #483, PRO – FO 371/20817; Narrative dispatch #2, OAG to Colonial Secretary, 23.10.37, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁹⁶ Survey, 15.10.37-28.10.37, CZA S/25 – 22437. This report contends that the punishment of Dhahiriyyeh boosted the ranks of those willing to inform on the rebels (whom it refers to as "terrorists") in a variety of regions, but this is gainsaid by the inability of the state to find adequate witnesses to press legal cases.

⁹⁷ OAG to Shuckburgh (CO), 21.11.37, CP 286 (37), PRO – CO 733/332/12.

⁹⁸ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 376; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 211.

⁹⁹ Ibid., both sources.

¹⁰⁰ Survey, 29.11.37[29.10.37]-12.11.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

unease of village leaders whose reluctance, along with the state's counter-measures, together reduced the induction of fighters in late 1937. Even old rebel havens were wary. Shaykh 'Atiya traveled through the Jenin subdistrict in late October seeking men, but his efforts yielded little.¹⁰¹ Indeed, he was almost captured and was compelled to retreat to Damascus.¹⁰² A similar tour by 'Izz al-Din al-Shawa in search of recruits and bases in the north also failed in early November.¹⁰³ In late October fighters around Acre proclaimed that they were the advance guard of *jihad*, but their call to arms didn't garner much interest, and on one occasion rebels recruiting in the area were forcibly turned out of a village.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, alongside 'Isa al-Batat's force operating in the environs of Hebron and Jerusalem, the first bands of the renewed revolt were mostly based in the north, and consisted of small groups of fighters, 15-30 in number.¹⁰⁵ They were headed by and large by *Qassamiyun* and veteran commanders from 1936,¹⁰⁶ and despite the rough start in finding their footing and igniting a mass revolt, they quickly returned to action. Some of the earliest assaults after the October spike took place not in Palestine but in Transjordan at Irbid and 'Ajlun (adjacent to the Beisan subdistrict) on government

¹⁰¹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.11.37, resume of operations (October 1937), PRO – Air 5/1247.; Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 255.

¹⁰² ADC-Nablus, Secret: Note on recent terrorist activity in the Samaria division, 24.12.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

¹⁰³ Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 255.

¹⁰⁴ CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 2-3, PRO – CO 733/370/9.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 377. JA intelligence corroborates these figures. In mid-November a band at Acre was reported to consist of 14-20 men, while the headcount of another near Yoque'am and the tiny Arab village of Qira, on the Western edge of the Marj Ibn 'Amir, was put at 10 (Survey, 12.11.37-18.11.37, CZA S/25 – 22227). Another band at Haifa reputedly consisted of 16 men while on the road linking Nahariya to the central highlands, a force of 30 men operated by early December (Survey, 3.12.37-9.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227).

¹⁰⁶ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 377.

buildings and other facilities. These attacks, officially presented as the likely handiwork of Palestinian exiles in Damascus, were followed by a local arrest wave and the stationing of TJFF forces in the region to try to cut off movement between Syria and Palestine via Transjordan.¹⁰⁷ The authorities attempted to seal the Northern border as well, which led to some early altercations with bands reorganizing in the region, such as at Fasuta, northwest of Safad, in mid-November.¹⁰⁸ Villages in the far north were searched the same month, including Fasuta, Mi'iliya, and Mayrun, and the JA's Arab Bureau assayed that the army soon tightened its grip over the area in December, erecting billets and intimidating villagers from giving rebels sanctuary.¹⁰⁹ Although these measures frustrated the rebels for the moment, their success was fleeting.

In part as a result of the security forces' pressure on the north and the central hills Syrians appear to have had a prominent place in the newly emergent bands, though their commanders were Palestinians.¹¹⁰ This was reputedly the case even for forces as far south as Hebron.¹¹¹ The extent of Syrian participation at this early stage in the new revolt is unclear, but in October they were reported to leave as rapidly as they came, after sizing up the inhospitable local atmosphere and conditions.¹¹² As the Syrians'

¹⁰⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.11.37, resume of operations (October 1937), PRO – Air 5/1247.

¹⁰⁸ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.12.37, resume of operations (November 1937), PRO – Air 5/1247; Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 61-62. Yasin relates an exaggerated account of the Fasuta battle in which some 12 British security forces are said to have perished.

¹⁰⁹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.12.37, resume of operations (November 1937), PRO – Air 5/1247; Survey, 10.12.37-16.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

¹¹⁰ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.12.37, resume of operations (November 1937), PRO – Air 5/1247; Survey, 29.11.37[29.10.37]-12.11.37, CZA S/25 – 22437; Survey, 19.11.37-25.11.37, CZA S/25 – 22227. These JA reports tally rumors and estimates of between 360 and 620 Syrians and persons entering via Syria. See also JA, "The Activities of the Mufti and his Associates in Syria," transmitted 7.1.38, PRO – FO 371/21873.

¹¹¹ Survey, 10.12.37-16.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

¹¹² Survey, 29.11.37 [29.10.37]-12.11.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

presence illustrates, in spite of the administration's best efforts the Northern border remained permeable. While the Syrians may have bolstered the foundering rebellion early on, and acted in obvious solidarity with the Palestinians, the new insurrection was unlikely to achieve critical mass without strong local support, as its field commanders were well aware.

To break the government's stranglehold over the villages the rebels needed to make loyalist or quietist behavior more dangerous and disreputable than aiding the rebels. For this reason the rebels devoted themselves to developing a vigorous network of rural informants, one of whose chief tasks was to ferret out and report on those collaborating with the British. Subhi Yasin, who served under the *Qassami* Mahmud Salem in the Shafa 'Amr region,¹¹³ writes that intelligence capacities were developed by each platoon – the smallest rebel fighting unit – meaning that it was an essential function of rebel organization. Probably with some embellishment Yasin refers to this capacity as an “intelligence service” (*mukhabarat*).¹¹⁴ Little precise detail exists on the bands' intelligence operations, though it is well-known that the rebels collected data on army movements and other critical information from villagers and other sources, including government employees. DC Keith-Roach later acknowledged the effectiveness of the rebel intelligence apparatus, describing it as “well organized, properly directed and backed up by public opinion.” Moreover, he pointedly contrasted it to the state's

¹¹³ On the platoon's exploits, see Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 64-70.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

intelligence, which suffered greatly as the rebels systematically eliminated known and even suspected informants.¹¹⁵

In late 1937 it appears that the bands were able to use their contacts within the villages to turn the tide back in their favor. Zionist intelligence reported that by mid-November the rebels had three or more contacts in each village who were handing over the names of fellow villagers working with the British, and especially those who were helping them arrest and detain rebels or rebel sympathizers.¹¹⁶ Whether this report exaggerates its scope, the solidification of the network, the existence of which is uncommented on in earlier reports, dampened collaboration¹¹⁷ and widened the rebels' room of maneuver. The consolidation of a widespread network of rebel intelligence – itself an early step towards the formation of a matrix of rebel institutions and institutional capacities – proved to be an important step in de-linking the villages from government control and reopening them to rebels.

As the bands prepared the ground for wider village participation and support, their movement was both dealt a blow and given a boost by the arrest, trial, and rapid execution of shaykh Farhan al-Sa'di. Farhan had played a key role in helping touch off the revolt in 1936 and in rekindling it in 1937. His career of resistance to the dual colonial order stretched back at least to the 1929 uprising, during which he organized a

¹¹⁵ Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 196. The DC-Jerusalem declaimed the government's intelligence capacity as "practically nil." This appears to be a somewhat uneven judgment, which is based not on a total void of information on the rebel formations and their activities, but on the general difficulty of obtaining timely and actionable intelligence.

¹¹⁶ Survey, 19.11.37-25.11.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.; Survey, 30.12.37-21.1.38, CZA S/25 – 22437. Perhaps the greatest evidence of this was the fact that after the arrest of Farhan al-Sa'di in late November (discussed below), there were no subsequent captures of rebels under arms (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 15.1.38, resume of operations (December 1937), PRO – Air 5/1247; and subsequent reports at PRO – Air 5/1248).

paramilitary band. Rounded up during the suppression, he served three years in Acre and Nur al-Shams prisons, after which he joined ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam’s underground.¹¹⁸ Described by ADC-Nablus Foot as “a fierce and fanatical old man, brave and ruthless,” the government had been seeking to apprehend him for over a year before he was captured in a surprise raid on his home village of Mazar in the Jenin subdistrict.¹¹⁹ He was then in his 80s and was “perceived by many to be the successor of ‘Iz[z] al-Din al-Qassam.”¹²⁰

The shaykh’s undoing stemmed from the murder of Rida ‘Abbushi, whose Jenin-based family was known for its links to the Istiqlal.¹²¹ As CID papers make clear, Rida was cooperating with the administration’s investigation into the Andrews assassination and was gathering information on shaykh Farhan’s role in the matter. He was well-placed to act as an informant because he was on good terms with many rebels.¹²² When shaykh Farhan got wind of Rida’s double dealing, he sent his men to seize him. After his capture, Rida was executed.¹²³ Along with the failed attempt on the life of Sulayman Tuqan on 12 December, the ‘Abbushi slaying stirred up the Nablus and Jenin areas.¹²⁴ The CID held that Rida was liquidated on Farhan’s orders, but Farhan’s nephew, Ahmad Muhammad al-Sa‘di, stated during interrogation that the shaykh was enraged by Rida’s killing, shouting at one of the perpetrators, As‘ad Khalil, “I did not tell you to do this, do

¹¹⁸ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 376.

¹¹⁹ Foot, *A Start in Freedom*, p. 49.

¹²⁰ Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, 214.

¹²¹ Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 254.

¹²² CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 11, PRO – CO 733/370/9.

¹²³ The most detailed account is given by one of the two gunmen who pulled the trigger on Rida. See Statement of Hussein M. Hussein Salameh [Husayn Muhammad Husayn Salameh], 20.12.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

¹²⁴ ADC-Nablus, Secret: Note on recent terrorist activity, 24.12.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

you want to make Fassad [*fasad*: corruption; a blood feud]?” and even threatening to kill him.¹²⁵ Farhan’s apprehensions proved prophetic: outraged at Rida’s killing, the ‘Abbushis became accomplices of the colonial state’s pursuit of the shaykh, and one of them provided the tip on Farhan’s whereabouts that led to the sting at Mazar.¹²⁶

To conceal the informant’s identity, Foot relates that all of the members of the informer’s village were bound over to report at the Jenin police station on a daily basis. Although the informant was killed within months of the shaykh’s demise, the collective deployment of the Prevention of Crimes statute on the whole village served its purpose.¹²⁷ After receiving the news of Farhan’s whereabouts, the ADC-Nablus surrounded Mazar with armored cars and, according to *Time* magazine, “threatened to wipe out the entire settlement” if he wasn’t given up.¹²⁸ Eliding this menacing detail, Foot’s memoirs describe finding the shaykh armed and hidden in a bin of corn (*durra*). Farhan was “dignified and calm” when he was taken at gunpoint and Foot claims that he pled the same day with Acting HC Battershill not to execute the long-sought after *Qassami*.¹²⁹ The intercession was to no avail; Farhan was captured on 22 November 1937, tried by the new military court system two days later, and executed at Acre prison on 27 November.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 12, PRO – CO 733/370/9; Statement of Ahmed Mohamed el Sa‘adi, 26.11.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

¹²⁶ Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 254; CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 12, PRO – CO 733/370/9.

¹²⁷ Foot, *A Start in Freedom*, p. 49-51.

¹²⁸ “Palestine: Acre Justice,” *Time*, 6.12.37.

¹²⁹ Foot, *A Start in Freedom*, p. 50-51. Palestinian calls for the sentence to be lowered, including a plea from Raghib al-Nashashibi, are noted in Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 214-15.

¹³⁰ *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p.10.

Shaykh Farhan was the first Palestinian to be tried under the military courts that were established on 10 November 1937.¹³¹ His speedy execution during the month of Ramadan, when capital punishment is forbidden by Islam, shocked the Arab public, as did the government's zeal in killing a man of Farhan's advanced age.¹³² The Palestine administration's haste in killing what Bayan al-Hut refers to as the "brain" (*'aql*) of the *Qassamiyun* gave the revolt a powerful new martyr figure, an image no doubt burnished by the shaykh's reputation as a stern, steadfast, devout, and uncompromising Muslim patriot.¹³³ Within days of Farhan's execution Akram Zu'aytir noted the founding of a large band calling itself *Ikhwan Farhan*, the Farhan Brotherhood. *Ikhwan Farhan* soon divided itself into three units based around Tiberias, Acre, and the regions between Shafa 'Amr and Acre.¹³⁴

Whether Farhan's killing was directly the inspiration for the uptick in the scale of rebel organization elsewhere is a matter for speculation,¹³⁵ but in December larger bands appeared in the triangle and the north. Zionist intelligence estimated that by early in the month some 200 fighters made their bases in mountain strongholds in the hinterlands of Nablus and Jenin. Unlike earlier formations, these men were locals, reputedly drawn from the countryside of Nablus and Umm al-Fahm.¹³⁶ 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad was pegged by both the administration and Zionist intelligence as head of the largest force, variously estimated at 50-80 rifles, which operated all over the triangle

¹³¹ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 139.

¹³² RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.12.37, resume of operations (November 1937), PRO – Air 5/1247.

¹³³ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 377.

¹³⁴ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 340, 342.

¹³⁵ Abu Gharbiyya notes that the execution was one of several factors that galvanized the renewed resistance (*Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 101).

¹³⁶ Survey, 3.12.37-9.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

and northwest to Ya‘bad and Umm al-Fahm.¹³⁷ ‘Abd al-Rahim came from a family with strong roots in the Tulkarm subdistrict, served in the Ottoman army in World War I, and then managed his family estate and became a grain and vegetable trader. By the time of the 1936 revolt he closed his business and staked everything on the uprising, during which he emerged as a top commander and served under Fawzi al-Qawuqji.¹³⁸ Doubtless his personal history, dedication, and selflessness helped him to become, according to ADC Foot, the most well-liked commander of the central region,¹³⁹ and eventually the paramount commander of the revolt, to the extent that such existed. In the Safad area, ‘Abdullah al-Asbah commanded a force of 30-60 men in December 1937 that included many Druze and Syrians.¹⁴⁰ Al-Asbah hailed from the village of al-Ja‘una, where the colony of Roshpina was established at the outset of Zionist settlement in 1882, and led the insurrection in the subdistrict until his death in the battle of Khirbat Rukhsun in 1938.¹⁴¹ Other commanders operating in the triangle and the north, such as Fawzi Rashid, ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq, Ibrahim ‘Amuri, Hamid Dawud, and the *Qassami* Yusuf Sa‘id Abu Durra, had smaller complements of fighters, and most were then considered by the colonial state to be second tier leaders.¹⁴²

During their phase of reestablishment the rebels did not engage in major battles with either the British or Zionist forces, and were liable, with the possible exception of

¹³⁷ Ibid.; Survey, 10.12.37-16.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227; ADC-Nablus, Secret: Note on recent terrorist activity, 24.12.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

¹³⁸ Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 255; Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, ft. 105, p. 256.

¹³⁹ ADC-Nablus, Secret: Note on recent terrorist activity, 24.12.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

¹⁴⁰ Surveys, 10.12.37-16.12.37 and 24.12.37-31.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

¹⁴¹ ‘Abbasi, *Safad fi ‘ahd al-intidab*, p. 221-22.

¹⁴² RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.12.37, resume of operations (November 1937), PRO – Air 5/1247; ADC-Nablus, Secret: Note on recent terrorist activity, 24.12.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

bands basing themselves in remote mountain redoubts, to keep on the move.¹⁴³ With the proliferation of police outposts in the north, the rebels were compelled to spend more time on self-preservation and the reconstitution of their ranks than on offensive operations.¹⁴⁴ The initial rebel reluctance to pursue combat may as well have had to do with unfulfilled promises of support and men made to field commanders by the CCJ.¹⁴⁵ According to one Zionist intelligence report in December ‘Izz al-Din al-Shawa also instructed the bands in-country to hold off on large-scale action until the outcome of the diplomatic efforts by the Arab states was clear.¹⁴⁶ This was a reference to either the newest rendition of secret negotiations between Palestinian Arab and Zionist leaders under the auspices of former Palestine Immigration Commissioner Albert Hyamson and Colonel S. Newcombe, and/or the ongoing shuttle diplomacy between the British, the French, and the Palestinian exiles by Nuri al-Sa‘id and Dr. ‘Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar, an ambitious Syrian politician opposed to his country’s National Bloc government.¹⁴⁷ As noted in the last chapter, the Peel Commission inquiry stimulated multiple sets of quiet talks from May 1937 onward, the terms of which strongly broke with the Palestinian national lines (i.e. accepting Jewish immigration in principle, but seeking its limitation) though they still never garnered the Zionist leadership’s approval.¹⁴⁸ If the

¹⁴³ Surveys, 3.12.37-9.12.37 and 10.12.37-16.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

¹⁴⁴ Survey, 10.12.37-16.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

¹⁴⁵ This is somewhat implied in both of the reports cited two footnotes above.

¹⁴⁶ Survey, 10.12.37-16.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

¹⁴⁷ See discussions in Cohen, “Secret Diplomacy,” p. 392-99; Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 101-06;

¹⁴⁸ The various schemes for resolving the Palestine conflict that were advanced in late 1937 by Hyamson and Newcombe on one hand, and Nuri Pasha and Shahbandar from a different direction, were effectively derailed in December when *Filastin* publicized the existence of secret Arab-Jewish negotiations and claimed that the Zionists had agreed to permanent minority status (Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 104). Ben-Gurion made short work of this erroneous claim, holding a press conference in Jerusalem at which he denounced the notion Jews remaining a minority (Cohen, “Secret Diplomacy,” p. 394). With the talks

field commanders took the idea of waiting on the secret talks seriously, they didn't do so for long.

In December rebel forces doubled their attacks against the military and police and nearly tripled the volume of assaults on Jewish transport.¹⁴⁹ The Acting High Commissioner cabled London that "terrorism" was persistent in Haifa, the Galilee and Jerusalem.¹⁵⁰ Beginning mid-month the pace of hostilities thickened, culminating in a series of bloody encounters, six of which involved the military and the RAF. On 16 December 'Abd al-Rahim and his forces clashed with security forces at Zayta in the Tulkarm subdistrict. According to Zionist intelligence the battle went badly for the rebels, with 11 killed and 'Abd al-Rahim himself injured.¹⁵¹ The next evening another skirmish occurred at al-Sha'b, near Acre. This time a modest rebel force of 20-30 only lost two of its men.¹⁵² The gathering force of the revolt was evident days later on 23 December when some 50-60 insurgents ambushed and engaged the TJFF for over five and a half hours between Sakhnin and 'Arrabeh. The battle sparked a *faza* that brought 200-300 villagers into the fray. The rebels recorded 18 deaths and though they inflicted no fatalities, they did knock two RAF planes out of commission.¹⁵³

thrown into the limelight, however inaccurately, and after the government backpedaled on partition in January 1938, the position shifted. The Arab negotiators, who were close to the mufti, reverted to the national lines by demanding a bar on immigration and retracting the limited but significant recognition of the Zionist enterprise they had previously extended. The about-face was communicated in the so-called Beirut proposal of January 1938, which killed the already stalemated negotiations (Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 105; Cohen, "Secret Diplomacy," p. 399-400).

¹⁴⁹ CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, appendix A, PRO – CO 733/370/9.

¹⁵⁰ HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.12.37, #565, PRO – CO 733/332/10.

¹⁵¹ Survey, 17.12.37-23.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22437. See also CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 4, PRO – CO 733/370/9.

¹⁵² RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 15.1.38, resume of operations (December 1937), PRO – Air 5/1247.

¹⁵³ Ibid.; Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining*, p. 141. Yasin notes another *faza* two weeks earlier during an encounter which he says began at al-Liyat in the Acre region where a British convoy was ambushed

The climax of the string of encounters in December 1937 came on 25 December, Christmas day. In ‘Amud valley, southwest of Safad, near the village of Yaquq, British forces engaged rebels that it had been hunting in the area. The military reported 29 Arab fighters killed in a punishing rout, which Gerber fittingly describes as “more like carnage than combat.” Having only lost two British personnel in the battle, the colonial authorities publicly claimed to have destroyed the band, whose remaining forces were “completely dispersed.” The subsequent failure to locate sizeable rebel contingents in the immediate aftermath only further confirmed this impression.¹⁵⁴

The state’s premature declaration of victory was based in part on a misconstrual of rebel tactics, including their skill at breaking into smaller units, temporarily going to ground, and later congregating at designated locations.¹⁵⁵ The rebels answered the colonial regime’s superior firepower and manpower with flexible formations whose ability to rapidly dissolve and disappear into their surroundings was, as in 1936, critical to their survival and longevity.¹⁵⁶ Similarly the government’s efforts to deprive the insurgents of village support also gave rise to false appearances. The area between Shafa ‘Amr and Tiberias and north to Acre had been the focus of TJFF searches for weeks before the battle on 23 December, including the zone between Sakhnin and

and then stretched for 15 kilometers along the road to Safad. The reinforcements came from area villages and, uncharacteristically, Yasin admits 8 rebels were killed (*al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 103). I have found no official mention of the episode.

¹⁵⁴ OAG to Colonial Secretary, 27.12.37, #581, PRO – CO 733/332/10; Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining*, p. 141; *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 10-11.

¹⁵⁵ This was not the only episode in which the government or the military wrongfully proclaimed to have vanquished rebel forces. After the Zayta battle, for instance, it boasted that ‘Abd al-Rahim had been put out of commission (CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 4, PRO – CO 733/370/9).

¹⁵⁶ The British were not the only party to misread the practice of battlefield dispersion. Ezra Danin, a pioneer of Zionist intelligence who worked with the Haganah, represented it as symptom of disunity, indiscipline and self-interested behavior (*Te ‘udot u-demuyot*, p. 84, ft. 172).

Maghar just days earlier.¹⁵⁷ That ferocious combat followed a steady flow of searches suggests that far from having closed the region off from supporting the bands, as some observers contended, rebel strength and local mobilization continued to grow despite the military's countermeasures.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, the insurrection in the Galilee blossomed – with growing evidence of village support, including through the practice of *faza* – in the teeth of the counterinsurgency.

The official image and trope of quietist peasants disinclined to insurrection was not easily abandoned.¹⁵⁹ Nonetheless Charles Tegart more accurately assayed the situation in mid-December when he asserted to HC Wauchope that the police were totally alienated from the rural population, and its contacts with the latter were correspondingly nil. Further, the state's much-prided "prestige," and with it its territorial sovereignty, were not universal. There existed villages and areas where mobile patrols could not enter, or in which they could not remain without being attacked.¹⁶⁰ To recoup the state's authority, it would have to overcome the disaffection stewing in the regions of central and northern Palestine where the rebels had sought to reconstitute their formations. General hostility to the colonial power served the rebel cause and could not be easily dissipated. Consequently, with Tegart as chief strategist, the authorities resorted to increasingly harsh and militarized tactics to try to break the supportive links between rebel fighters and the village milieu from which they derived their strength.

¹⁵⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 15.1.38, resume of operations (December 1937), PRO – Air 5/1247.

¹⁵⁸ E.g. Survey, 24.12.37-31.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

¹⁵⁹ E.g. HC to Colonial Undersecretary (Parkinson), 21.12.37, PRO – CO 733/332/12.

¹⁶⁰ Interview, HC w/ Charles Tegart and David Petrie, 17.12.37, enclosure to *ibid*.

Paralyzing the Palestine government: Jerusalem, Hebron and urban rebellion

As they had been in October 1937, the environs of Jerusalem and Hebron were significant centers of rebel activity. Hebron, which was slower to join the armed uprising in 1936, became the first urban center to be conquered (*muhtalla*), albeit fleetingly, by the rebel forces.¹⁶¹ In Jerusalem the authorities attributed a good deal of violence and rebel activity to what the CID dubbed “the Jerusalem organization,” which was closely tied to the mufti and acted as his proxy, but this view proved reductive; its suppression in March 1938 failed to quell the tide of local rebellion. In both of the southern mountain towns youth played a leading role and the interconnections between hinterlands and urban centers facilitated the revolt’s expansion.¹⁶²

Jerusalem gave rise to a number of rebel formations. Being al-Hajj Amin’s former seat of authority, it naturally became a focus of the exilic leadership. Upon his departure, the mufti deputed Hasan Abu al-Sa‘ud, a close ally and then official in the SMC, to act as the in-country head of the new revolt.¹⁶³ Abu al-Sa‘ud was regarded by the CID to have been a major figure in the “terrorism” that had afflicted Jerusalem in 1936, and in 1937 ensconced himself, as al-Hajj Amin had, in the *Haram al-sharif* compound.¹⁶⁴ He was joined by members of the Abu al-Sa‘ud and Husayni families, Talal and Sabri ‘Abdin, and a sprinkling of others who acted as the organization’s

¹⁶¹ Ma‘ali, *Dawr al-Khalil*, p. 102; Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 119. See below.

¹⁶² In his chronicle of the revolt Subhi Yasin decries the tendency to associate the strength of the rebellion in the Jerusalem and Hebron subdistricts with the politicians of the national movement and protests that too little is known about the history of local fighters (*al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 165). See also Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 102.

¹⁶³ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu‘assasat*, p. 378, ft. 147.

¹⁶⁴ CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 16-18, PRO – CO 733/370/9.

managers.¹⁶⁵ Its primary activity seems to have been to manage an assassination ring. Gunmen were hired for selected jobs through two intermediary figures, one in the city (Muhammad al-Barnawi, a former bodyguard for the mufti) and the other connected to the local villages (‘Abd al-Rahman Shahadi, a notable and scout leader from Lifta).¹⁶⁶ By early 1938 the mufti and the CCJ had a second network running in the surrounding villages through a group of shaykhs and scouts affiliated to the SMC which may have worked in conjunction with the Jerusalem organization.¹⁶⁷ Based in ‘Ayn Karim, Qalunya, Suba, Shu‘fat, Dayr Yasin, Bayt Ikhsa, Bayt Safafa, Lifta, and Ram, this rural network financially supported armed operations by bands, and was reported by Zionist intelligence to coordinate with the mufti via courier.¹⁶⁸

The host of SMC officials involved in the Jerusalem committee and the mobilization of SMC scouts in the suburban villages gave the impression that the Islamic bureaucracy had been coopted by the insurrectionists, which had long been the accusation of the Zionist movement. An audit conducted by DC-Galilee Kirkbride found that the SMC’s monies had not been diverted into rebel coffers,¹⁶⁹ though certainly a host of personnel silently or publicly defected and likely used their positions to aid the rebel cause after the final break between the mufti and the authorities in the summer of 1937. Along with the audit, the SMC was also successively purged of mufti

¹⁶⁵ According to the CID its other members were: Musa ‘Azrawi, Sa‘d al-Din [Abu] al-Sa‘ud, Muhi al-Din [Abu] al-Sa‘ud, Fayad al-Khadra, ‘Abdullah Nammar, ‘Umar Salim al-Husayni, Yusuf Ibn Jamil al-Husayni, and Ghalib al-Khalidi (CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 19, PRO – CO 733/370/9).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 19-20.

¹⁶⁷ A.H. Cohen to Shertok, 4.1.38 and Terror and its form of organization in the Jerusalem region, 18.2.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

¹⁶⁸ Terror and its form of organization in the Jerusalem region, 18.2.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

¹⁶⁹ The *majlisi* newspaper *al-Liwa*, recently restarted after months of government suppression, gloated in early January 1938 at this news (Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper*, p. 211-12).

loyalists, stripped of managing the *shari'a* courts, and subject to tightened government control, prising the institution away from its former master.

Jerusalem was also home to a number of bands aligned to the CCJ and the mufti, most famously that of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, who had earned a reputation for valor at the ill-fated battle of Khudr in 1936. The former member of *al-Jihad al-muqaddas* and employee of the Lands Department became the outstanding rebel commander in the subdistrict. 'Abd al-Qadir's participation helped to identify the Husaynis with the armed struggle and to palliate the common peasant view that elites were absent from the battlefield and sowers of schism and discord.¹⁷⁰ 'Abd al-Qadir is remembered as having embodied the national ideal of putting country before faction and was known for speaking to peasants in these terms, preaching against the divisiveness of narrow familial interests and for the necessity of serving the homeland (*watan*) first.¹⁷¹ In reality 'Abd al-Qadir was neither free of his family's pretensions for dominance nor did he entirely act the part of salt of the Earth for which he is commonly venerated. He was, however, deeply dedicated to the rebel cause, and played a key role in reorganizing the resistance in the Jerusalem hinterland in late 1937.¹⁷² Eventually he had at least eight subcommanders under his authority.¹⁷³ While 'Abd al-Qadir has gained the lion's share

¹⁷⁰ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 84-85.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁷² Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 101. Yasin's chronicle agrees on his authority and position, but places his emergence as regional commander in 1938 (*al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 166-67).

¹⁷³ This included 'Abd al-Ghani Haymur of the 'Arab al-'Ubaydiyya, Mahmud Idhim of 'Arab al-Sawahira, shaykh 'Isa Abu Qadum of the 'Arab al-Ta'amara, Jad'allah al-Khatib of Sur Bahir, Ahmad Jabir of al-'Araqub (Bethlehem), Muhammad 'Umar al-Nubani in the Ramallah region, and Khalil Manun and 'Isa al-Hamza of 'Ayn Karim (Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 101).

of attention within the Husayni family for this role, his relations, Safwat Yunis and Nafiz, also led a small force at Jericho by early 1938.¹⁷⁴

Although the authorities and Zionist intelligence each put great emphasis on the mufti's surrogates in the holy city, it boasted several other groupings, according to both Yasin and Abu Gharbiyya. Yasin depicts three units operating inside the city, ranging in size from three to 14 men, though this is likely an undercount. They received intelligence from police officer Jamil al-‘Asali and from journalists.¹⁷⁵ Some of these urban squads had connections to the mufti and the CCJ, at least in terms of acquiring weapons. Abu Gharbiyya relates a story in which 20-year old German explosives were procured through “Abu Majdi” al-Ja‘uni for use in an attack on a Jewish café frequented by CID men; the plan fizzled, however, when the explosives failed to work.¹⁷⁶ Neither Yasin nor Abu Gharbiyya describe the underground Jerusalem forces as being under the sway of the CCJ or the exiles.

Urban rebels, especially those in Jerusalem, were remarkably successful in rapidly altering the situation in the country and pushing the administration onto the defensive. By late November OAG Battershill reported to the home government that a campaign of murder was incapacitating the police, not least in the holy city.¹⁷⁷ Bomb throwing and assassination attempts became daily affairs in several areas of the

¹⁷⁴ A.H. Cohen to Shertok, 4.1.38, CZA S/25 – 22191. Safwat (at least) remained involved with the bands in the area later in the year (The terror around Jerusalem, 24.7.38, *ibid.*).

¹⁷⁵ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 169.

¹⁷⁶ *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 103-05.

¹⁷⁷ OAG to Shuckburgh, 25.11.37, CP 286 (37), PRO – CO 733/332/12. This included murders committed by Zionists from the Revisionist wing of the movement.

country.¹⁷⁸ Rebels allegedly issued orders for the executions of the Chief Justice (Trusted), Mr. Harris (member of the state's Executive Council), DC Kirkbride, and ADC Foot from the administration, and Acting IG Rice, officer Faraday, and Tegart from the security services. Some were given armed guards, but as the OAG underlined, in such an environment "no senior Government official can be said to be really safe." Struggling to make sense of the upsurge, Battershill first admitted that it was aimed at scuttling the approval of partition, but then lapsed into an Orientalist disquisition on the supposedly deficient ethics of Arabs who collectively "look upon murder as a justifiable and satisfactory weapon."¹⁷⁹

As during the general strike, Arabs working for the government who were not double agents for the rebels were targeted, as were notables and others who refused to support the renewal of the revolt. This was a general phenomenon, not limited to Jerusalem and Hebron. In Haifa two Arabs working for the police and prisons were killed in December, along with three others whose slayings were interpreted by the government as intended to silence and dissuade opposition to the revolt.¹⁸⁰ In the Nablus subdistrict Arab police and tax-collectors were repeatedly attacked.¹⁸¹ Overall in the last quarter of 1937 lethal assaults claimed twice as many Arab as Jewish lives, and almost no Britons.¹⁸² A violent test of loyalties was underway, which, combined with the return

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.; *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 9-10.

¹⁷⁹ OAG to Shuckburgh, 25.11.37, CP 286 (37), PRO – CO 733/332/12. After noting the political character of the rising, the OAG went on to "doubt whether any Arab really has any ethical feeling against murder."

¹⁸⁰ *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 10; HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.12.37, #565, PRO – CO 733/332/10.

¹⁸¹ ADC-Nablus, Secret: Note on recent terrorist activity, 24.12.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

¹⁸² CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, appendix A, PRO – CO 733/370/9.

to urban guerilla warfare by rebels, was aimed not primarily at score-settling or fratricide, but at flummoxing the administration and commanding the adherence of the public to the national-revolutionary standard. By some measures this initial lethal press worked well: Abu Gharbiyya records that in each urban center Arab police joined with rebel forces, not only in providing intelligence, but even in battles.¹⁸³ In the countryside the district officers were hamstrung for lack of protective services, crippling government functions.¹⁸⁴

While the rebellion struck at the colonial state's urban Achilles' heel – the predominant role of Arabs within the police force – rural attacks in the Jerusalem-Hebron corridor also ramped up. On 9 November five Jews including a supernumerary were killed near Kiryat 'Anavim, west of Jerusalem.¹⁸⁵ To its east, employees of the Jewish-owned potash company working in the Dead Sea area (under concession) had already suffered assaults.¹⁸⁶ Settlements were attacked, police and military harassed, and British and Jewish transportation, both in the Latrun salient and on the rail lines emanating from Lydda, soon became major targets.¹⁸⁷ By January 1938 Jewish transit along the Jaffa-Jerusalem road in particular was subjected to "constant attacks."¹⁸⁸ The government's answer to this development was to introduce the use of human shields. Expanding on the principles of collective guilt and responsibility, residents of five suspected villages over a 10 km stretch beginning with the suburb of Qastal and

¹⁸³ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 120.

¹⁸⁴ Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 196.

¹⁸⁵ *Report to the League of Nations*, 1937, p. 9.

¹⁸⁶ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.11.38, resume of operations (October 1937), PRO – Air 5/1247.

¹⁸⁷ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 101; *Report to the League of Nations*, 1937, p. 10.

¹⁸⁸ *Report to the League of Nations*, 1938, p. 6.

stretching seawards were forced, willy-nilly, to accompany patrols in the area.¹⁸⁹ The tactic accomplished its immediate aim and sniping on traffic in the Latrun corridor quickly fell off. Instead rebels turned to small-scale closer-range attacks.¹⁹⁰

Hebron was rapidly caught up in the resumption of the revolt. Like the notables of Jerusalem, the city's elites were sharply divided along factional lines, with many wishing to avoid the new round of conflict with the British and the inevitable toll this would bring. Members of the Islah Society, including the mufti of Hebron, Shaykh 'Abdullah Tahbub, advocated quiet and opposed the return to arms. In response, members of the organization were threatened in October 1937 and some had their houses shot up.¹⁹¹ Such rough treatment recurred over the succeeding months¹⁹² and bolstered at least a segment of the anti-revolt constituency within the city and its environs in its determination to make common cause with the government. No doubt this sentiment was amplified by the warning issued by the local district officer, 'Abdullah Qardus, that any recrudescence of anti-colonial rebellion would be met swiftly with fines and home demolitions.¹⁹³ When the city bucked at paying for a punitive police post assigned to it in late 1937, the much-hated police officer J.A.M. Faraday was dispatched with a large group of police to break the recalcitrance and gather the money required for the billet.¹⁹⁴ Nonetheless, by mid-January 1938 rebel sniping succeeded in all but clearing out police

¹⁸⁹ Record of a meeting on public security on 7.1.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3. Most accounts note the employment of human shields late in 1938 (Segev, *One Palestine Complete*, p. 425-26; Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 211), but it began earlier and by summer had become commonplace, at least in certain regions (see chapter 10).

¹⁹⁰ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 6.

¹⁹¹ Survey, 29.11.37[29.10.37]-12.11.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

¹⁹² CID bulletin, 245/37, 21.12.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 1.

¹⁹³ Survey, 29.11.37[29.10.37]-12.11.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

¹⁹⁴ Record of meeting on public security held on 7.1.38, p. 7, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

patrols from the city center and, according to Zionist intelligence, British officials in the city, fearing for their lives, demanded to be withdrawn to safer quarters and reputedly even threatened to quit the service short of their security concerns being met.¹⁹⁵ This followed the killing of a British archaeologist, J.L. Starkey, between Hebron and Bayt Jibrin, and the subsequent imposition of a collective fine on the city. ‘Isa al-Batat’s men, headquartered north of al-Dhahiriyyeh and drawn in significant measure from Bayt Jibrin, were responsible for the murder but managed to evade the series of aggressive searches that followed.¹⁹⁶ In one instance al-Batat was almost caught. At ‘Azzun the house he was staying at was hit with tear gas and, according to Abu Gharbiyya, while the owner tried to surrender and claim in a ruse that he was al-Batat’s prisoner, the latter made good his escape, possibly killing one of his British pursuers to boot.¹⁹⁷ Accounts differ, but his former host was subsequently killed by the authorities and a further revenge operation was conducted at nearby Halhul, where troops and police fired at random on its villagers.¹⁹⁸

As rebel action in the vicinity intensified many heads of prominent families proposed to compose a loyalist counter-rebel force that would aid the British authorities.¹⁹⁹ When DC Keith-Roach rebuffed their offer, stating that his preference was for Arabs to take up more pacific channels of exercising their “influence” against the insurrection, local elites asked for more police and planned to organize a pro-

¹⁹⁵ Political information of Arab activities, 17.1.38 and 17.1.38 (two separate reports), CZA S/25 – 22191.

¹⁹⁶ Ma‘ali, *Dawr al-Khalil*, p. 110; Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p.113; HC to Colonial Secretary, 28.1.38, #35, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

¹⁹⁷ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p.113-14.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.; Political information of Arab activities, 17.1.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

¹⁹⁹ Political information of Arab activities, 13.1.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

government youth club, using municipal funding, that would promote an end to the revolt on grounds of preserving general security.²⁰⁰ Notwithstanding local cooperation with the government, rebel forces multiplied in the region, including a new band under the command of ‘Abd al-Halim al-Jawlani, a young man in his twenties whose organization was initially comprised of city youth.²⁰¹ According to Arab sources, rebels briefly “occupied” the city in February 1938 before retreating to their strongholds.²⁰² Rebel sniping continued to pose a serious problem for the colonial authorities, which responded at the end of the month with a series of suppressive raids aimed at those with band contacts and those threatening Hebron’s mufti. Musa Yunis al-Husayni and ‘Abd al-Salam Zayad, a co-organizer with al-Jawlani, were both arrested and, among others, bound over under the Prevention of Crimes Ordinance, which temporarily quieted the city.²⁰³ As in the north, the appearance of having stifled the rebellion was deceptive, and in the spring the RAF listed al-Batat as one of the top four rebel commanders in the country, still based in the Hebron hinterlands.²⁰⁴

Al-Hajj Amin al-Husyni’s efforts to align the Jerusalem and Hebron regions under his authority was dealt a blow by the suppression of the so-called Jerusalem organization in early 1938. The CID had been in pursuit of Muhammad al-Burnawi, deemed by police to be the operations chief for the rebels in the *Haram*, and their

²⁰⁰ Political information of Arab activities, 17.1.38, CZA S/25 – 22191. They also demanded cancellation of the collective fine assigned to the city after the Starkey murder. Illustrating the government’s disdain even for Arabs cooperating with it, the High Commissioner reportedly offered the city a miserly £P 15 in relief money (Information on activity in Hebron, 23.2.38, CZA S/25 – 22191).

²⁰¹ Political information of Arab activities, 17.1.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 190. Al-Jawlani’s name is sometimes given as al-Jilani.

²⁰² Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 119; Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 358.

²⁰³ On the situation in Hebron, 28.2.38 and Information from Hebron, 11.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22191. Zayad was accused of threatening the Hebron mufti over the latter’s contacts with the government.

²⁰⁴ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.4.38, resume of operations (March 1938), PRO – Air 5/1248.

coincidental interrogation of a bathhouse attendant in late January 1938 helped to provided the break they needed. Over the subsequent two months more than 100 suspects were arrested in connection with the organization, including many gunmen. Members of the leadership committee exited the country as police efforts gathered steam. Another purge of SMC personnel was conducted, which pushed out Amin Bey al-Tamimi and 27 others in the courts and *waqf* departments who were judged to have connections to the organization, and the *Haram* compound's guards were replaced by police, signifying the reimposition of state authority over the site and its termination as a rebel haven. The precipitous decline in acts of "terror" in Jerusalem proper from January (17) to February (0) and March (5) was seen as evidence of the organization's former importance and of police success in disrupting it. As a parting shot, shaykh 'Arif Yunis al-Husayni, a vocal rival of al-Hajj Amin's from a branch of the family that was marginalized under the British, was nearly assassinated in late March for aiding the police, allegedly under orders from Sabri 'Abdin. But the Jerusalem organization, and with it the mufti network's primary leverage in the area, were rolled up.²⁰⁵

Counterinsurgency redux: from the military courts to the village reoccupation scheme

Given the immense unpopularity of official policy and the government among Palestinian Arabs, the colonial authorities faced a number of dilemmas in confronting

²⁰⁵ CID, Terrorism: 1936-37, p. 21-23, PRO – CO 733/370/9; Statement of Atiyeh Awad ['Atiya 'Awad, not to be confused with Shaykh 'Atiya], MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c. On shaykh 'Arif see Pappé, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 296; CID, Terrorism, *ibid.* p. 23; and *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 8. Of the leadership council, shaykh Hasan Abu al-Sa'ud, Musa 'Azrawi, Talal 'Abdin, and shaykh Sabri 'Abdin were thought to escape to Egypt while 'Umar Salim al-Husayni and al-Barnawi were believed to have gone to Syria.

the revived insurgency. Besides the turbulent state of the Arab police, the insufficient numbers of security forces in the country, and the problem of deficient intelligence collection, the colonial administration's fundamental capacity to act as an agent of legal order was impaired by its inability to bring rebels to book. Alienated by government, proper trials of rebel suspects or detainees were infeasible.²⁰⁶ In their stead were the coercive, blanket techniques of collective punishment that had come to characterize the state's counterinsurgency strategy in 1936. Yet as Horace Rumbold of the Peel Commission commented in mid-October 1937, the principal tools at the disposal of the state were inadequate and even self-defeating: blowing up houses and imposing large unpayable fines, which then resulted in property seizures, only stirred further resentment. As George Rendel, the Foreign Office's influential head of the Eastern Department, handily put it, absent adequate witnesses for trials, "all we can do is to carry out reprisals, which almost inevitably must fall on the innocent."²⁰⁷ High Commissioner Wauchope, who had authorized the reliance on collective punishments in 1936 while voicing significant misgivings about them (see chapter 7), sounded no such note of equivocation when the uprising returned. His unqualified if tacit endorsement of repressive methods was too late however, and as blame for Arab militancy was quickly laid at his feet, he was removed from office and replaced with a High Commissioner

²⁰⁶ Minute by Rendel, 21.10.37, on Note of discussion, Rumbold and R. [Vansittart], 20.10.37, PRO – FO 371/20817.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

who was ready and willing to act as the civilian face of an increasingly militarized regime.²⁰⁸

While collective punishments were ready at hand, and had been evaluated as among the most effective tools in the colonial administration's arsenal, officials never regarded them as a substitute for the courts. A state claiming to stand for "law and order" could hardly stand to have its legal machinery immobilized by the colonized population, much less during an insurgency. To remedy the situation, Defence Regulations were enacted which established a system of military courts in November 1937. Procedure at these courts, initially two in number, was cursory at best. Cross-examination of witnesses, for example, was routinely disallowed.²⁰⁹ The rights of the accused and the potential for their legal defense were greatly circumscribed, which was all the more significant given the draconian sentences with which the tribunals became associated. In the first round of regulations, promulgated with the courts' creation, "carrying" firearms, bombs, or even ammunition was made a capital offense.²¹⁰ With procedure reduced to a bare semblance of a civilian court, capital cases could be adjudicated in as little as an hour.²¹¹ Appeals went before the GOC and not the civil administration, which confirmed that the new courts were to act as an arm of the military apparatus.

Charges related to the possession of firearms and ammunition formed the mainstay of the new courts' dockets and illustrate a number of problematic dynamics

²⁰⁸ Wauchope was nicknamed "washout" by the army by the end of his tenure (Hughes, "The Banality of Brutality," p. 319).

²⁰⁹ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 115.

²¹⁰ *Report to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 13.

²¹¹ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 114.

inherent in the military tribunals' operations and in machinery of the Defence Regulations. For one, the regulations barring gun ownership licensed the presumption that anyone found with firearms was a rebel. Yet prior to the 1936 rebellion many Arabs had rifles and firearms for hunting or for personal and household defense, which were supposed to be regulated by the state.²¹² The general proscription enacted under the Defence Regulations thereby inadvertently blurred the boundaries between the general population and the insurgents, and cases were made against actors of marginal value to the revolt or who bore no relationship to it. In one search in Nazareth in early 1938, for example, an old man was taken to trial for possession of three bullets in an old coffee pot, for which he was sentenced initially to ten years in prison.²¹³ In a similar instance, an 85 year-old Hebron man was sentenced to five years for possession of gunpowder.²¹⁴

The severity of the sanctions around firearms rendered the regulations ripe for abuse. In the aforementioned search of Halhul when state forces were pursuing 'Isa al-Batat's men, soldiers discovered a resident who was playing dead, presumably to avoid detention. The accused was charged with firing on the army and taken to a military trial where, much to his bewilderment, he was framed, according to Abu Gharbiyya, who covered the case as a journalist. Although unable to produce a rifle, the prosecution clinched the peasant's execution a mere day later by introducing bullets that it claimed were found on his person.²¹⁵ As suggested by both Abu Gharbiyya and Matthew Hughes, who has studied the revolt's suppression extensively, planting bullets on a

²¹² *Survey of Palestine*, v. 2, p. 592; Hughes, "The Banality of Brutality," p. 318.

²¹³ Hughes, "The Banality of Brutality," p. 318. His sentence was subsequently lowered on appeal.

²¹⁴ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 375-76.

²¹⁵ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 114. Bahjat worked for *al-Jami'a al-Islamiyya* (ibid., p. 112-18).

captured suspect or detainee was a relatively simple and easy way to exact a measure of retribution.²¹⁶ Even with the bar for harsh sentences set low in the military courts, and with evidence tampering and frame-ups a lurking possibility, acquittals still occurred in sizable numbers.²¹⁷ When the courts failed to convict HMG's forces sometimes took matters into their own hands, executing the acquitted and claiming (illogically, given their release from legal custody) that the prisoners were shot while trying to escape. Incidents like this happened as early as December 1937, one month after the courts' debut.²¹⁸

Although the military courts were meant to add legal muscle to the suppression campaign, they became a rallying point for the rebellion, symbolizing the injustice of colonial rule. The trial of 10 members of the Shamallakh family from Gaza, captured during a failed smuggling incident in December 1937, for possession of a single pistol, produced one death sentence, seven life sentences, and lesser terms for minors involved. Far from intimidating the public, the verdict outraged it and youth in Gaza called for joining the rebellion and organizing weapons procurement.²¹⁹ When the death sentence passed in January 1938 on a 25-year old from al-Bu'ayneh near Nazareth, his funeral was said to attract a crowd of 5000.²²⁰ In the prisons and detention camps a common refrain which Ahmad al-Shuqayri heard was "O lord, free us so that we may join the

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 113-14; Hughes, "The Banality of Brutality," p. 318, 326.

²¹⁷ The acquittal rate for 1938 was just under 37 percent or 141 of 382 persons put up for trial (*Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 24).

²¹⁸ Hughes, "The Banality of Brutality," p. 347.

²¹⁹ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 115-16; Survey, 24.12.37-31.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

²²⁰ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 348.

revolution.”²²¹ HC Wauchope recognized by early 1938 that the military courts had lost their “shock and first effectiveness,” though he still contended they were not without some value.²²² More forthright was the judgment of the RAF weeks later that the courts had failed as a deterrent.²²³

More so than the military courts the Defence Regulations fundamentally altered the state’s relations with Arab society. The scope of the Defence Regulations (authorized under the 1937 Order-in-Council) was almost unlimited and gave colonial authorities immense power over all manner of questions concerned with the security of persons and property. The corpus of Defence regulations accumulated steadily, enhancing the state’s power while diminishing the sense that Arab colonial subjects had any substantive rights. In early March 1938, for instance, the circulation of printed matter without prior approval of the state censor’s office was forbidden, and all such publications banned, with the exception of newspapers, which were already subject to state controls and interference.²²⁴ Late in April another order gave the High Commissioner the power to declare eminent domain for the sake of the state’s suppression campaign.²²⁵ The trend towards official hostility on the part of the state deepened under the tenure of High Commissioner Wauchope’s successor, Harold MacMichael, former governor of Tanganyika. Upon taking office in March 1938, HC

²²¹ Al-Shuqayri, *Arba ‘un ‘aman*, p. 175, 177-78.

²²² HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.1.38, #36, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

²²³ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.2.38, resume of operations (January), PRO – Air 5/1248.

²²⁴ Defence (Amendment) Regulations 1938, #3, gazetted 2.3.38, PRO – FO 371/21870. It was internally explained that this regulation was designed in response to publications judged to be offensive and inaccurate, including but not limited to an Arabic translation of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and a pamphlet alleging Jewish plotting to conquer the *Haram* compound, that were coming into the country from abroad (HC to Colonial Secretary, 22.3.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4).

²²⁵ Defence (Amendment) Regulations 1938, #5, gazetted 27.4.38, PRO – FO 371/21870.

MacMichael lost no time in requesting (in concert with the GOC) that the Colonial Office approve the death penalty for persons unaffiliated with the state caught wearing official uniforms of any kind. Although the Colonial Office balked at the proposal, it approved, in no less drastic fashion, life imprisonment, illustrating the extreme measures that the imperial authorities were ready to take to reverse the situation.²²⁶

Where in 1936 the military had ostensibly buttressed the civil government and acted in conjunction with the police, during the second phase of the revolt this pretense was readily dropped and military forces quickly took the lead in the suppression campaign. Soldiers were empowered to act as police, to conduct searches and arrests, to kill anyone evading their authority or fleeing a search, and to use overwhelming force in their effort to flush out and extinguish the rebels, who were variously referred to as terrorists, bandits, “badhats” or through racialized slang like “oozlebart,”²²⁷ and epithets like “wog,” etc.²²⁸

Searches, which remained central to the counterinsurgency effort, quickly attained a rapacity seldom seen in 1936. One early episode occurred in November 1937 at Silwan, just south of Jerusalem’s Old City. Troops in pursuit of men who had killed two of their comrades were led by tracking dogs to the village, which they cordoned off and then brutalized. According to the official record of events one man was shot dead

²²⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 11.3.38, and Colonial Secretary to HC, 25.3.38, PRO – FO 371/21870.

²²⁷ “Oozlebart” and “oozabart” were corruptions of the Arabic *‘isabat* (guerilla bands).

²²⁸ Examples may be found in Naval reports at PRO – CO 733/366/4; Hughes, *The Banality of Brutality*,” p. 332. Hughes claims dubiously that the racism evinced by the soldiers and police was generally “casual,” contrasting it to the “racial hatred” of white settlers in Kenya and noting popular antipathy towards Jews as well (352). As with much of the rest of his argument concerning the limited, non-systemic nature of the “abuse” of Arabs during the counterinsurgency (353), and his conclusion that British methods were “relatively... humane and restrained” (354), this evaluation leaves much to be desired and downplays the role that racism played in dehumanizing the Palestinians. See the next chapter.

during the operation and another somehow fell off one of the steep cliffs upon which the village is perched.²²⁹ Arab accounts hold that at least five residents were killed and 70 hospitalized while houses were set ablaze.²³⁰ One military diary tells an even more sordid story, however, in which troops of the Black Watch, avenging their fallen friends, beat no less than 12 residents to death with rifle butts.²³¹ In an act typical of the period, the GOC then praised the purported restraint of the troops involved in the operation, who left behind them a punitive police post and bound over the male inhabitants.²³²

As is suggested in the Silwan case, the scale of violence employed during searches in the second phase of the revolt was in general quite considerable and indiscriminate, representing an intensified application of the proximity principle and notions of collective guilt. Searches were punitive and punctuated by spectacular violence, even when comparatively less lethal. The village of Ijzim, near Mt. Carmel, serves as an example. After sniping killed a British airman on 18 February 1938 on a nearby road, tracking dogs led authorities to believe the attackers originated in the village. A search party of police and troops was dispatched and the usual destruction of village foodstuffs, household items, and habitations was visited upon it, including two stone homes demolished at the entrance to the village. During the events the men of the village were rounded up and when one man feared that a sum of money on his person would be stolen by the search party he attempted to conceal it and in the process was killed for breaking the cordon around the village. According to villagers his head was

²²⁹ Hughes, *The Banality of Brutality*,” p. 346; Narrative dispatch #3, OAG to Colonial Secretary, 18.11.37, p. 13-14, PRO – CO 935/21.

²³⁰ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 106.

²³¹ Hughes, *The Banality of Brutality*,” p. 346.

²³² Ibid. For an official sanitized statement on the events at Silwan, see Narrative dispatch #3, cited above.

found smashed in and bayoneted such that it was reduced to “a great pool of blood and his scalp and his brain were scattered about outside his head.” The monetary damage done to the village was estimated at about £P 3000, affecting some 60 homes, not including the homes demolished. Additionally, however, the village’s entire livestock population of some 7-800 goats and sheep were taken as payment for a collective fine that was levied and a Qur’an was also alleged to have been desecrated. Locals attested to rampant theft by the search detail and when one woman complained to police inspector Cohen (Haifa) she was told to be grateful that she was still living. The official rendition of events transmitted to London was, needless to say, free of the eyewitness testimonies of police and military misconduct and brutality, and added for good measure that the Arab killed at the cordon had spent ammunition on his person, thereby insinuating his culpability for capital offenses. In the aftermath of the search many families left the village, clearly suspecting that more trouble was likely in store for it.²³³

The seizure of entire flocks of livestock for fines took place elsewhere, and by 1938 searches began to be accompanied by mass arrests.²³⁴ Statements of protest against the search regime lodged with the colonial authorities and the League of Nations by Arab parties such as the AWC decried the destruction of villages.²³⁵ HC Wauchope’s response in February 1938 was to say that their severity would lessen when the

²³³ Frances E. Newton, *Searchlight on Palestine: Fair-Play or Terrorist Methods?* (London: the Arab Centre, 1938), excerpted in *From Haven to Conquest*, p. 361-64; HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.2.38, #82, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

²³⁴ Jacob Norris, “Repression and Rebellion: Britain’s Response to the Arab Revolt in Palestine of 1936-1939,” *The Journal of Commonwealth and Imperial History* v. 36, n. 1 (2008), p. 33; Zu’aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 346. Adding insult to injury, villagers were sometimes offered the option of buying the livestock back from the state if they could afford to do so (Newton in *From Haven to Conquest*, p. 364).

²³⁵ AWC to Colonial Secretary and League of Nations, 17.2.38, PRO – CO 733/368/9.

“assassinations” wracking the country dissipated.²³⁶ As in 1936, some searches became occasions for humiliating Palestinians. At Kafr Manda in January 1938, after the killing of supernumerary police, male villagers were coated with oil, saddled with yokes, and made to plow fields in the area as if they were herd animals.²³⁷

With gruesome tales of events such as at Silwan and Ijzim circulating, it is little wonder that villagers in some areas slated for searches or military maneuvers elected to clear out ahead of time. Almost from the outset of the second phase of the revolt this was a tactic used by the rural population to protect itself from the depredations of security forces.²³⁸ Often, however, villagers fled in the aftermath of searches. In early February 1938, after a search of Umm al-Fahm turned into a notable battle (see below), some 2000 residents pulled up stakes and headed for nearby urban centers.²³⁹ In other instances villagers migrated to escape the financial burdens associated with the counterinsurgency. Ijzim is again a case in point, thanks to the documentation provided by Miss Francis Newton, a sympathetic British resident of Palestine who worked with the Arab Centre in London, an advocate for the Palestinian national movement.²⁴⁰ Within two months of the aforementioned search, the village was almost entirely depopulated, left a veritable ghost-town where only a handful of elderly infirm women remained, along with the *mukhtar* and the village school-teacher. The village had been hit with a punitive police post, the cost of which rose from £P 90 per month initially to £P 240 after the garrison had been increased to 40 men. Although Ijzim was one of the

²³⁶ Arab ladies' interview w/ HC, 5.2.38, PRO – CO 733/368/9.

²³⁷ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 348.

²³⁸ Survey, 30.12.37-21.1.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

²³⁹ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 354.

²⁴⁰ On Newton, see Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*.

largest villages in the Haifa subdistrict, locals saw these sums as prohibitively high. Unable or unwilling to pay, residents left for Haifa or nearby villages, or camped outside the village proper in makeshift shelters.²⁴¹

As most of the December battles had occurred in the north, villages in the Galilee were saddled with military billets that were shuffled around in early 1938 in order to deny the area to rebels.²⁴² The concentration of efforts there also reflected the mufti thesis and the idea that the revolt was, as Tegar put it, “almost entirely organized in Syria.”²⁴³ This was the Jewish Agency’s view as well. The JA reported to British authorities in January 1938 on Palestinian organizing in Syria and Lebanon by the CCJ and its contacts, portraying the *majlisi* exiles and their allies as the heart of a conspiracy in which the Syrian government was junior partner. Its report stated that the irregulars over which HMG’s forces had triumphed the previous month were Syrians, some of whom had made it home safely afterwards.²⁴⁴

Others dissented from the mufti thesis. The British Consul in Damascus, Gilbert MacKereth, argued that it was “tempting” to exaggerate “Syrian participation” in the rebellion. In place of a unified rebel machine, he suggested that three forces were to blame: the *Qassamiyun*, whom he depicted as xenophobic Jew-haters; youth from Palestine, Syria and Iraq who were part-time adventurers involved mostly in sniping

²⁴¹ Newton in *From Haven to Conquest*, p. 364-65. *Mukhtars* and other state employees like teachers were prohibited by regulation from leaving their places of employment.

²⁴² HC to Colonial Undersecretary (Parkinson), 3.1.38 and HC to Colonial Secretary, 28.1.38, #35, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

²⁴³ Memo on MacKereth talks with Tegar and Petrie, 11 and 12.1.37, enclosure to Damascus (MacKereth) to Foreign Secretary (Eden), 13.1.37, E 406/10/31, PRO – FO 371/21872.

²⁴⁴ JA, “The Activities of the Mufti and his Associates in Syria,” transmitted 7.1.38, PRO – FO 371/21873. The report also asserts that aside from 150 Syrians prepared at head to battle in Palestine, the Palestinian expatriates stopped recruiting Syrians after the 1937 defeats, in part because of their lack of knowledge of local geography, which was seen as a liability and also potentially as easing the detection of rebel forces.

actions; and bands composed of criminals and “starving peasants” assembled by Palestinian and non-Palestinian agitators. MacKereth’s suspicion of the mufti thesis derived from the fact that British intelligence services, including operatives in Syria from army intelligence, the RAF, and the CID, had failed to uncover any corroborating evidence that could lay the revolt at the exiles’ doorstep.²⁴⁵ DC Kirkbride soon added his doubts about the official narrative. Situated in the bosom of the ongoing counterinsurgency he communicated to his superiors on 28 February 1938: “However tired they may be of the losses and inconveniences which they suffer at the hands of the gangs and government forces, the Arab population as a whole is in sympathy with the rebels and even the notables who have been induced to cooperate with the Government do so with considerable mental reservations.” He urged that a political horizon was necessary to end the revolt and argued that the situation was ineluctably tied up with the question of policy and the fate of partition: so long as indeterminacy reigned, the insurrection would continue.²⁴⁶

Tegart was unwilling to countenance that the rebellion had popular roots. The rebels succeeded in cultivating regional bases for themselves by dedicated work, systematic intimidation, and collaborator killings.²⁴⁷ Somewhat contradictorily given his assessment that the rebellion was driven by coercion, Tegart came to conceptualize the countryside in dichotomous terms: villages were either rebel or loyalist, “good” or

²⁴⁵ Memo on MacKereth talks with Tegart and Petrie, 11 and 12.1.37, PRO – FO 371/21873.

²⁴⁶ DC-Galilee to Chief Secretary, 28.2.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

²⁴⁷ Tegart, memo: “Present Situation,” 3.5.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3. GOC Wavell differed somewhat on this point, depicting the six months under his tenure as studded with many successes, but equivocating and conceding thereafter that the military’s efforts had only dealt the insurgents temporary setbacks (GOC to War Secretary, 7.4.38, p. 6-11, PRO – CO 733/379/3).

“bad.” Reinterpreting and expanding on the state’s doctrine of the “collective responsibility” of villages he argued that a “bad” village need not actively aid in rebel actions; any village unwilling *or unable* to contribute to the colonial state’s intelligence and the pursuit of its quarry was fit for the designation.²⁴⁸

Believing that the revolt was directed by the exiles, Tegart’s first concerns were to sever the local rebel forces from their presumed masters to the north and to stem the flow of arms and monetary support entering the country. To this end – and short of the cooperation of Syrian and Lebanese authorities – he secured the doubling of the border police and the construction of an 80 km fence along the northern frontier.²⁴⁹ The technical aspects of sealing the borders proved daunting. On the Transjordanian front 70 fords crossed the Jordan river between Samakh and the Dead Sea.²⁵⁰ In the north, where the fence was contracted to Solel Boneh, the Histadrut’s construction arm, the project took months to get off the ground, and after it did, it was repeatedly subject to extensive sabotage.²⁵¹ DC Keith-Roach ridiculed the fence, which was projected to cost almost £P 200,000 before it was finished, and recounts that it was torn down by camels.²⁵² GOC Haining also jokingly referred to it as “Tegart’s folly” though admitting that it nonetheless was useful in impeding smuggling.²⁵³

²⁴⁸ Tegart, “Collective responsibility of villages,” 4.4.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

²⁴⁹ Note of meeting w/ Chief Secretary, 31.12.37, enclosure to Chief Secretary to IG-Police, 5.1.38, and Record of a meeting on public security held on 7.1.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

²⁵⁰ Tegart, no heading, n.d. [late April 1938], MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4.

²⁵¹ Ibid.; D. Hacothen to Tegart, 22.7.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4.

²⁵² Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 191; HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.6.38, #304, PRO – CO 733/367/1. Darwaza says the final cost of the fence was closer to £P 500,000 (*Hawla al-haraka*, p. 210).

²⁵³ Memorandum by Colonial Secretary, 24.8.38, p. 3, CP 193 (38), PRO – CAB 24/278.

Intertwined with the prophylactic operations in the north and the Beisan valley, and more generally with the question of shaping an offensive strategy to counter the rebels, was the need to attain an adequate force size and structure. By late 1937 the military command had created 11 mobile infantry columns of roughly 100 men each, seven of which were based in the north, but army contingents were also tied down in the village reoccupations.²⁵⁴ Tegart wanted to free up the military units and replace them with police. To do so police numbers needed to be boosted. Tegart's answer to the shortfall in manpower was to recruit irregulars and enlarge the supernumerary rolls. Additionally, he fought successively to have the standards for enrollment dropped, ultimately pushing for the inclusion of "the illiterate tough type capable of fighting rural lawlessness by its own methods."²⁵⁵ As this description indicates, new additions to the Palestine "buffs" were to be multi-purpose, combining muscle with local insight into rebel methods and acting as eyes and ears in the village environment from which police had largely been cut off. From the rebels' perspective, the supernumeraries were composed of the dregs of Palestinian society and were often targeted to warn against collaboration.²⁵⁶

Tegart and his colleague David Petrie, former Director of Intelligence in India brought on temporary retainer to Palestine, also pushed in a lengthy report in January

²⁵⁴ GOC to War Secretary, 7.4.38, p. 6, PRO – CO 733/379/3; Note of meeting w/ Chief Secretary, 31.12.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

²⁵⁵ Note of meeting w/ Chief Secretary, 31.12.37, and Record of a meeting on public security on 7.1.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3; quote from the latter.

²⁵⁶ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 203; Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 100.

1938 for a series of further reforms to the Palestine police.²⁵⁷ One of their central proposals, which Tegart struggled for months to implement, was to create mobile striking units from the police that could complement the military and react with requisite quickness and agility to the guerilla tactics of the rebel bands and their allies. By late February 1938 four columns of mounted police had been formed, stationed at Jenin, Hebron, Salfit (Nablus subdistrict), and in the Galilee, but their numbers were short.²⁵⁸ Columns were soon added at Ya'bad (Jenin), 'Allar (Tulkarm), and Tubas (Nablus), implanting cavalry units into historical rebel strongholds.²⁵⁹ But by spring the new formations were still contending with organizational difficulties and were not fulfilling the role for which they were designed.²⁶⁰ Moreover, the dearth of intelligence remained a serious problem.

Tegart and Petrie contended that the intelligence issue owed primarily to dysfunction of the CID and initiated a major expansion of the service.²⁶¹ Beyond the CID's reorganization and the aforementioned supernumeraries, the real program for improving intelligence collection was off the books and consisted of torturing detainees. Among the methods employed were: beating (including with makeshift maces); sodomy with a pole; various forms of genital torture (pulling or beating testicles, etc.); attacking

²⁵⁷ Available at PRO – CO 733/383/1. See also the discussion in Gad Krozier, "From Dowbiggin to Tegart: revolutionary Change in the Colonial Police in Palestine during the 1930s," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* v. 32, n. 2 (2004), 115-33.

²⁵⁸ Note of a meeting at Nablus, 28.2.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3. See also Note of meeting w/ Chief Secretary, 31.12.37, and Record of a meeting on public security on 7.1.38, *ibid*.

²⁵⁹ Note of a meeting at Nablus, 6.4.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

²⁶⁰ Tegart, no heading, n.d. [late April 1938], MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4.

²⁶¹ See John Knight, "Securing Zion? Policing in British Palestine, 1917-39," *European Review of History* v. 18, n. 4 (2011), p. 531-32; Krozier, "From Dowbiggin to Tegart," p. 124-25. These suggestions included dividing the CID into nine sub-sections and pushing to get more qualified Arabic-speaking British personnel.

prisoners with dogs; waterboarding; mock executions including mock drownings in the sea (at Acre or Haifa); burning with oil, hot pokers, or setting clothes or substances attached to the body (e.g. straw) on fire; electric shocks; tearing out fingernails, hair, or facial hair; and urinating upon detainees.²⁶² ASP Riggs, who reputedly declared himself God to the prisoners suffering at his hands, and Arthur Giles, later head of the CID, were closely associated with administering the “third degree” methods, but Tegart stood behind the approach and cloaked it in the euphemism of “interrogation.”²⁶³ Taking place mostly at facilities in Jerusalem and Acre, the reliability of the information obtained through torture was, of course, suspect. Some detainees killed themselves rather than face the brutalization.²⁶⁴ Protests lodged by the AWC elicited denials on the part of the High Commissioner and the IG-Police, but Keith-Roach, irritated at the denigration of British honor, claims that he had the Jerusalem center, sited in the former Inspector General’s home, closed shortly after MacMichael took over in March 1938.²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, rampant torture continued.²⁶⁶

Tegart’s tactics for reshaping the battlefield failed to achieve their aims. The rebels proved far more malleable than the superior British forces they harried, and far more resilient than their foes expected. Neither searches and collective punishments nor

²⁶² Subhi al-Khadra to Akram Zu’aytir, 17.8.38, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 493-95; Hughes, “The Banality of Brutality,” p. 335.

²⁶³ Al-Khadra to Zu’aytir, 17.8.38, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 493-94; Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 191; Hughes, “The Banality of Brutality,” p. 331.

²⁶⁴ Al-Khadra to Zu’aytir, 17.8.38, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 494; Hughes, “The Banality of Brutality,” p. 331. Hughes notes that some prisoners defenestrated themselves.

²⁶⁵ Arab ladies’ interview w/ HC, 5.2.38, PRO – CO 733/368/9; Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 191.

²⁶⁶ Testimony procured under torture was later ruled inadmissible at military court, which led to some diminution in its use for legal purposes (see the afore-cited letter from al-Khadra to Zu’aytir). Torture remained common after MacMichael became High Commissioner. For instance, see Zu’aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 369, 372, 426, 445, 456, 503-04, 528, 547, for notations after 1 April 1938.

a string of costly losses to colonial security forces in the early months of 1938 (discussed below) throttled the revolt, the scale and pace of which began by April to approach the ferocity of events in 1936.²⁶⁷ The outgoing GOC, Lieutenant-General A. P. Wavell, pointed in April 1938 to a number of other problems plaguing the suppression campaign: “In the intervals between military operations on a large scale, which only have a temporary effect, there is little civil control of the disturbed areas, many of which are somewhat remote and inaccessible, especially in the winter.”²⁶⁸ Rather than shrinking, the revolt spread. The preservation of colonial law and order was, consequently, Tegart wrote, a “disheartening task,” and both Kirkbride and the ADC-Nablus were early to call for troop reinforcements.²⁶⁹

Confronted with a growing insurrection, Tegart was “anxious” to revamp the counterinsurgency and to “develop... [the state’s] attack on all fronts.”²⁷⁰ To remedy some of the problems highlighted by the GOC and to break the gathering force of the uprising Tegart advanced a new scheme, given effect in May. In the first phase of the plan roughly 20 of the most recalcitrant villages in the north and in Samaria were to be occupied by police and military contingents.²⁷¹ Around 22 new “static” police posts were then to be constructed, some in the villages being occupied. The network of

²⁶⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.5.38, resume of operations (April), PRO – Air 5/1248.

²⁶⁸ GOC to War Secretary, 7.4.38, p. 12, PRO – CO 733/379/3.

²⁶⁹ Tegart, memo: “Present Situation,” 3.5.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

²⁷⁰ Tegart, no heading, n.d. [late April 1938], MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4.

²⁷¹ Note of a conference at Force HQ, 10.5.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3. The initial list for the military was comprised of: Ya’bad, Quffin, Maythalun, Kafr Ra’i, Dayr al-Ghusun, Silat al-Dhahr, and Kafr Qaddum (in Samaria); and Mi’iliya, Sakhnin, Shafa ‘Amr, Saffuriya, Daliyat al-Karmil, al-Kafrin, Sabbarin, Umm al-Fahm, and ‘Ara (in the north); with police at Tarshiha, al-Rama, Majd al-Krum, Maghar (Bayt Jann), Jalbun, Qaqun, and Jayyus. In the final layout, Safad and Umm al-Fahm also received new military posts (Secret: Force Operation Order no. 1, 18.5.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3).

reoccupations and police posts would facilitate the restoration of the Palestine administration's authority in the regions in question and provide a launch pad for improving intelligence collection. Village registers would be established first in the reoccupied villages and then in the surrounding areas.²⁷² More importantly, the police and military presence was intended to protect informants and collaborators.²⁷³ The plan's real novelty, however, lay in its utilization of an obscure law to dragoon rural dwellers in the occupied zones into building access roads so that the state's security forces could more easily penetrate the remote areas frequented by rebel bands.²⁷⁴ This facet of the counterinsurgency, which continued on throughout its duration, was deemed essential to its prospects.²⁷⁵ Amid deepening economic depression, the road-building program would also double as a source of employment for *fellahin* who might otherwise be tempted to join the rebels.²⁷⁶ The RAF reported that the plan was put in motion with little resistance and was followed by a lull in major encounters in the affected areas.²⁷⁷ HC MacMichael claimed success for it, but in fact, as the administration's annual report

²⁷² Chief Secretary, 19.5.38, circular #59, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

²⁷³ Tegart, memo: "Present Situation," 3.5.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3; HC to Colonial Secretary, 25.5.38, #232, PRO – CO 733/367/1; Kolinsky, "The Collapse and Restoration," p. 156. In his memo Tegart noted that the authorities were "daily losing ground" in the struggle to protect informants and thereby obtain useful intelligence.

²⁷⁴ Tegart to Chief Secretary, 5.5.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3; Kolinsky, "The Collapse and Restoration," p. 156.

²⁷⁵ HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.6.38, #304, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

²⁷⁶ Tegart, memo: "Present Situation," 3.5.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3. Year-on-year seasonal unemployment was up among Arabs, and although citrus exports almost doubled from the 1935/36 season to 1937/38, trade difficulties with Europe were crippling the sector's profits. Jewish unemployment also grew by about 80% between December 1937 and July 1938 and, symbolic of the *yishuv*'s woes, the population of Tel Aviv declined for the first time ever (Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine*, p. 84).

²⁷⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 22.6.38, resume of operations (May), PRO – Air 5/1248.

makes clear, rebel activities continued to intensify month-on-month in May, June and beyond.²⁷⁸

Some sense of the colonial authorities' frustration that had built up at this point is perhaps apparent in a spate of harsh and even sadistic reprisals. After a successful rebel attack in April at 'Azzun, east of Qalqilya, in which six Arab police were killed and in which the village's cooperation was alleged, security forces destroyed its *diwans* and six homes, terrifying many residents into fleeing.²⁷⁹ At Tamra and al-Birwe in the Acre subdistrict twin encounters between rebel bands and state forces produced wildly discrepant accounts. The official version given by the RAF states that rebels assailing a search party at Tamra were repelled at great cost to the attackers, who lost 24 men; this was followed by a second round of combat at nearby al-Birwe the same night, where 14 more insurgents perished, along with one British serviceman. Palestinian sources tell a different story in which four villages in the vicinity were savaged for the attacks. During these reprisals Mandatory forces are said to have killed two women, four children, and eight peasants and shepherds.²⁸⁰ Adding to the bloody-mindedness of indiscriminate retaliations were further accusations that colonial forces mutilated the bodies of some fighters. Six men killed at Kafr Saba in late May during a search were reported by Arabs to suffer this fate; shortly afterwards further allegations were made in the Qalqilya

²⁷⁸ Narrative dispatch #8, HC to Colonial Secretary, 14.7.38, p. 38, PRO – CO 935/21; *Report to the League of Nations*, 1938, p. 9-10.

²⁷⁹ *Report to the League of Nations*, 1938, p. 8; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 387.

²⁸⁰ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 22.6.38, resume of operations (May), PRO – Air 5/1248; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 391, 397.

area.²⁸¹ Without prior concert or official endorsement, police and military forces' conduct came to embody the view, put forward by HC MacMichael in late May 1938, that "every Arab must be regarded as a potential enemy in certain eventualities."²⁸²

From the jaws of defeat: the rebel spring, 1938

In the early months of 1938 insurgents faced an uphill struggle. They had reconstituted a core of cadres, renewed their standing in certain areas of the country, rebuilt an intelligence network that allowed them to avoid ambush and hold the initiative in combat and, additionally, they were receiving money, supplies and men from the CCJ and allied bodies like the Palestine Defense Committees in Syria and Iraq. Still, a number of rebel bands had suffered stinging losses in December 1937 and the government was able to hit insurgents on the run in the Safad area hard. Its early reoccupation of areas of the Galilee, and intensified deployments of police and soldiers into areas of rebel activity also posed operational challenges. As noted, rebel forces not only endured these blows and maneuvered around the search operations and the expanding infrastructure of police posts and military camps, but expanded their ranks considerably over the remainder of the winter. Initially, the influx of fighters swelled the most prominent formations in size. From an estimate at the close of 1937 that all of the bands combined retained some 120 full-time fighters, Shaykh 'Atiya's band alone, believed to be the largest, was gauged in February 1938 to comprise anywhere from 120-

²⁸¹ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 396, 400. Zu'aytir notes the first incident as occurring at Miske, while the RAF report in the previous citation indicates it was at Kafr Saba, but links the encounter to a prior search at Miske.

²⁸² HC to Colonial Secretary, 25.5.38, #232, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

300 men.²⁸³ As had occurred in 1936, the agglomeration of rebel forces emboldened them, leading to larger engagements in which they were roundly defeated. In other instances their large footprint made them more easily detectable, much to their detriment. Taken together, the rebel ascent into the spring was punctuated by a series of bloody defeats that could have unwound the insurrection.

Large-scale battles in the first half of 1938 did not tend to go in the rebels' favor. The first major encounter of the year took place at Umm al-Fahm on the last day of January. Infantry that were sent to search and occupy the village were attacked by an estimated 80 rebel fighters led by Yusuf Hamdan, 'Ali al-Faris, and Yusuf Sa'id Abu Durra.²⁸⁴ The British were hard-pressed during the fighting, especially as a *faza* ' brought rebel strength to 200-300 men.²⁸⁵ Air power turned the tide against the rebel attackers, who lost some 20-30 of their number before making their retreat.²⁸⁶ In one of many such statements to come, the rebel communiqué issued afterwards inverted the casualty count and claimed that 35 members of the security forces perished in the confrontation. This may have had to do with misperception on the battlefield that their foes were hit harder than they were, but the pattern that followed suggests that victory was claimed to bolster support for the revolt and conceal the frightful costs born by

²⁸³ HC to Colonial Undersecretary (Parkinson), 30.12.37, PRO – CO 733/366/4; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.2.38, resume of operations (January 1938), PRO – Air 5/1248.

²⁸⁴ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.2.38, resume of operations (January 1938), PRO – Air 5/1248; Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 142-43. The first two men were regional subcommanders (ibid., p. 124-25); Abu Durra was on his way to being one of the second phase's most important rebel leaders.

²⁸⁵ GOC to War Secretary, 7.4.38, p. 8-9, PRO – CO 733/379/3; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.2.38, resume of operations (January 1938), PRO – Air 5/1248.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., both sources.

fighters.²⁸⁷ As noted above, the Umm al-Fahm engagement spurred a British sweep of the region that drove many peasants to flee their homes, but a lull in combat followed in February.²⁸⁸

In early March another large engagement occurred near the village of Yamun, west of Jenin. According to JA intelligence the ex-mufti is alleged to have ordered Shaykh ‘Atiya to greet the arrival of the new High Commissioner that month with a show of force.²⁸⁹ As the rebels had continued to amass larger concentrations of men in the Jenin subdistrict, a party under his command numbering some 200-400 men took the offensive and attacked soldiers who were hunting them.²⁹⁰ The battlefield stretched for over a mile and, according to the GOC, “only the indifferent shooting of the Arabs saved [British] troops from suffering heavy casualties.”²⁹¹ As at Umm al-Fahm the rebel assault was stymied – and the government’s ground forces again saved – by the RAF, which dropped 47 bombs on their antagonists during the blistering encounter. Rebel casualties were officially estimated between 50-70 men, half of whom were left behind on the battlefield – something fighters were loathe to do.²⁹² By rebel accounts, 9-10 full-

²⁸⁷ Survey, 16.2.38-3.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22437. A report similar to the communiqué reached Akram Zu‘aytir (*Yawmiyat*, p. 371). Years later the *mujahid* Subhi Yasin seems to have been unaware of the heavy damage inflicted upon the rebels during the battle, and gives an even larger toll of British lives lost in his chronicle (*al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 142-43).

²⁸⁸ GOC to War Secretary, 7.4.38, p. 9, PRO – CO 733/379/3; *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 6-7.

²⁸⁹ Survey, 10.3.38-16.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

²⁹⁰ This is according to British sources cited herein. Both Yasin and JA intelligence suggest that the rebels were actually caught in a surprise attack (*al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 141; Conversation w/ B.S. on 25.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22191).

²⁹¹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 22.3.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4; GOC to War Secretary, 7.4.38, p. 10, PRO – CO 733/379/3; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.4.38, resume of operations (March), PRO – Air 5/1248.

²⁹² GOC to War Secretary, 7.4.38, p. 10, PRO – CO 733/379/3; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.4.38, resume of operations (March), PRO – Air 5/1248; *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 7. Zionist intelligence reported that the British fired wildly and killed civilians as well, which may (or may not) have been a reference to reserve fighters among the dead (Survey, 10.3.38-16.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22437).

time fighters were killed along with 30 reserves.²⁹³ Shaykh ‘Atiya was himself among the dead. 16 fighters were also captured. The British somewhat miraculously only suffered a single death.²⁹⁴ Retreating guerillas were reportedly spared further evisceration after their encirclement by troops in hot pursuit was broken, but the circumstances of their escape are disputed. Yasin writes that Abu Durra, who took ‘Atiya’s place afterwards, was responsible for their rescue. A rather different version was given to Zionist intelligence by one of its informants, in which Rashid al-Hajj Muhammad (Rashid Bey), an officer of the TJFF and cousin of ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad, intentionally aided the rebels and saved them from certain destruction.²⁹⁵

Determined to press the attack, colonial forces concentrated their patrols on the Upper Galilee, where survivors from the battle of Yamun were thought to have headed. After a week contact was made with a large group of regional fighters, perhaps several hundred in number, who were awaiting a caravan of ammunition from Lebanon. The battle of Mt. Jarmaq, taking place near Buqay‘a and Suhmata, ensued. Surprised by the British forces, a rearguard of six rebels was left to impede the ground assault while the main body of the bands fled; all six men fell after what the GOC deemed to be “gallant and desperate resistance.” The combined air and ground attack also claimed the lives of

²⁹³ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 141-42; Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 374. Zu‘aytir does not mention the reserves tally. Unlike his account of Umm al-Fahm and many other battles, Yasin doesn’t shy away from recording Yamun as a disaster for the rebels, though to sweeten the bitter pill he adds that the revolt subsequently grew stronger in the area.

²⁹⁴ GOC to War Secretary, 7.4.38, p. 10, PRO – CO 733/379/3; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.4.38, resume of operations (March), PRO – Air 5/1248; *Report to the League of Nations*, 1938, p. 7.

²⁹⁵ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 141-42; Conversation w/ B.S. on 25.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

‘Abdullah al-Asbah, the most prominent Upper Galilee commander, and nine more men, for 16 total, while the British lost one soldier.²⁹⁶

In April and May the rebels broke into smaller units. One informant reported to the authorities that ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad split his group into seven parties of seven, each of which was responsible for recruiting up to 100 men as reserves. The other principal commanders in the triangle and the Beisan subdistrict, including Abu Durra and ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq, were reputed to have organized along similar lines, with small cores supplemented by substantially larger forces in combat.²⁹⁷ While the outgoing GOC tried to cast this development in a favorable light as indicative of the uprising’s weakness, in April the RAF began comparing conditions to 1936.²⁹⁸ At about the same time the rebels scored some qualified military successes, particularly around Beisan and the upper Galilee. On 6 April a party of 80 insurgents clashed with security forces in the Besian region and only lost a single man.²⁹⁹ Mid-month a rebel ambush near the new colony of Hanita in the Upper Galilee killed four settlers. As a frontier post of Zionism deep in Arab territory – on land that was allotted to the Jewish state in the Peel partition plan – Tegart believed that the settlement and the new colonization drive that it represented were spurs to rebellion in the area.³⁰⁰ Indeed, the intrusion of Jewish settlers into the heart of the far north was harshly met by the local villages, and

²⁹⁶ GOC to War Secretary, 7.4.38, p. 11, PRO – CO 733/379/3; Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 119-121.

²⁹⁷ Gangs, Northern sector, n.d. MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

²⁹⁸ GOC to War Secretary, 7.4.38, p. 11, PRO – CO 733/379/3; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.5.38, resume of operations (April), PRO – Air 5/1248. The HC echoed the GOC’s spin in Narrative dispatch #7, HC to Colonial Secretary, 14.4.38, p. 33, PRO – CO 935/21.

²⁹⁹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.5.38, resume of operations (April), PRO – Air 5/1248.

³⁰⁰ HC to Colonial Secretary, 16.4.38, #181, PRO – CO 733/366/4; Tegart, no heading, n.d. [late April 1938], MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4.

rebel forces attacked Hanita on the night of its establishment in late March, killing two. For Zionism, however, Hanita helped crystallize a new orientation. Built with the aid of the Haganah's new field squads (the FOSH), the colony and its bitter history embodied the turn towards a more militaristic conception for the Zionist ethos.³⁰¹ At the end of April up to 200 fighters mounted another assault on the Beisan police station, killing one policeman before falling back. There were no confirmed rebel casualties in the incident. Afterwards the government imposed a £P 500 fine and destroyed a number of houses.³⁰² Rebel attacks on British and Jewish road traffic also increased and became more deadly. In one April encounter six Jews were killed on the Acre-Safad road, which had been closed by curfew order precisely because of band influence and sniping in the area.³⁰³ Sabotage of railroads, the oil pipeline, public infrastructure and Jewish property grew markedly in the spring, with increasing signs of professional and sophisticated techniques employed against industrial targets.³⁰⁴

As Gerber has noted, with the changing of the seasons the government grew more intent on decapitating the insurgency by capturing or killing its principal field commanders, who, after the deaths of Shaykh 'Atiya and al-Asbah, were identified as 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad, Abu Durra, 'Arif 'Abd al-Raziq, and 'Isa al-

³⁰¹ Shapira, *Land and Power*, p. 253-54. Repeated attacks on Hanita claimed at least 10 settlers' lives (Bein, *Return to the Soil*, p. 488).

³⁰² RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.5.38, resume of operations (April), PRO – Air 5/1248; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 380.

³⁰³ HC to Colonial Secretary, 14.4.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

³⁰⁴ See telegrams from the HC to the Colonial Secretary in PRO – CO 733/366/4. One former rebel turned informant, Mustafa Hindawiyya, told police that Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir's men, for instance, conducted their demolition operations with considerable care, boring holes in stone when necessary to place explosive charges more effectively (Statement of Mustafa Khalil Hindawieh, 3.3.38, p. 14, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c).

Batat.³⁰⁵ Search parties combed the triangle with greater frequency and intensity but they were mostly given the slip by rebels, who sometimes decamped only hours before the arrival of troops.³⁰⁶ On some occasions the authorities came close to apprehending the leaders. Such an outcome was allegedly forestalled in Abu Kamal's case at 'Unayza where he was shielded by his double-agent cousin Rashid Bey.³⁰⁷ On another occasion, at Kafr Ra'i, he is said to have hidden in a well during a search.³⁰⁸ Abu Durra and 'Abd al-Raziq also had close run-ins, breaking encirclements of villages where they were staying and eluding capture directly after firefights with soldiers and police.³⁰⁹ Although the leaders consistently escaped, it wasn't always without cost. While hunting 'Abd al-Rahim mid-April near Dayr al-Ghusun, a rebel bastion in the Tulkarm subdistrict, some of his men, possibly couriers, were picked up with caches of documents, giving the authorities a detailed first-hand view of his operations since November 1937.³¹⁰ During the same sweep an engagement occurred on the Nablus-Tulkarm road at a location dubbed "windy corner" in English. The RAF thought that the altercation was meant as a diversion to allow Abu Kamal to escape. In the event between 14 and 20 men were killed and a small number were captured, though civilians may have been among both groups.³¹¹

³⁰⁵ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.4.38, resume of operations (March), PRO – Air 5/1248; Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining*, p. 142. The authorities neglected to include Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir, who was a member of the CCJ and an active commander in the north at the time.

³⁰⁶ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 371; Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining*, p. 142.

³⁰⁷ Conversation w/ B.S. on 25.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

³⁰⁸ Statement of Mustafa Khalil Hindawieh, 3.3.38, p. 11, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

³⁰⁹ Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining*, p. 142.

³¹⁰ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.5.38, resume of operations (April), PRO – Air 5/1248; Tegart, memo: "Present Situation," 3.5.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

³¹¹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 23.5.38, resume of operations (April), PRO – Air 5/1248; Tegart, no heading, n.d. [late April], MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4; *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 8.

The government had more luck in the Hebron region, where sabotage raged and rebels had a good deal of local support.³¹² After being pushed out in March, insurgents penetrated into the city in April and successfully ambushed police on at least two occasions in May, killing several of their number.³¹³ ‘Isa al-Batat, the free-willed commander of the region was variously estimated to lead 25-60 men.³¹⁴ Before his demise he focused on raising funds for the insurrection and building local support for the rebellion.³¹⁵ Tegart noted that he studiously avoided the type of full-bore engagements that had been so costly elsewhere.³¹⁶ According to several accounts al-Batat was betrayed in early May, leading to his death in what HC MacMichael referred to as a “minor police affair.”³¹⁷ Information collected by the JA indicates that he was given up by one of his couriers and killed by police near Dawayimeh, whereas several Arab sources place his end in Bayt Jibrin, one of his strongholds.³¹⁸ Zu‘aytir’s diaries record that he was executed while sleeping and his body riddled full of bullets. Whatever the exact circumstances, the rebellion lost its third major commander in as many months.

The possibility that civilians were among the dead is amplified by reports reaching Zu‘aytir that prisoners taken during the battle were passers-by (*mara*) not fighters (*Yawmiyat*, p. 380). The RAF also noted the presence of unarmed persons, which was the cause of its suspicion. Zu‘aytir refers to the battle as taking place at Bal‘a, though official sources do not.

³¹² Tegart, no heading, n.d. [late April 1938], MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4.

³¹³ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 372; *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 9.

³¹⁴ Survey, 8.4.38-20.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; Tegart, no heading, n.d. [late April 1938], MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4.

³¹⁵ Survey, 8.4.38-20.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

³¹⁶ Tegart, no heading, n.d. [late April 1938], MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4.

³¹⁷ Accounts noting al-Batat's death was caused by an informant include: Information from Hebron, 11.5.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 183; Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 388. The JA report claimed that he was found with a hit list of Arab politicians on his person. The HC's report is in HC to Colonial Secretary, 9.5.38, #212, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

³¹⁸ Information from Hebron, 11.5.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 183; Ma‘ali, *Dawr al-Khalil*, p. 113.

Paradoxically, as the insurrection mushroomed from winter into the spring the rebels remained under pressure. Their funding, then reputedly mostly coming from abroad and not from Palestinian villages, was meager.³¹⁹ Promises and assurances of foreign Arab support netted little in reality.³²⁰ Ammunition was frequently in short supply and of quality so poor it was attributed with causing rebel losses.³²¹ During the government's push in April in the triangle the bands were forced to go to ground and disperse some of their men.³²² And of course, three pillars of the rebellion had fallen on the battlefield and rebel losses such as at Umm al-Fahm and Yamun were rumored to be dispiriting, even as rebel statements circulated about them covered up the extent of insurgent losses.³²³ The rebels first and abiding concern, above all of these issues, was to preserve and protect their vital links to the villages, from which they derived shelter, provisions, funds, intelligence, and recruits.

As discussed in chapter 8, the Peel Commission interregnum was an unstable period. Discontent with the British regime and its loyalty to Zionism was rife in Arab circles and among the public, but the political field, especially at the elite level, had scarcely ever been so divided. While the atmosphere grew more electric and incendiary after the partition recommendation was unveiled, the Opposition faction stood against a

³¹⁹ Evidence for modest funding and external origins of funds early in the second phase appear in a host of sources: Statement of Mustafa Khalil Hindawieh, 3.3.38, p. 16, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c; Letter from Jaffa, 12.5.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

³²⁰ MacKereth was relatively quick to dismiss Syrian assistance as long on talk and short on substance (Damascus (MacKereth) to Foreign Secretary, 5.2.38, PRO – FO 371/21873). In Iraq, fundraising for the rebellion and donations by parliamentarians amounted to a slender £P 1100 in the first five months of 1938 (Baghdad (Peterson) to Foreign Office, 4.6.38, PRO – FO 371/21877).

³²¹ Surveys, 8.4.38-20.4.38 and 3.6.38-9.6.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; Conversation w/ M.Q. from Nablus on 2.5.38, and Information from Tulkarm, 1.6.38 and 7.6.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; A.T. Widdows (WO) to Foreign Undersecretary, 19.5.38, PRO – FO 371/21876; Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining*, p. 142.

³²² Political information on Arab activities, 24.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

³²³ Survey, 4.3.38-10.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

return to arms and unlike during the 1936 uprising, no new national consensus emerged. The suppression of elements of the urban and activist leadership in early October 1937 and the *de facto* exiling of others only complicated the situation further. When the *Qassamiyun* and the other 1936 commanders took to the hills in late 1937 they did not have the same infrastructure of support in place. The absence of a hegemonic position in favor of rebellion left a more complicated terrain to negotiate. This was apparent in the tensions that accompanied rebel reorganization in areas at the heart of the previous insurrection. Events in the Tulkarm subdistrict are exemplary in this respect.

When the rebellion was rejoined in late 1937 some villages formerly disposed to the rebels opposed it or feared the colonial military's retribution. Long before Tegart's reoccupation scheme colonial authorities had their eyes on penetrating rebel areas like Jabal al-Mintar, the location of Bal'a and several other restive villages, and had created access roads so that they could not again so easily reprise the role of mountain redoubts that they played in 1936.³²⁴ In January 1938 rebels regrouped at Bal'a after being dispersed, probably indicating that at least some were involved in the December battles.

³²⁵ Uncharacteristically they received a cold reception at their *rendezvous* point, where locals threatened to inform on them, heaped them with abuse, and tried to again disperse them by breaking them into small groups that would be easy to disarm. One of Abu

³²⁴ Information about terror in the north, 21.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; al-Qawuqji, *Filastin fi mudhakkirat*, v. 2, p. 71, 73. Al-Qawuqji confuses GOCs Dill and Wavell and mentions no specific dates or places, but anxiously observes the road-building and military drilling in his old centers before the return of the revolt.

³²⁵ The following draws on two letters reprinted in *Te'udot u-demuyot*: 'Abdullah al-Hadir to unknown, 8.1.38 and 'Abdullah al-Hadir to 'Abd al-Qadir Yusuf 'Abd al-Hadi and three others, 9.1.38, p. 85-87. On the unrest at 'Allar see also Survey, 30.12.37-21.1.38, CZA S/25 – 22437. Al-Hadir later went on to lead as many as 200 men. Danin, it should be noted, highlights the competition between Bal'a and Dayr al-Ghusun, as part of the commonplace Zionist depiction of tribalist unruliness and familial factionalism seeping into and taking over the rebellion's organization and focus.

Kamal's couriers was also beaten and in no uncertain terms it was made known that his forces were not welcome. A local commander from the neighboring and rival village of Dayr al-Ghusun, 'Abdullah al-Hadir, wrote several plaintive letters to fellow captains on the situation. As villagers told al-Hadir, in their view the national leaders had fled the country and left it to be ruined by second-rate men. Infuriated, al-Hadir suggested in one letter that local notables be executed to send a message, or if this was not desirable, to set the record straight and correct the misperception that the public had been abandoned. The disastrous potential of the first option had already been revealed at nearby 'Allar, where rebel strong-arming had led to the death of a village leader. Al-Hadir himself on a visit there afterwards was nearly killed by residents who again tried to break the insurgents into easily disarmable groups, before sending them packing and closing the village to them.

As sources as disparate as former rebels and Charles Tegart attest, the challenge of reluctant or hostile villages was met – in part – with a coercive response.³²⁶ Informants and potential informants were rooted out without mercy, as were *mukhtars* and others who stood in the rebellion's path. Rebel intelligence tapped any and every source possible, including local notables. In Tulkarm, shortly after the incidents at Bal'a and 'Allar, they were asked to provide a list of informants and seem to have complied to some degree after threats.³²⁷ Logs kept by 'Abd al-Rahim's group (seized by the government in April) showed that the rebels assiduously tracked allies and enemies

³²⁶ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 376; Tegart, "Present situation," 3.5.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

³²⁷ Survey, 21.1.38-3.2.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

within the villages.³²⁸ The consequences of flouting them could be dear. When *mukhtars* acted against the bands they were sometimes assassinated. Beginning in March 1938 the government noted an uptick in killings of villagers and headmen: four *mukhtars* were killed in April and three more in May.³²⁹ Rebel defeats in engagements with the state also occasioned harsher relations with villagers. After almost being captured in April and after the “windy corner” battle led to much loss of life, Abu Kamal’s men executed several men deemed responsible. At Shwayka, where ‘Abd al-Rahim had been sheltering, the informant they ferreted out was killed with nine bullets shot symbolically through his mouth. More controversially, two other men were killed, one from Dayr al-Ghusun and one from Bal‘a, who locals claimed were innocent of passing information to the government. Their killing stirred discontent not only in light of the protestations of their innocence, but because, according to JA sources, there was no investigation preceding their killing.³³⁰

As in the killings above, there is little question that rebels sometimes resorted to brutish means to secure themselves. In another instance, when a shaykh of the Samara family objected to looting and disorder allegedly committed by the rebels in the Tulkarm region, going so far as to call for armed resistance to the bands, two members of the Samara family were taken hostage.³³¹ The severity of such methods and the overreach they often represented in villagers’ eyes no doubt form part of the background to the

³²⁸ Tegart, “Present situation,” 3.5.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

³²⁹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 7-9.

³³⁰ Letter from Hadera, 24.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Survey, 21.4.38-6.5.38, CZA S/25 – 22437. These sources do not indicate any dissent on the man murdered from Shwayka, only those from the other two villages.

³³¹ Terrorist activities in the north, 28.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

institutionalization of the rebellion through courts and other formalized or pseudo-formal apparatuses designed to regulate rebel interactions with the public. The need to assuage local discontents more peaceably quickly grew more urgent. After the *mukhtar* of Sunira was executed by ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq’s men in May local notables turned to the ADC-Nablus and asked for arms with which to defend themselves. The government obliged them and soon after its employees also received firearms training.³³²

The rebels didn’t just “strike[] ruthlessly” and operate ceaselessly, as Tegart put it. Struggling to grasp how the revolt had flourished despite the counterinsurgency measures in place, he favorably compared the stamina and determination of the bands to that of the state. In 1937 Abu Kamal and his associates gathered a force of 100 men in the Acre subdistrict and headed to the Tulkarm and Jenin regions, where opinion was divided and, according to ‘Abd al-Rahim’s papers, the majority were not disposed to the insurgency. Through perseverance, careful intelligence collection on local opinion in the villages, and the elimination of collaborators Abu Kamal and the other bands in the area turned the situation around, once again making the triangle the heartland of insurrection.³³³ What Tegart and the colonial state were incapable of seeing was that the spread and deepening of the revolt was a polyvalent process, reliant on local negotiation, trust-building, and the cultivation of beneficial relations with the Arab public as well as on an effective *mukhabarat* and the neutralization of collaboration.

The rebel resurgence in the triangle owed in no small respect to manifestations of solidarity and reciprocity on the part of insurgents. From early 1938 if not sooner,

³³² Conversation w/ M.Q. on 2.5.38, and Political information on Arab affairs, 20.5.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

³³³ Tegart, “Present situation,” 3.5.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

rebels aimed to foster supportive ties and capitalize on widespread political discontent to build the basis for a vibrant movement. To this end, when the bands began to amass sizeable forces late in the winter their commanders took a number of initiatives to prevent the fighting units, subcommanders and leadership from taking undue advantage of the rural population or trampling on local sensibilities. Some 700 men staging in the Jenin area in February, under the command of Shaykh ‘Atiya and possibly Abu Durra and others, used monies at their disposal, some likely provided by the CCJ, to purchase goods and services from area villages, rather than requisition them *gratis*.³³⁴ JA intelligence noted that they had an extensive network of spies monitoring the police and the military, so it stands to reason that like Abu Kamal, regional commanders probably kept careful tabs on the dispositions of the villages.³³⁵ The posture on provisioning established under the Jenin command was subsequently reinforced. Rebel commanders soon after issued a circular barring fundraising by coercion.³³⁶ Locally collected monies were to be obtained only through donation.

Rebel strictures on garnering local support undoubtedly reflected the depressed conditions prevailing in the countryside, but the care taken regarding these issues in early 1938 was also connected to a rise in theft and extortion. In some cases, probably the majority, opportunists used the political unrest as a cover and the name of the rebellion as a license for criminal activities. To some extent, however, the government also had a hand in the issue. In areas that it deemed rebel territory it ceased to pursue the

³³⁴ Survey, 16.2.38-3.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22437. See also: On the security situation in the Nablus and Jenin areas, 27.2.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

³³⁵ Survey, 16.2.38-3.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

³³⁶ Letter from Nablus, n.d. [March, it appears], CZA S/25 – 22191.

suppression of mundane crimes, leaving the population to be preyed upon.³³⁷ Moreover, to some degree it appears to have egged on the phenomenon or used *agents provocateurs*. One rebel communiqué condemning the rash of theft dissociated the revolt from such behavior and declared that some of the malefactors were employed by the secret police (the CID) “to weaken the ranks of the *umma*, bring about corruption within it and disfigure the movement of holy *jihad*.” It goes on to note that one extorter apprehended by the rebels was found with a police-issue pistol and with documents proving he had contacts with the same. The statement, issued by the “Leadership of the Arab Revolution,” called on the public to provide information on men masquerading as rebels and on acts of extortion.³³⁸ The CCJ issued a similar notice alerting the public to the presence of “deviants and mercenaries” working with the British and Zionism in an effort to “disfigure” the revolt. It broadcast that perpetrators would be punished severely and ill-gotten properties returned to rightful owners, while asking for all incidents to be reported to local rebels. It also affirmed, in line with practices on the ground in the Jenin area, that only voluntary financial aid to the revolt was legitimate.³³⁹ Another communiqué from in-country commanders directed specifically at the Nazareth region echoed the positions noted above while underscoring that the rebels, and not the government, were the sole proper authority through which to seek redress.³⁴⁰

³³⁷ Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 19, CZA S/25 – 22191.

³³⁸ Communiqué, Leadership of the Arab Revolution to the noble Arab nation, 1938, in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 614-15.

³³⁹ CCJ, notice and warning, n.d., in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 613-14.

³⁴⁰ Call of the High Command of the Palestinian Revolution for redoubling resistance efforts, and warning against the spread of criminals in the Northern District, 15.2.38, notice #2, in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 475.

In their rebuilding phase in early 1938 the rebels were eager to protect the revolt's image and disavow that it was guided by any but the highest aims and sublime service to the nation. As will be returned to below, the rebel courts were integral to this process and acted, however imperfectly, not only to protect the interests of the public, but also to discipline the rebels and regulate their conduct. Rebels abusing their authority, taking advantage of or harming the public, or otherwise sullyng the revolution's reputation were sanctioned in a variety of fashions. Two rebels who took mattresses without compensation were made an early example when they were expelled from the fighting ranks. The informant supplying this report to the JA added that this had a good effect on public opinion, illustrating that the rebels themselves were not untouchable.³⁴¹ In a more dramatic episode, a rebel officer who subsequently turned government informant, Mustafa Hindawiyya, was ejected from the rebellion after allegations of theft, attempted rape, and murder were made against him.³⁴² One of the pillars of Zionist intelligence, Reuven Zaslani (Shiloah), cynically interpreted this incident as a ploy to boost the stature of Shaykh 'Atiya.³⁴³ Such deprecation fails to take

³⁴¹ Letter from Nablus, n.d. [March, it appears], CZA S/25 – 22191.

³⁴² Information about terror in the north, 21.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Survey, 17.3.38-24.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22437. The second report states that Hindawiyya wasn't expelled, but had his rank reduced. Hindawiyya was an opportunist. He clearly sought to save himself from prosecution, repenting of his deeds with the insurgents and cooperating with the administration (as is suggested by the detailed 19 page record of his interrogation: Statement of Mustafa Khalil Hindawieh, 3.3.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c). He described himself as tired of the rigors of band life, but he was eager at the prospect of collecting rewards for turning in some of his former comrades (ibid., p. 4). His defection represented a blow to the rebels, because he had served under and traveled with numerous commanders, including Abu Durra, Mahmud Salem, Khalil Muhammad 'Isa, 'Abdullah al-Asbah, and Shaykh 'Atiya. Among the valuable data he provided were identities of a number of subcommanders, names of numerous villages frequented by the bands in the Jenin, Haifa, Nazareth, and Galilee regions, and some detail on rebel finances and troop strength. His account also provides insight into rebel operations and an inside account of some of the large December 1937 battles.

³⁴³ Information about terror in the north, 21.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

seriously that the in-country commanders were genuinely concerned to protect the Arab public, whose interests, as noted in chapter 7, they saw as inseparable from their own. Vigilance against ordinary criminality served this aim while at the same time upholding the integrity of the rebel cause and highlighting its purity as a national struggle whose partisans were expected to conduct themselves with rectitude.

Although numerous accounts have highlighted the revolt's more coercive or caustic dimensions, indications of its popular basis abound. The much-pressured *mukhtars*, who were liable to find themselves alternately put upon by the colonial state and the insurgents, occasionally joined the ranks of the stalwart, acting as organizers for the insurgency.³⁴⁴ They also resisted state efforts to use them as foils. After the battle of Yamun ADC Foot called the Jenin subdistrict *mukhtars* to a meeting at which he importuned them to prevent their villages, which he said accounted for 85 percent of rebel cadres, from acting as bases of insurrection. They rebuffed him and instead insisted that it was incumbent upon the government to accede to the demands of the rebels.³⁴⁵ Even Sulayman Tuqan, an ardent opponent of the revolt's second phase who placed great emphasis on the executions of *mukhtars* in bringing about a compliant and supportive climate for it in the triangle region, was compelled to admit in April that many government officers, including the village headmen, believed in the justness of the insurgent cause and sought to aid it. In a meeting with the DIG-CID he recommended a thorough purge of government roles in response.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ Survey 4.3.38-10.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; Letter from Jaffa, 12.5.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

³⁴⁵ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 375.

³⁴⁶ DIG-CID to IG-Police, 29.4.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

The rebellion's popularity was perhaps most evident in its swelling numbers. Sensitive to the power of public opinion, its leadership never admitted the insurgency's crushing defeats. Rather, its communiqués often inverted events, projecting the image of colonial forces on the run and Jewish colonies under siege, being beaten by the faithful, dedicated warriors of the uprising.³⁴⁷ These distortions were the product of strategic calculation: for the rebels to be victorious, morale and popular backing needed to be unshakeable and the sense of Arab triumph historic and impending. Nevertheless, it is far from clear that a more accurate depiction of events – one from sources that rebels would have trusted, rather than the government's accounts – would have made much difference. The dangers inherent in the armed struggle were evident to all and those who joined the bands were often quite courageous and self-sacrificing.³⁴⁸

In keeping with the patterns of 1936 and the sympathies of the *Qassami* and veteran commanders, the rebel cadres in the countryside were mostly drawn from the lower peasantry, the unemployed, and youth. The peasantariat and former peasants living in Haifa and elsewhere were natural constituencies to tap, alongside villagers.³⁴⁹ As economic conditions slid further, the incidence of hunger in Arab villages laid bare the fact that the insurgency was in part a movement of the poor and the destitute. JA intelligence reported that food insecurity and economic hardship increased the ranks of

³⁴⁷ E.g. Letter from Nablus, 25.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22191

³⁴⁸ *Remembering and Imagining*, p. 142. It is little surprise that youth recruited in the Haifa area were said to hold the understanding that they must be ready to lay down their lives for the struggle (Survey, 25.3.38-231.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22437).

³⁴⁹ Survey, 3.4.38-9.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

the bands,³⁵⁰ as the hungry and the unemployed added their numbers to the only force that was sympathetic to the underclasses and fighting for their salvation. Urban youth were also attracted to the rebel formations, both in the cities and in the rural sphere.³⁵¹

By the time of Tegart's reoccupation scheme in the spring, the rebellion was flourishing. Despite substantial losses in major engagements and notwithstanding the difficulties of negotiating safe harbor among an apprehensive and impoverished rural population, the insurgents had taken the initiative. Almost coincident with the roll-out of Tegart's plan, HC MacMichael telegraphed London that the entire country north of Tel Aviv "especially Nablus sub district and the whole of Galilee district is subject to domination by gangs composed of local and foreign elements which constantly commit outrages against life and property."³⁵² Illustrating its loss of control and its exasperation at rebel resilience, the Palestine government requested permission to use the RAF to bomb civilian homes without prior warning. This was supposedly to save the lives of troops who might otherwise be jeopardized, but the Air Ministry and War Office rejected the proposal.³⁵³

The rebels regained their momentum over the first half of 1938 through tactical malleability and by dissuading Arabs, on balance, from joining the state's counterinsurgency campaign. The government's plan to accentuate the role of Arab

³⁵⁰ Conversation w/ M.Q. in Nablus, 3.6.38, and Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 17, 20, CZA S/25 – 22191.

³⁵¹ Some accounts have discounted urban youth in the second period of the revolt, e.g. Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 195.

³⁵² HC to Colonial Secretary, 25.5.38, #232, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

³⁵³ Colonial Secretary to HC, 7.6.38, #224, PRO – FO 371/21870.

supernumerary police was an early source of both rebel and popular anxiety.³⁵⁴ As they had been before Andrews's assassination, Arab police loyal to the colonial government were high on the rebels' target list, but rebels also attempted to persuade their countrymen against standing in the path of the revolt. In likely the most resonant incident of its kind, rebels staged a dramatic capture of Arab supernumeraries at Suhmata in the Upper Galilee in late January. The operation was well-planned and well-executed. An estimated 40-50 men took nine supernumeraries hostage at the village, stripped them of their clothes, and then released eight of them. The commanding officer, a corporal from Safad who, ironically, had done a bid in prison for participation in the 1929 events, was executed.³⁵⁵ The message was clear: collaboration with the state would result in humiliation at the least and possibly death. Sparing the lives of eight of the men served as a warning to others not to follow their example while suggesting to those in the service that they could still resign and live.³⁵⁶ The rebels were thus able to appear judicious and merciful as well as skillful, disciplined and dedicated. The administration charged that villagers colluded with the rebels in the attack and took unspecified "punitive measures" in its aftermath.³⁵⁷ Rebels subsequently vacillated in their approach to the supernumeraries, on some occasions taking them hostage and

³⁵⁴ Surveys, 30.12.37-21.1.38 and 16.2.38-3.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

³⁵⁵ HC to Colonial Secretary, 5.2.38, #49, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

³⁵⁶ The olive branch extended by insurgents to Arabs on the police force had a curious echo in rebel messaging to HMG's forces. In his second communiqué Shaykh 'Atiya recounted an attack on a British convoy during which rebels from the Abu 'Ubayda and Khalid Ibn al-Walid platoons attempted to take a British soldier prisoner, but he drew on them and was killed. The inclusion of this detail seems to suggest that British troops should choose their fates in encounters with the rebels: either to surrender peaceably or to die in Palestine fighting the proud men of its independence movement. Communiqué #2 from the General Command of the Revolution, n.d., in *Watha'iq al-muqawama*, p. 616-17.

³⁵⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 5.2.38, #49, PRO – CO 733/366/4. Suhmata did provide a complement of fighters, some note of which appears in Hindawiyya's statement to the police (p. 5-6, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c).

seizing their arms while on others fighting them directly or executing captured men.

Demonstrations were conducted against supernumerary service and during the summer the government banned the press from announcing resignations from its ranks.³⁵⁸

As discussed above, state countermeasures and the conspicuousness of the large band formations by late winter led the rebels to break into smaller, more flexible units.

The use of smaller striking parties was a forte of the insurgents before the spring, but afterwards it was *de rigueur*.³⁵⁹ Strike parties hit police posts, police and military

patrols, and Jewish settlements with great and increasing regularity from March on.³⁶⁰

Although the official casualty counts for British and Arab police were quite low, smaller police posts were raided and/or destroyed with such frequency that eventually they were

abandoned for armored cruisers outfitted with machine guns and for newer fortress-like

police stations (built later in 1938) that became known as “Tegart forts.”³⁶¹ Rebels

organized daring incursions into the urban centers of Nablus, Hebron and Jenin in April

and mounted a number of other attacks the same month in which they took few

casualties and managed their exits more successfully.³⁶²

The arrival of the Woodhead Commission in Palestine in late April occasioned a show of rebel of strength. After the commission’s presence, which was officially kept

quiet, became known, a general strike was observed in Palestine’s Arab cities on 28

³⁵⁸ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 391, 405.

³⁵⁹ E.g. Statement of Mustafa Khalil Hindawieh, 3.3.38, p. 10-11, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

³⁶⁰ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 8-10.

³⁶¹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 11.6.38, #271, PRO – CO 733/366/4; Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 195-96. The former reported that between 12 January and 31 May 1938 the rebels killed three British and 19 Arab police and wounded seven and 24 respectively. Eight soldiers were killed and 21 wounded, along with nine Jewish police killed in action and 17 injured.

³⁶² Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 372-74; Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 119.

April. Curfew orders were issued in some locations, such as Jenin, but a spate of concerted assaults ensued. In Safad the police station was attacked, along with the TJFF, supernumeraries, and the Jewish quarter while outside the city military forces at Mt. Kan'an were targeted. At Nablus insurgents struck the military camp east of the city, police units to its west, and the Justice Department building inside as other bands hit security forces in three area villages. The ADC-Nablus threatened to impose a £P 5000 fine on the city and a group of villages, but when the Woodhead Commission visited a dozen days later, the city again struck, a bomb was hurled at the governor's mansion while its members were inside, and a battle erupted near the city's military base. Nazareth also struck and its students demonstrated when the commission brought its work there, and as Zu'aytir excitedly noted in his diaries, everywhere it went it was received similarly, with strikes and various protests.³⁶³ The *yishuv* was not immune to the upsurge, with at least 23 colonies assaulted in the first half of May, the largest engagement of which took place at Roshpina.³⁶⁴

The government's brand of military developmentalism ushered in by the village reoccupation plan in May pushed the rebels to further tactical adaptation and, unintentionally, helped bring the southern half of the country to a boil. The paving of roads into remote villages where rebels had sheltered presented them with a major predicament. They responded by opening a new front in their struggle, subjecting road-building camps, workers, and projects to a variety of harassment and attacks. From mid-May to early June Public Works Department camps were assaulted at Naqura, Baqa al-

³⁶³ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 382-83, 388-89, 390.

³⁶⁴ Terror in Israel ("the land"), May 1-15 [1938], CZA S/25 – 22191.

Sharqiyya, Marda, and Ya‘bad.³⁶⁵ Arab laborers engaged in road-building in the Tulkarm subdistrict were beaten up by rebels, but the reigning economic depression left many with few options but to work on PWD projects.³⁶⁶ When insurgents were unable to halt construction of the new roads they turned to a tactic that came to be among their most effective: mining. Particularly in the areas affected by the reoccupation scheme, and in the Gaza subdistrict, they set land mines on roads and tracks.³⁶⁷ So as to try to avoid harming the Arab public, notices were issued instructing it to avoid travel by road between certain hours, typically at night.³⁶⁸

Confronted with shrinking sanctuaries in the areas under permanent reoccupation, rebels reacted in a number of fashions. In general terms they amplified their reliance on guerilla warfare methods, making strong use of sniping, sabotage, ambushes, and what the administration described as “terrorism.”³⁶⁹ These tactics were employed everywhere the rebels had raised their banner, although RAF intelligence assayed a significant drop in activity in the reoccupied zones in June and July.³⁷⁰ Still, sabotage in particular raged in the summer months, a good deal of which was concentrated in the north against the frontier fence and in Beisan and the Marj Ibn ‘Amir against the oil pipeline. The latter was struck and damaged on 18 occasions in June.³⁷¹

While Tegart’s scheme temporarily put something of a damper on rebel activity in many

³⁶⁵ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 391, 399, 400.

³⁶⁶ The terror around Tulkarm, 19.6.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

³⁶⁷ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 10; Information from Nablus, 27.6.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

³⁶⁸ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 391; Information from Nablus, 27.6.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

³⁶⁹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 22.6.38, resume of operations (May), PRO – Air 5/1248.

³⁷⁰ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 14.7.38 and 10.8.38, resumes of operations for June and July, PRO – Air 5/1248.

³⁷¹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 10. The incidence of sabotage roughly doubled after mid-June. For a break-down with some detail on targets, see various telegrams from the HC to the Colonial Secretary tabulating weekly casualties and events at PRO – CO 733/366/4.

of their familiar venues, it also provided them with an opportunity. The increased deployment of police and troops into the Galilee and the triangle drained the southern half of the country of security personnel.³⁷² ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq was reported to be the first major commander to migrate and exploit the laxer security conditions there, but by July the movement of rebel forces southwards became more marked, leading to an upsurge of activity and new concentrations of rebel power in the Jerusalem and Jaffa subdistricts.³⁷³ The imbalance in security deployments, the growing danger to the colonial regime, and the increasing geographic spread of the Arab rebellion led HC MacMichael to call for troop reinforcements in June, a situation he had sought to avoid.³⁷⁴ Tegart’s reoccupation scheme thus bore pyrrhic fruit, as the southern portions of the country became major theaters of insurgency throughout the second half of 1938.³⁷⁵

Even in the reoccupied zones the rebels continued to display considerable bravado, repeatedly attacking military encampments in villages sympathetic to the revolt, such as at Silat al-Dhahr, Dayr al-Ghusun, Kafr Ra‘i, and Shafa ‘Amr.³⁷⁶ More cunningly, the rebels used their capacity for concealment to retain themselves in some of the very villages and towns where military and police garrisons were erected or fortified. In Qalqilya for instance, rebels secured themselves on the side of town opposite the military camp. Jewish representatives complained to the administration of this, charging

³⁷² HC to Colonial Secretary, 25.5.38, #232 and 13.6.38, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

³⁷³ Conversation w/ M.Q. in Nablus, 3.6.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 10.8.38 and 17.9.38, resumes of operations for July and August, PRO – Air 5/1248.

³⁷⁴ HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.6.38, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

³⁷⁵ The unintended consequences of Tegart’s plan have gone unmentioned in the literature which discusses it: Kolinsky, “The Collapse and Restoration,” p. 156; Norris, “Repression and Rebellion,” p. 33.

³⁷⁶ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 400, 402, 403.

that the insurgents were actually able to exercise authority, or even to rule over, as they put it, half of the town – in spite of the military’s basing on its grounds!³⁷⁷ Punitive police posts and military installations did not necessarily halt rebel recruiting in the villages they were emplaced in, and insurgent contacts within the police very likely aided their ability to keep close quarters with the security forces and remain undetected.³⁷⁸ This kind of surreptitious clawing-back on the part of the rebels, and their bypassing the counterinsurgency’s supposed repossession of insurgent territorial bases, presaged their subsequent urban offensive.

Rebel courts, insurgent sovereignty and the counter-state

James Gelvin has persuasively argued against the view that the rebellion in Palestine was reactive and purely negative in character. Comparing it with the 1919-20 mobilization in Syria against impending French rule he writes: “both movements served as moments in a process through which a significant portion of the population of the Fertile Crescent, facing a crisis the seriousness of which rendered conventional structures of authority ill-suited or ill-prepared, both reconceptualized their community and undertook its reconstitution.”³⁷⁹ As in the Syrian example that Gelvin has examined in depth, the project of social reformation entailed the development of novel institutions by the Palestinian Arabs. Likewise it necessitated efforts to extirpate the corrosive and debilitating influences of colonialism in their myriad forms and to uproot and replace its

³⁷⁷ Extracts from discussion on security, Jerusalem, 24.8.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4.

³⁷⁸ Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 17-18, CZA S/25 – 22191.

³⁷⁹ “The Other Arab Nationalism,” p. 241. See also his argument against employing Tilly’s notion of “reactive collective actions” to the revolts (p. 237-38).

institutions. It has been part and parcel of the argument advanced in this dissertation that the forging of rebel institutions, however protean and variable in quality, was both essential to the longevity of the rebel enterprise and constitutive of a process of state formation from below. Crowning the rebel institutional matrix – the counter-state in the making – were the rebel courts.

Mirroring accounts of the Great Revolt as a whole, the rebel (or revolutionary) courts have been greatly misunderstood and only recently became the subject of serious scrutiny.³⁸⁰ Older narratives have long depicted them more or less as hanging courts, the primary activity of which was sanctioning the execution of land sellers, informants, loyalist Arab police, and others standing in the way of the rebellion.³⁸¹ Porath, for instance, has highlighted their place in inducing an “atmosphere of fear” and intimidating “moderates.”³⁸² Their reliance on Islamic law and traditions has also been cited as a significant factor in shaping their brand of justice.³⁸³ Recent work by Musa has broadened the focus of discussion to include their role in adjudicating civil disputes as well as revolt-related concerns, noting that they were an agency of social justice for the oppressed. Nevertheless, Musa shares a good deal with the older view, underscoring that the courts’ punishments were extreme and disproportionate and that their procedure

³⁸⁰ Recent scholarship which engages them, in differing fashions, includes Nimr Sirhan and Mustafa Kabha, *Bashir Ibrahim: al-qadi wa al-tha'ir fi thawrat 1936-39* (Ramallah: Markaz Ghunnam lil-kumputir wa-l-khidmat al-ta'limiyya, 2000); Cohen, *Army of Shadows*; Ghandour, *A Discourse on Domination*; and Mustafa Kabha, “The Courts of the Palestinian Arab Revolt, 1936-39” in *Untold Histories of the Middle East: Recovering Voices from the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Amy Singer, Christoph K. Neumann, Selçuk Akşin Somel, eds., (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 197-213.

³⁸¹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 190, 248, 250; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 401-02.

³⁸² *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 190. The cited passage refers to al-Qawuqji’s court, but Porath’s discussion of the courts during the second phase essentially reiterates the same themes (p. 248, 250).

³⁸³ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 402; Kabha, “The Courts.”

was rough and reliant on vague evidence.³⁸⁴ Hillel Cohen also echoes the old view while qualifying it to contend that the courts wielded a “controlled violence” designed in significant measure to “grant the liquidations [of opponents of the rebellion] at least an appearance of judicial review.”³⁸⁵ The emphasis in these treatments is clear: the courts were mostly apparatuses of repression – crude and harsh in manner and barely, if at all, comparable to the judiciary of a normal state. This view of the courts’ importance is as mistaken as it is reductive.

There were four tiers of rebel courts. At the base of the system were village conciliation committees (*lijan al-sulh*), which strove to maintain the peace and mediate disputes at the most local level. The first proper revolutionary courts were the judicial arm of the rebel bands, with subcommanders as well commanders acting as judges. Alongside their judicial operations band leaders appointed “suitably educated” men or “dignitaries,” as one judge put it, to serve as district court magistrates. As suggested by the name, district courts typically operated within a select geographic zone. Above all of these bodies were what were called the High Court and the High Court of Appeals.³⁸⁶

Far from being a mere carapace masking lawless and unaccountable violence, the courts were a reasonably sophisticated set of institutions. They handled all manner of dispute resolution, local peacemaking, and civil and property questions as well as criminal affairs and the cases of those accused of betraying the rebellion or nationalist doxa. Though the courts network was variable from locale to locale and the quality of

³⁸⁴ *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 293-94. Older works do note the civil purview of the courts, but don’t give these much thought (e.g. Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 248).

³⁸⁵ *Army of Shadows*, p. 139. See also p. 137-40.

³⁸⁶ Kabha, “The Courts,” p. 200-01. Kabha refers to the High Court as the National Supreme Court. Some of the village committees played multiple roles closer to those of the 1936 National Committees.

justice was often dependent on their officers, together they formed a unified field of interlocking jurisdictions covering wide areas if not the entirety of the country. The courts' authority over persons and issues within their jurisdiction was universal and compulsory, and was effective enough that one British judge analogized them to the state courts.³⁸⁷ Their rough emulation of the authority and capacities of a sovereign power recalled the dynamic efforts of the youth trend after 1933 and the rebels in 1936 to displace the state's official institutions and replace them with Arab-centered alternatives. In other words, the revolutionary courts were an extension of the quest for popular sovereignty, and, as a vital component of the counter-state complex, contributed to the embodiment and enactment of a kind of tentative rebel sovereignty.

The respective purviews of the intermediate tiers of the system (the district courts and those of the bands) undoubtedly differed somewhat from region to region, changed over time, and were likely malleable and fluid. Bashir Ibrahim, a former district court judge from Zayta (Tulkarm subdistrict), relates that after their establishment, mundane affairs, factional disputes and land cases went before the district courts, whereas previously these issues had fallen on the shoulders of the commanders and subcommanders.³⁸⁸ More weighty issues, such as blood feuds and accusations of treachery or deviance from the nationalist norms (e.g. land dealing), were taken before band leaders or regional commanders, who also heard appeals arising from the district courts.³⁸⁹ The High Court's exact remit is unclear, though it took on troublesome cases

³⁸⁷ *Te'udot*, p. 28.

³⁸⁸ Kabha, "The Courts," p. 200; *Te'udot u-demuyot*, p. 28.

³⁸⁹ Kabha, "The Courts," p. 200.

and those in which local commanders and district judges were at odds.³⁹⁰ The High Court of Appeals was the least regular of the bodies. Composed of two regional commanders and four local judges, it met only infrequently.³⁹¹

The integrity of the courts was dependent on the judges, who were expected to be honest, just, righteous, and faithful to the revolution.³⁹² Many were shaykhs, imams, or other local leaders and men of stature; others were zealous patriots like Bashir Ibrahim, a young well-off platoon leader. Like the fighters themselves, the great majority were of rural origin. Judges based their rulings on tribal and customary law, *shari'a*, and accepted social conventions,³⁹³ but as there was no systematic rebel code of law or corpus of jurisprudence, they operated with a great deal of latitude and individual discretion. The conditions of the revolt and the spread of rebel authority over great swatches of the country simultaneously impressed an urgency upon their business and fueled a strong impulse towards pragmatism. Ultimately, the operations of the rebel court system were a highly personalized affair, greatly dependent on the disposition, expertise, and inclinations of individual magistrates.

As discussed in chapter 7, the rebel courts were first erected in 1936. They took a number of forms, from the court of the Nablus national committee to the shadowy revolutionary bodies that appeared in the triangle before al-Qawuqji arrived and

³⁹⁰ *Te'udot u-demuyot*, p. 27-28.

³⁹¹ Kabha, "The Courts," p. 201.

³⁹² *Te'udot u-demuyot*, p. 28; Sirhan and Kabha, *Bashir Ibrahim*, p. 9.

³⁹³ Kabha, "The Courts," p. 208. Although most scholarly discussions of and some contemporaneous reports on the courts note their Islamic inflection, according to data compiled by Porath and Kabha (*ibid.*, p. 206-07), few rebel judges had any formal legal training. This might well suggest an overall tendency to rely on customary law, social convention, and the magistrate's sense of the exigencies of the moment over *shari'a*.

established the most famous court. During the second phase of the revolt ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad became the first commander to reestablish a court. In a gesture aimed at promoting national unity, ‘Abd al-Rahim appointed ‘Abd al-Qadir Yusuf ‘Abd al-Hadi, a former Ottoman judge and associate of the Opposition to preside over what subsequently became the High Court.³⁹⁴ This court was soon joined by others. As disaffection with the Palestine government grew, and following the example of the rebel courts in 1936, elements of the public shunned the state courts and began to bring matters before the band leaders when the uprising recommenced in fall 1937.³⁹⁵ This taxed the energies and time of the commanders, whose primary vocation was military and not judicial. According to Danin’s foremost source on the courts, Wasif Kamal, Mamduh al-Sukhn, and one ‘Abd al-Shaykh then suggested that men known for their national and social credentials should be empowered as magistrates to handle the mounting load of cases and allow the commanders to turn their attentions back to the insurgency.³⁹⁶ This produced the district courts, which reputedly spread everywhere in the country.³⁹⁷

As Abu Gharbiyya relates, the spread of the courts tracked the geographic expansion of rebel power in the country.³⁹⁸ By summer 1938 they were increasingly represented to the public as emblematic of “an effective and independent administration” which aimed to replace and extinguish the colonial state.³⁹⁹ While action against

³⁹⁴ *Te‘udot u-demuyot*, p. 27-28; Kabha, “The Courts,” p. 200-01.

³⁹⁵ *Te‘udot u-demuyot*, p. 27; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 248.

³⁹⁶ *Te‘udot u-demuyot*, p. 27.

³⁹⁷ *Te‘udot u-demuyot*, p. 28.

³⁹⁸ *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 119. Al-Shuqayri intimates the same thing: *Arba‘un ‘aman*, p. 185.

³⁹⁹ Narrative dispatch #9, HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.9.38, p. 46, PRO – CO 935/21.

“deviants” (*khawarij*) and “traitors” has garnered the most attention, the courts served a host of purposes. At their most basic level, the courts were instruments for protecting and preserving public order in Arab society: fighting and punishing criminal and predatory behavior, upholding recognized principles of justice, and mediating disputes. This extended to the fighters and band leaders as well, whose conduct and authority were subject to court review. The ability of the nascent rebel judiciary to act as a check and balance on the rebel formations, though not always smooth in operation, undoubtedly boosted the credibility of the courts, the rebel formations and the counter-state.

As noted above, a subset of the rebels used their arms and the name of the revolt to take advantage of or abuse the public. For obvious reasons this posed a grave danger to the revolt and risked losing it critically needed rural support. Punishments meted out to violators of the public varied, but often included expulsion from the fighting ranks. One rebel broadsheet in early 1938 publicized that two men tried for stealing a horse from an Arab village were given a sentence of lashes and dismissed from service.⁴⁰⁰ One of Abu Kamal’s men found guilty of theft by Bashir Ibrahim was subjected to corporal punishment, expelled from the fighting ranks, had his weapons confiscated, and was exiled from his former area of operation for two years.⁴⁰¹ In another instance, two men who participated in a shakedown at Fundqumiyeh (Tulkarm subdistrict) were brought before a summary court headed by ‘Abd al-Rahim and ‘Abdullah Taha,⁴⁰² from

⁴⁰⁰ *Fata al-‘Arab* excerpts (in translation), 8.3.38 [sic], enclosure to HC to Colonial Secretary, 5.3.38, PRO – FO 371/21876. The judgment was reported to make a good impression on the public.

⁴⁰¹ Kabha, “The Courts,” p. 212.

⁴⁰² Danin held that Taha pilfered rebel funds for personal gain, a common and not particularly credible charge made by the Zionist movement against rebel leaders. More interestingly, Taha was an Opposition man closely tied to Hafiz Hamdallah, the pillar of the *mu‘arada* in Tulkarm (*Te‘udot u-demuyot*, p. 86, n.

Silat al-Dhahr. Both men admitted to being part of the group of perpetrators, but perhaps because they were each unarmed during the event, they were let off with a warning, and one of them, later apprehended by troops, was immediately tasked with transiting some of Abu Kamal's documents. (The fate of the other men involved in the incident, and whether they were rebels themselves, is unclear.)⁴⁰³

To underscore the presence and activity of the courts, and perhaps to subtly remind the partisans that the insurgent justice system applied at least theoretically to all of Arab society, some of the verdicts of various trials were published in rebel bulletins and newsletters. One issue of *al-Jihad*, a rebel newssheet, reported the discharge of 20 cases over the course of a week, while promising details of a particular trial in its subsequent issue.⁴⁰⁴ Judgments against fellow platoon heads and captains were also circulated among field commanders so that norms and standards of conduct were made transparent and known to all. This was perhaps done more concertedly after the primary field commanders formed the *Diwan*, or Office of the Arab Revolution, in summer 1938, to improve their coordination. For example, Sa'id Shuqayr, an important subcommander from Baytunya, west of Ramallah, was placed on temporary leave from duty after he was found guilty of collecting monies and food by force. He was put under watch of key southern commanders, first Hasan Salameh and then 'Abd al-Halim al-Jawlani, while on

178, and p. 101, n. 210). 'Abd al-Rahim's own association with and trust in Taha would again seem to suggest his particular effort to bridge the elite factional divide and bring the Opposition into the rebel fold.

⁴⁰³ Statement of Abdel Rahim Abdel Karim Dahud Abu Diak ['Abd al-Rahim 'Abd al-Karim Dawud Abu Diyak], 2.5.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

⁴⁰⁴ Reproduced in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 488-89. The issue, #4, was dated August 1938.

probation for half a month.⁴⁰⁵ Though the sentence was light, its circulation to other field officers was no doubt intended by the *Diwan* to signal that they meant to uphold certain standards (such as non-coercion in fundraising) and preserve the rebellion's good image.

According to Kabha's research, convictions for theft, domestic violence, and "moral transgression" usually netted corporal punishments like lashes or hard labor, the latter commonly consisting of building rebel fortifications or roadblocks, transporting rebel goods, or dismantling British roadblocks. Fines were also used as recompense for theft or other property crimes. Incarceration was comparatively rare and in cases of blood feuds, parties were sometimes exiled pending the conclusion of a *sulha* (truce).⁴⁰⁶

Zionist intelligence recognized in the summer of 1938 that the courts were playing an important role in cementing the authority of the rebels in the countryside. The courts were reputed to utilize Islamic law and, importantly, to provide a forum for the weak and the poor to stand up for themselves against the strong.⁴⁰⁷ Opinions were divided about their growing stature. 'Adil Zu'aytir wrote to his brother from Nablus that the rebels were too eager to exact harsh punishment and complained that the extension of rebel authority into civil matters and personal and family disputes was inappropriate and detracted from the movement.⁴⁰⁸ This critique has been noted and accepted by some contemporary scholars, who echo the idea that the field commanders overextended their

⁴⁰⁵ Verdict of Sa'id Shuqayr's trial, n.d., *Te'udot u-demuyot*, p. 22. Yasin names Shuqayr as one of five chief subcommanders in the mountain region between Ramallah and Hebron (*al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 167).

⁴⁰⁶ Kabha, "The Courts," p. 208-09.

⁴⁰⁷ Survey, 1.8.38-11.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁴⁰⁸ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 422.

authority and in effect, made themselves into a kind of new *zu'ama* (class of strongmen), distinctly rural and traditional in their outlook. They inserted themselves into the daily lives of the public through the courts and, while subverting the underlying social order and class hierarchy, aped the outward appearance of the old notables, for instance in dress and by riding on donkeys in public.⁴⁰⁹ As a report of the JA's Arab Bureau contends, however, it was precisely the courts' assertion of prerogative over civil disputes and financial suits that won the bands support as a *governing* force. By doing so the rebel formations "merged with the village way of life," as the analyst put it. In other words, they displayed a concern for the daily life of the common people and showed sympathy for the downtrodden masses.⁴¹⁰ The courts' exertions to preside over a novel and comprehensive legal sphere bolstered the revolt, but given the social inversions involved in elevating peasants and rural voices to judicial stations and in promoting the interests of the weak, they hardly met with universal acclaim.

The courts also acted to legitimate the spread of rebel authority by filling the void left by the progressive withdrawal of the Mandatory government from much of the country. While the administration expressed contempt for the restive Arab population by ignoring conventional crime (unrelated to the rebellion), by the time the insurgency reached its peak in summer and early fall 1938 this was no longer by choice. The rebellion had by then rendered most of the state's judiciary inoperable. Courts at Nazareth, Beersheba, and Bethlehem were destroyed by arson; only those at Jerusalem,

⁴⁰⁹ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 228, 293-94, 300.

⁴¹⁰ Survey, 12.8.38-18.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and Haifa remained open.⁴¹¹ In the liberated zones of the country, where the insurgents beat back the colonial state, the revolutionary courts symbolized the drive for popular sovereignty. As Akram Zu‘aytir put it, “In every area [under the sway] of the revolution, the people are critically examining [*yuraji ‘u*] all of their affairs and they’re making the courts the guide [by which] they are laying claim [to their future] [*wa-yaj ‘aluna mahakimaha marja ‘ taqadhiihim*].”⁴¹² Indeed as the High Commissioner observed, the rebels adduced the courts first and foremost when broadcasting their establishment of a revolutionary government in the summer.⁴¹³

To advance the rebel sovereignty project, the insurgent movement strove to sever linkages between the population and the colonial regime and to integrate the former firmly into the rebel sphere. Supplanting the state’s judicial system was part of this program.⁴¹⁴ Alongside a major push to expand the rebel courts, notices were circulated, such as one at Jaffa in September, which proclaimed that use of the state courts was banned and would result in punishment at the hands of the rebel authorities.⁴¹⁵ DC-Galilee Kirkbride wrote the same month, in a document captured by the rebels, that the mere appearance of an Arab not already known as a government opponent at any of its facilities put the individual under suspicion of informing and was liable to get them killed at a summary trial before a rebel court.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹¹ Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 56-57, PRO – CO 935/21; *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 96. Illustrating the decline of the state system, its caseload went increasingly into arrears although it diminished significantly over 1938 (ibid.).

⁴¹² *Yawmiyat*, p. 507. Abu Gharbiyya conveys the same sense in his memoir: *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 119.

⁴¹³ Narrative dispatch #9, HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.9.38, p. 46, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁴¹⁴ Survey, 1.8.38-11.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁴¹⁵ On the security situation in Jaffa and its environs, 5.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁴¹⁶ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 205-06.

Despite its disturbance of the class and status hierarchies of Arab society and the coarseness of justice often meted out to those found guilty of collaboration, the revolutionary justice system attained a truly impressive degree of public acceptance and recognition before the final months of 1938, when the rebels lost the upper hand in the country. This is evidenced by the mechanics of its operations with regard to investigations into spying and collaboration. In such cases suspects were apprehended by rebel parties and transported to trials under the courts, which themselves were often mobile affairs consisting of a judge, sometimes accompanied by one or more aides, and a corps of armed men.⁴¹⁷ HC MacMichael found it “most disturbing” that the accused submitted quite freely to such “abductions,” explaining that “the sufferers make no attempt to resist, or to disclose their identity and the circumstances in which they find themselves even when passing through control points at which cars conveying them have been searched by the police, or to dispute the authority of their abductors in any way.” For him, this “particularly noteworthy” development was “sufficiently indicative of the prestige enjoyed by the gangs.”⁴¹⁸ The no-nonsense reputation of the courts also worked to assure compliance in civil cases. In one instance recalled by Bashir Ibrahim, when the defendants in a property case initially refused his court’s jurisdiction, the young judge threatened to take them into custody and they quickly relented and cooperated with the proceedings.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ Sirhan and Kabha, *Bashir Ibrahim*, p. 22.

⁴¹⁸ Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 55, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁴¹⁹ Sirhan and Kabha, *Bashir Ibrahim*, p. 57-58.

Unlike the machinery of state bureaucracy, the revolutionary courts operated on simplified terms, and hence attained a reputation for efficiency and speed. Plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses all spoke for themselves, without attorneys or intermediaries.⁴²⁰ Verdicts were often handed down swiftly. In one instance noted by Darwaza, a Haifa woman that lodged a complaint about stolen jewelry was told flippantly by a state magistrate that he couldn't handle the affair with the rapidity of the rebel justices. She promptly turned to Yusuf Abu Durra, the commander of the region, and within a week, her jewelry had been restored to her.⁴²¹ The circulation of stories like this gave the rebel courts a folk appeal while signaling that they were effective institutions for resolving problems. This remained the case even as they absorbed an increasing stream of civil and other cases.⁴²²

While acting to integrate the Arab public into the institutional sphere of the counter-state, the courts were also used for more forceful delinking. Arab police and state employees were increasingly targeted for trials and investigations as the courts and the rebellion flourished. The quality of treatment varied though the aims were more or less uniform: to spread insurgent loyalties and to deter cooperation with the state and the counterinsurgency. For police especially the courts tended to be menacing. Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir, a major northern commander, captured three Arab policemen from Shafa 'Amr in early December 1937. According to Hindawiyya, they were brought to

⁴²⁰ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 216; Te 'udot u-demuyot, p. 27-28.

⁴²¹ Kabha, "The Courts," p. 202.

⁴²² The government's annual report noted that owing to a variety of circumstances the caseload and prosecutions dropped off "as the political situation deteriorated" (*Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 96). Conversely, Zionist intelligence recorded that the rebel courts were booming with business during the summer (Surveys, 1.8.38-11.8.38 and 25.8.38-2.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22437).

trial with the commander presiding. Two were executed and the third was released.⁴²³ After repeated targeting, the CCJ issued orders concerning the police at the outset of summer. Informants for the secret police and supernumeraries were to be killed; regular police were to be recruited into the rebellion and pumped for arms and information.⁴²⁴ Rebels in the field acted of their own accord. Arab supernumeraries at Nazareth captured and tried in August 1938 were executed, yet by contrast, only weeks later other supernumeraries were spared.⁴²⁵ The state began to take more serious note of the courts in April and May 1938, and by late summer, abductions of state employees escalated rapidly.⁴²⁶ Fifty were taken in August, of whom 15 were killed.⁴²⁷ The morale of the Palestinian police, already under immense pressure, collapsed by September, when it was feared by the War Office and other parties that they would defect to the rebels *en masse*.⁴²⁸ As in 1936, this was not to be, since Arab police double-agents proved rather valuable. For these reasons the police force half imploded and Arab officers were disarmed and put on less sensitive duties.⁴²⁹

It is worth emphasizing that the rebels did not execute all of the state employees and Arab civilians that they brought to trial. A group of Arab surveyors captured in the north in August, who were almost certainly working for the Lands Department or on the

⁴²³ Statement of Mustafa Khalil Hindawieh, 3.3.38, p. 6-7, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c; CID bulletin 228/37, 1.12.37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 2.

⁴²⁴ Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 10, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁴²⁵ Report of the *mujahidin* in the north, 25-30.8.38, in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p.499; HC to Colonial Secretary, 6.9.38, #541, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

⁴²⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 14.4.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4; CID, 28.5.38, periodical appreciation summary 3/38, PRO – CO 733/359/10

⁴²⁷ Narrative dispatch #9, HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.9.38, p. 51, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁴²⁸ Todd (WO) to Downie (CO), 9.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4; Survey, 19.8.38-25.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁴²⁹ Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 57, PRO – CO 935/21.

military access roads, were released after investigation determined that they were not “traitors.” Their equipment was seized but they were unharmed.⁴³⁰ More remarkable were the trials of two men at Mazari‘ Nubani in the triangle in September. Fakhri Yunis al-Husayni was brought in for a show trial where the assumption was that he would be made to pay the price for his father, ‘Arif Yunis, who was cooperating with the colonial authorities. At the trial Fakhri was reported to secure his release on condition of serving the rebellion and by accepting orders that would be delivered to him.⁴³¹ The other case concerned ‘Awni Shihabi, a *majlisi* defector who had been wrapped up in a plot to assassinate Amir ‘Abdullah. Akram al-Ja‘uni, son of ‘Arif, a close associate of al-Hajj Amin, was put on trial in Transjordan for conspiracy but acquitted. Shihabi had been the centerpiece of the prosecution’s case and, according to Zionist intelligence, had been part of the plot before backing out of it. During al-Ja‘uni’s trial Shihabi defamed the Husaynis and the former mufti. With a record of attacking the *majlisis* and al-Hajj Amin, in a Transjordanian court no less, and perhaps having turned tail if there really was a serious plot at all, it could have been expected that Shihabi would be put to death quickly after a speedy proceeding in front of the rebels. Instead he renewed his pledge of loyalty to the revolution and was released.⁴³²

⁴³⁰ Report of the *mujahidin* in the north, 25-30.8.38, p. 499, and Letter from Acre (Ahmad ‘Afifi to Akram Zu‘aytir), 31.8.38, p. 500-01, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*. Their release was reportedly well received in the Arab community, which might suggest wariness with the harsh methods of the rebel tribunals.

⁴³¹ Political information on Arab activities, 15.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Pappé, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 296. Fakhri was used to spy on his father, whose gun and files (including government correspondence) he stole and delivered into rebel hands before quickly being arrested (Political information on Arab activities, 20.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22191).

⁴³² Political information on Arab activities, 15.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Darwaza, *Mudhakkirat*, v. 3, p. 80.

As the Mazari‘ Nubani stories illustrate, the courts were used to coerce or induce loyalty, support, or aid from fence-sitters, opponents, and renegades. Khayri al-Qalqili, a member of *al-Sirat al-Mustaqim*’s staff, was brought to ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq’s court for investigation in August. Proceedings against him were dropped and in return he agreed to utilize his skills to help with ‘Abd al-Raziq’s public communications.⁴³³ Similarly, Hashim al-Muhtadi, a printer in Jerusalem, was coaxed into offering the rebellion his services by means of a court.⁴³⁴ Reports also attest to the courts being used as mechanisms for conscription, though little detail exists to clarify the matter.⁴³⁵ These instances, and many others of their kind, shed light on the range of fashions by which the courts became instruments for pressing, both by breaking ties with the government or by directly harnessing the talents, capacities and energies of elements of the Arab public.

The same power of individual discretion and potential for merciful or conciliatory judgements exhibited in the cases above were evident in the courts’ handling of a broad range of offenses against nationalist norms and codes of conduct. In one case brought before Hasan Salameh’s court around October 1938 an Arab working for a Jewish orchard was brought to trial to explain his association and probably to ascertain whether he was a spy. In his testimony he explained that he was indeed in business with the orchard owner, whom he claimed owed him a sum of money that he feared wouldn’t be repaid if he quit, and further admitted that he bought goods (fuel)

⁴³³ Information from Jaffa, 7.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁴³⁴ Urgent information for action, 14.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁴³⁵ Survey, 2.9.38-8.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22437. *In one notable instance that may offer a glimpse into this practice, a former informant for the RAF, captured and put on trial by Faris al-‘Azzuni was released after a key witness fled Faris’s camp. Days and many beatings later, the informant was released and told by Abu Khalid that he would have his seized cash returned to him, but that he must serve with rebel forces. The informant then escaped from rebel custody after the battle of Dayr Ghassaneh (discussed below).*

from Jews on credit because he had no cash. For these contraventions of the prohibition on relations with Jews, Salameh, who sat before him with a pistol plainly in view during the proceedings, cursed him as a “dog” and released him, failing even to fine him.⁴³⁶ In a case of alleged land dealing brought before ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq’s court in December two men, including the *mukhtar* of al-Haram village, were sequestered in a well, reportedly with scorpions, before trial. At court they were convicted using a government file to help prove their involvement in the affair in question. For this the *mukhtar*, deemed to have played the larger role, was fined £P 125 and his accomplice £P 75. After paying the sums the men were released unharmed.⁴³⁷ In another instance that illuminates not only the courts’ willingness to let violators off lightly, but their occasional susceptibility to external political influence, Jawdat al-Habab, youth activist and former National Guard leader in Jaffa, was accused of passing information to local police – what commonly would have been a capital offense. Apprehended and brought to trial none other than the mufti intervened to praise him and have him released, apparently without punishment.⁴³⁸

A fourth sensitive case that demonstrates the courts’ deliberative capacities reveals the importance of evidentiary standards to their proceedings. The case concerned an informant working for RAF intelligence. The man, a migrant from Jenin who settled in Jaffa, had a contact inside one of the Jaffa area bands that was able to provide information for which the RAF was willing to pay. After four months as an

⁴³⁶ Report (no heading), 6.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22489.

⁴³⁷ Report (no heading), 27.12.38, CZA S/25 – 22489. The men, unconvinced of their safety, subsequently fled to Beirut.

⁴³⁸ Information from Jaffa, 12.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

informant the man was captured, stripped, searched by rebels and brought before Faris al-‘Azzuni, head of the insurgents east of the city. In al-‘Azzuni’s care the man was whipped and beaten repeatedly, passing out more than once in the process, and transferred to several different locations over a span of days. When al-‘Azzuni demanded that the man confess his “error,” the captive begged instead to be quickly put out of his misery, only to be told that he would be whipped to death. In a twist of fate, the prisoner was still in al-‘Azzuni’s charge when the latter attended a major meeting of the rebel leadership at Dayr Ghassaneh in the Ramallah subdistrict (see the next chapter). There, upon questioning by Abu Faysal it was admitted that the captive had never confessed while the primary witness against him had absconded from the rebel camp. Lacking a witness to corroborate the man’s links to the RAF, and without a confession of guilt, even after numerous beatings, a conviction could not be rendered. Abu Faysal put the man under the charge of one of the *mukhtars* at the meeting and then ordered his release. When the former captive requested the money taken from his person during his apprehension be returned to him, Abu Khalid informed him that his property would be returned after he served under arms with the rebels. After the rebel powwow was surprised by British forces and subjected to severe attack, the man was finally released from custody, scooped up by the army forces that swarmed into the area, and afterwards eager to return to work as an informant and advise the government on how to destroy the insurgents.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁹ Events in the bands’ camp, 21.9.38, HA 281/105.

This rather unusual case underscores that the courts institutionalized standards of conduct and evidence that were supposed to be rigorously adhered to, even in cases involving Arabs aiding the counterinsurgency. The freed prisoner later attested in a statement given to Zionist intelligence that revolutionary court executions could only be authorized upon receipt of a confession. While he meant to emphasize the futility of the notion that those repenting at trial could gain mercy from their captors, he actually pointed out the privileged place that the accused's own statements, particularly professions of guilt, had within the courts.⁴⁴⁰ This was a standard that was established under, or at least witnessed during, Fawzi al-Qawuqji's court in 1936. This was apparent in the case of Rushdi al-Baramki, probably the most well known execution under al-Qawuqji. Al-Baramki was released from prison by the government after being hired, along with several colleagues, to assassinate rebel leaders. Placed on trial by al-Qawuqji, he was killed after confessing.⁴⁴¹ It seems unlikely that this standard was universally observed, but it is indisputable that it endured, as the above-noted case illustrates. The episode of al-'Azzuni's prisoner also sheds light on the importance of witnesses. Fragmentary evidence suggests that as with confessions, great weight was put on the testimony of witnesses, at least in some courts. In Jaffa in September 1938, for instance, after the rebels all but captured the city, it was reported that witnesses were required for any conviction (presumably where the accused refrained from confessing), and that this standard was maintained even as things began to spiral out of control in the

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 401. Abu Gharbiyya was with al-Qawuqji's men at the time of Baramki's trial, and unnerved by it, left their camp soon thereafter. He relates that Baramki tried to join the insurgents, but al-Qawuqji and 'Arif 'Abd al-Raziq quickly suspected him (*Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 81-82).

city and public security became an issue impinging on rebel interests there.⁴⁴² In other instances material documentation was considered adequate for conviction, but I have found no instance in which this alone could produce a capital sentence.

The instances recounted here of the courts' capacities for admonition and flexibility over dogmatism and brimstone demonstrate that they were pragmatic and variable in nature, and that procedure and evidence were not mere theatrical props for public consumption, but matters of real import to the rebel judiciary and the rebel leadership. Still, while the courts could show grace and though they were more concerned with specific forms of proof than has often been acknowledged, once such proof was in hand, they were not shy of issuing harsh sentences. Confessions by the accused in cases of "treason" against the nation or the movement could easily wind up in death sentences. The record of the courts concerning the power to take life, certainly the most sensitive aspect of their operation, is entangled with both the authority of the field commanders, who sat as judges, and, more problematically, with a parallel tendency on the part of the *majlisiyyin* to order the liquidation of their opponents outside the framework of the rebel judiciary. Given the tendency to lump these phenomena together, an effort to disaggregate them is worthwhile.

Kabha, who has done more work on the courts than any other scholar, argues that their operation and legitimacy tracked the general course of the rebellion. During its strongest period, he contends, the courts were restrained in their application of the death penalty as, according to one district court member, the High Court then exercised sole

⁴⁴² Survey, 29.9.38-6.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

control over it and frequently rejected requests from the lower courts for death sentences. Capital punishments issued by the courts were reputedly minimal in number. As the revolt came under pressure, convening courts became more difficult, less experienced and less prudent hands became judges, and sentencing became more severe and disproportionate and death sentences were handed out with increasing frequency.⁴⁴³ If those convicted of capital crimes were not present at court, the usual method of implementing the verdict was through a kill squad sent to their home or used in an ambush.⁴⁴⁴ Most accounts agree that the majority of those killed by the courts were accused of collaboration or land dealing.

One point of confusion that arises in assessing the courts' handling of capital crimes concerns the authority of the field commanders to order assassinations in the name of national honor, protecting the insurgency, or upholding the credo of the revolutionary movement. Al-Hut's discussion, for instance, slides too fluidly between the courts of the local commanders and the commanders themselves, making it unclear whether the killings which she notes of *simsars* and others took place at the behest of the courts, properly convened, or simply at the will of the regional rebel chief.⁴⁴⁵ As we have seen in the killings of accused informants at Shwayka for instance, the commanders sometimes skipped the courts and leapt straight to judgment and vengeance. Following Kabha and his sources, it does seem likely that these tendencies may have been tempered during the revolt's strongest months as its institutional matrix deepened in reach.

⁴⁴³ Kabha, "The Courts," p. 209.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 401-02.

Through reprimands and words of caution delivered in the spring and summer of 1938 to the commanders, the AHC and the CCJ may also have had a hand in moderating the rush to heavy-handed justice and in bolstering the courts.⁴⁴⁶ But by the time of the late revolt they were again in evidence. The *Diwan* itself issued an execution order for Fakhri al-Nashashibi in late November 1938, after his counterrevolutionary activities had become well known. Decrying his collaboration with the British and Zionism, the communiqué announcing the order declared that “The national cause [*al-qadiyya al-wataniyya*] does not tolerate conspirators and schemers; the homeland [*watan*] is above all,” and enjoined anyone with the opportunity to eliminate Fakhri.⁴⁴⁷ The number of extrajudicial killings carried out and ordered by the commanders themselves, outside of the courts, is unknown, but must account for at least some of their number.

More confoundingly, the *majlis* ran their own extrajudicial and factionally-bent assassination program, which has sometimes been equated with the rebel judicial system. Although hotly denied at the time, Jamal al-Husayni later admitted that external political leaders were secretly involved in what he said were some 30-40 assassinations, which he claimed were mostly directed at land dealers, including at least one member of his own family.⁴⁴⁸ Whether or not there is truth in the claim that the victims were selling or brokering land to the Zionists, which al-Hut rightly expresses some doubt about, it is clear that these killings, which may well have been greater in numbers than Jamal Effendi cared to admit, were widely perceived as factionally- and not nationally-

⁴⁴⁶ See below. If this is true it is ironic, in that it strengthened the institutions of the revolt that enabled the commanders to be more autonomous from the exiles and typically decreased the latter’s influence.

⁴⁴⁷ Quoted in al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu’assasat*, p. 402.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 403.

motivated in character, and that they caused popular revulsion.⁴⁴⁹ It appears that many were likely routed through or directly undertaken by ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq, who earned a reputation as perhaps the least scrupulous of the commanders most closely aligned with the mufti.⁴⁵⁰

The firestorm of factional conflict will be returned to in the next chapter, but for the present purposes the advent of liquidation orders from abroad and hit lists, which were in circulation by summer 1938, if not earlier, raises several points.⁴⁵¹ The first is that while the exiles advocated higher standards for capital cases within the court system and for controls on executions by insurgent forces, they didn’t themselves feel bound by the same advice, and were seemingly unperturbed in circumventing the courts entirely to wage their bloody-minded campaign. Secondly, where the courts represented an effort at institutionalizing a new justice system and emphasized impersonal standards of evidence and proof, the “black ops” of the *majlisi* exiles ignored such standards and continued to foist the personalized agendas of *majlisi* factional interest into the national arena, impeding or interfering with the institution-building project of the revolt. The increasing resort to extrajudicial murder for non-national aims also controverted the prior practices of the Black Hand and the *Qassamiyun*, who had often made a point of calling the wayward back to the fold and offering them a chance to redeem themselves before facing dire punishment, not to mention that the actual incidence of such killings

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 403-05. See also the next chapter.

⁴⁵⁰ On Abu Faysal and the mufti, see the comments of ‘Abdullah Mukhlis, from the Opposition, in *ibid.*, p. 404; Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 87-88; and the next chapter.

⁴⁵¹ E.g. Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 11, CZA S/25 – 22191. Hit lists of uncertain provenance were also displayed in mosques late in the revolt: Todd (WO) to Downie (CO), 9.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

appear to have been minimal. Finally, by making carnage out of the factional issue, the *majlisi* assassination program helped to dampen popular enthusiasm for the revolt in so much as the political murders became confused in the public eye with the uprising more generally.

The apex of the revolt and the urban offensive

In the summer and early fall of 1938 the insurgency reached its peak. The rebels temporarily occupied half a dozen urban centers, including Jaffa and the Old City of Jerusalem, surged throughout most rural areas, and expelled the colonial regime from vast regions of the country. Incessant raids, ambushes, and guerilla attacks threw the police and military on the defensive and compelled them to retreat to a smaller number of more heavily fortified camps and compounds. Much of the countryside came under the effective control of the rebel formations and the counter-state, even in areas targeted by the reoccupation scheme. In cities and towns the British presence was skeletal before the arrival of a second full division of troop reinforcements was completed in October. Security personnel were overextended between urban duties and rural deployments and state employees in constant danger of assassination.⁴⁵² Rural Jewish colonies were sniped and occasionally faced more serious assaults. Jewish transport, supernumeraries, and persons were attacked with great and lethal regularity. Sabotage of the state's spatial infrastructure (buildings, roads, rail, and communications) and government and Jewish property (including the oil pipeline and electric power stations) was frequent.

⁴⁵² Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 108; Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 203-04.

The situation of the colonial authorities was, as HC MacMichael acknowledged in September, “critical.”⁴⁵³

A number of factors combined to bring the insurrection to its greatest pitch. First and foremost was British repression. Although the British fancied themselves to be protecting Arab villagers from the “intimidation” and coercion of the rebels, *and even reported that the Tegart scheme was well received by reoccupied villages*, Zaslani reported the opposite to be true. Villagers took great umbrage at the counterinsurgency campaign and the ruin it brought in tow.⁴⁵⁴ In areas of house demolitions, collective fines and government reprisals, villagers decamped and fled their homes.⁴⁵⁵ Rather than wresting the population from rebel clutches, the rough conduct of many of the soldiers and police and the indiscriminate character of collective punishments soured the public perception of colonial rule even further.⁴⁵⁶ This was all the more so as the state’s repression intensified in the summer.

The fact that both ideological branches of the Zionist movement had begun to directly attack the Palestinians confirmed the Arabs’ worst fears and gave the rebellion added impetus. The Revisionist movement carried out a series of devastating bombings in Haifa and Jerusalem in July while news of the brutal activities of a joint British-Jewish strike force called the Special Night Squads (SNS), in which Haganah cadres

⁴⁵³ HC to Colonial Secretary, 7.9.38, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

⁴⁵⁴ Establishment of counter-band (suggestion for study, by R. Zaslani), 13.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22437. Zaslani added his own critique of the military as pursuing showpiece tactics like the reoccupation scheme that only amplified public antipathy without degrading the rebellion. His preferred course was not entirely dissimilar however. He called for joint Jewish and British mobile units that would hunt the rebels unceasingly, separating them from supportive villages through cordons or garrisons and closing off their border crossing points and areas of refuge.

⁴⁵⁵ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 413-14.

⁴⁵⁶ Establishment of counter-band, 13.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 213.

participated, quickly circulated. The bombings were directed at the Arab public as revenge for the execution of a Revisionist activist by the state's military courts. At Haifa the popular vegetable and melon market was the site of carnage on 6 July and again on 25 July. The first incident killed 21 Arabs and wounded over 100. Rioting and shooting in its aftermath claimed six Jewish lives. The subsequent attack was more than twice as deadly, killing 53 Arabs and injuring dozens more. Again, four Jews were killed in the outpouring of rage that immediately followed.⁴⁵⁷ At Jerusalem three bombings occurred the same month. Two inside the Old City took the lives of 13 Arabs, injuring 35, and the third, at Jaffa Gate, killed five Arabs while wounding 25. These attacks, far bloodier than any at the hands of the Arab partisans to date, were recognized by all parties as pouring fuel on the flames of the rebellion. After the second Haifa incident, JA intelligence and the RAF concluded that the bombings boosted rebel recruitment and propelled a fresh wave of identification with the rebel movement.⁴⁵⁸ Illustrating the tendency to see the colonial government as culpable, Abu Gharbiyya was convinced that they were perpetrated by the SNS.⁴⁵⁹

The SNS were organized under Sir Orde Charles Wingate, a military intelligence officer and devout Christian and philo-Semite who saw Palestine through a Biblical lens. His deep sympathy with the Zionist movement and his role as a military trainer of

⁴⁵⁷ Narrative dispatch #9, HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.9.38, p. 45, PRO – CO 935/21. Zu'aytir give a higher figure for the second bombing's casualties, citing 58 killed and 84 injured, 27 critically: *Yawmiyat*, p. 417.

⁴⁵⁸ Surveys, 1.7.38-7.7.38, 8.7.38-14.7.38, and 22.7.38-31.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; The terror around Jerusalem, 14.7.38, Information from Tulkarm, 17.7.38, and The terror around Jerusalem, 21.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 10.8.38 and 17.9.38, resumes of operations (July and August), PRO – Air 5/1248; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 213-14. The government launched a crackdown of the Revisionist movement afterwards, but this did little to assuage Arab opinion.

⁴⁵⁹ *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 100.

Jewish forces and a strong advocate of harsh offensive action against the insurgency, and the Arab community more generally, earned him the lasting and deep respect of many Zionist leaders and the sobriquet, “the friend.”⁴⁶⁰ The SNS, which began operations in July, were assembled to protect the pipeline from the increasing wave of sabotage directed against it and to use unconventional tactics to bring the fight to the Arab guerillas.⁴⁶¹ Wingate became legendary for bringing what ADC Sir Gawain Bell, himself an apologist for British violence in Palestine, called “deliberate ruthlessness” to SNS operations, which turned familiar features of Arab attacks, namely night assaults and the element of surprise, against them.⁴⁶² Although the number of men in the SNS was small, their impact was widely felt, feeding Labor Zionist desires for a more aggressive and proactive counterinsurgency in which they would be central participants and, among the Arabs, causing anxiety among rebels and villagers alike.⁴⁶³ As Uri Ben-Eliezer sharply argues, Wingate’s propensity to kill or execute random innocent villagers represented an expansion of the regime of collective punishments.⁴⁶⁴ In one illustrative episode he rounded up the men of a village and killed every tenth man, ostensibly in

⁴⁶⁰ Yehuda Bauer, “From Cooperation to Resistance: The Haganah, 1938-1946,” *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 2, n. 3 (April 1966), p. 186-87; David Hachohen, *Time to Tell: An Israeli Life, 1898-1984*, Menachem Dagut, trans. (New York: Cornwall Books, 1985), p. 53-61.

⁴⁶¹ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 202; Knight, “Securing Zion?,” p. 534.

⁴⁶² Sir Gawain Bell, *Shadows on the Sand: The Memoirs of Sir Gawain Bell* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1983), p. 90; Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 202. Bell claimed to have never witnessed any acts of brutality or looting on the part of counterinsurgency forces, but instructively and fallaciously described Arabs as electing to serve as human shields, or in the British lingo, human minesweepers. Despite the use of mines by rebels, Bell claimed that: “in the paradoxical way things work in the Arab world, there was never any shortage of volunteers among the local taxi owners prepared to drive immediately ahead of a military column and thereby, in some degree, to ensure its safety” (94).

⁴⁶³ At their peak the units counted just under 300 men, less than 50 of whom were British (Knight, “Securing Zion?,” p. 534).

⁴⁶⁴ *The Making*, p. 26.

pursuit of a murderer.⁴⁶⁵ In their first month the SNS repelled pipeline saboteurs with overwhelming force, killing 17.⁴⁶⁶ At Bayt Lid, southwest of Tulkarm, his men killed 14 people, including a band leader, ‘Abdullah Taha, on a night raid in early September during which he threatened to exterminate the entire village.⁴⁶⁷ The emergence of Jewish paramilitaries fighting under British command gave the appearance of complete collusion for the sake of destroying the Palestinians, however tactical it was in reality.⁴⁶⁸

A third factor in the revolt’s advance was the collapse of the Opposition. The *mu‘arada* had firmly rejected the return to arms in late 1937 and its leading lights alternately echoed the nationalist demands made by the AHC before the Peel Commission or, in a more quietist vein, strove to dissuade the population from supporting the insurrection. Sulayman Tuqan is likely the most exemplary of those who exerted themselves to the latter aim, and was credited in April 1938 by the head of the CID with helping dampen the fervors of the Nablus subdistrict.⁴⁶⁹ Nablus never ceased being a hotbed of nationalist activism, but its divided politics had made it a bulwark of the Opposition as well, and Tuqan was seen as one of the party’s chief voices that had supported partition.⁴⁷⁰ In July the Opposition’s will to refuse the rebel movement was broken at Nablus. After surviving several assassination attempts and almost being killed

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 10.8.38, resume of operations (July), PRO – Air 5/1248; *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 12.

⁴⁶⁷ Report on joint action w/ the friend, 5.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.10.38, resume of operations (Sept), PRO – Air 5/1248. The RAF report notably omits mention of the threat.

⁴⁶⁸ Shertok noted that as military cooperation and coordination grew between the JA and the government over 1938, political relations between Zionism and the British grew more distant, as was soon crystallized in the St. James Roundtable talks and the subsequent White Paper in 1939 (Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 129-30). Still, as Kayyali and Knight each observe, the SNS constituted a significant convergence of Zionist and imperial interests (*Palestine*, p. 214; Knight, “Securing Zion?,” p. 536).

⁴⁶⁹ DIG-CID to IG-police, 29.4.38, (detailing interview with Tuqan), MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

⁴⁷⁰ Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 2, CZA S/25 – 22191.

by insurgents while in the village of Talluza, Tuqan had had enough and went into exile.⁴⁷¹ Others of like mind did the same. Their removal in turn paved the way for the rebels in villages affiliated to Tuqan and his colleagues that had previously held out on them; new youthful recruits were reported to spring from these same locales as soon as word of Sulayman Bey's departure was known.⁴⁷² After the Nablus Opposition collapsed, it wasn't long before the retreat was generalized. Raghib al-Nashashibi, the DP's founding father who kept a studied low profile as the rebellion escalated, fled the country a month and a half later, after being asked to deliver £P 200 to the insurgents.⁴⁷³

A final factor promoting the rebellion's growth was the continuing economic depression among the Arabs. The signs of devastation were many by July. Bakers in Tulkarm used *durra* (sorghum) in place of flour and similar substitutions were evident in other locations. Workshops in Nablus closed, merchants went bankrupt and unemployment was high. In Jaffa the middle strata as well as the poor went hungry; some merchants there went the same way as their unlucky brothers at Nablus. The bankruptcies of traders and members of the upper classes followed their accusations in April that the government had pressured Barclays Bank and other lenders to call in their loans and induce an economic implosion that would kneecap the national struggle. The orchards of Gaza and Jaffa, symbols of economic prosperity and wealth since the nineteenth century, were put up for auction. At Bethlehem workshops making mother-of-pearl mementos and cigarettes closed. Charity kitchens in Jerusalem and Hebron

⁴⁷¹ Survey, 8.7.38-14.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22437. For the general context, see below. During the Talluza episode one of Sulayman Bey's bodyguards was killed and he and his party waited three hours for government reinforcements to rescue them (Conversation w/ B.S., 9.5.38, CZA S/25 – 22191).

⁴⁷² Survey, 8.7.38-14.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁴⁷³ Political information on Arab activities, 29.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

were serving increasing numbers of people. Though he seemed to fail to grasp the gravity of the situation and did little in response, the High Commissioner admitted in early September after one of the AWC's many protests that the specter of famine was present in the country. These developments redounded to the favor of the rebels: the severity of the crisis, as one report put it, led a larger and larger share of the public to conclude that the anti-colonial struggle had attained life or death urgency since the government had done little to ameliorate the prevailing blight.⁴⁷⁴

Under these sundry conditions the rebels were able to muster increasing numbers of men. As the revolt spread southwards, some of the largest concentrations of fighters were found there. Before the occupation of the Old City of Jerusalem an estimated 1500 men were under arms in two nearby *wadis*.⁴⁷⁵ 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni was reputed at peak to command 3000 men between full-time fighters and reserves.⁴⁷⁶ Next door in the Hebron region al-Jawlani led an ample force of well over 500 men; one British doctor working in the area said it was 2000-strong at peak, again reflecting the large local pool of reserves.⁴⁷⁷ Hasan Salameh's headquarters near al-Quleh *in the Latrun* was fortified by as many as 500 men in its vicinity, according to one eyewitness.⁴⁷⁸ Hundreds of

⁴⁷⁴ Political information on Arab activities, 29.4.38, and Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 19-20, CZA S/25 – 22191; Survey, 8.7.38-14.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; HC to Colonial Secretary, 5.9.38, PRO – CO 733/368/9. By May merchants had requested that banks agree to a temporary moratorium on debt and loan repayment and adduced alarming estimates of impending mass bankruptcy to underscore the seriousness of their plea (Political information on Arab activities, 12.5.38, CZA S/25 – 22191).

⁴⁷⁵ Survey, 22.7.38-31.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁴⁷⁶ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 223.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 224; Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 208. The doctor attributed the force to "Mansur," a corruption of al-Jawlani's *nom de guerre*, Abu Mansur, but Shepherd identifies the moniker (incorrectly) as A.Q. Husayni's.

⁴⁷⁸ Report, no heading, 6.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22489. A second source was cited as corroborating the informant's information.

rebels were reported to throng in the Jaffa subdistrict under ‘Arif ‘Abd-Raziq’s oversight, where two villages alone, Yazur and Salameh, were called to provide 200 men in September.⁴⁷⁹ The strength of rebel contingents from other zones of the country is suggested by the magnum sized assemblies held at ‘Abbud and Nabi Salih before a fateful war council at Dayr Ghassaneh in the Ramallah subdistrict. According to one eyewitness – a prisoner of the rebels who was later freed – some 1200 men were present, with large parties accompanying some subcommanders as well as top field officers.⁴⁸⁰ In total, Zionist authorities and the War Office agreed that rebel force strength in September 1938 was in the neighborhood of 5000 men, up 10-fold from the previous year.⁴⁸¹ This is comparable to Yasin’s estimate that 3000 men were fulltime fighters, 6000 reserve cadres, and some 1000 operated in urban units.⁴⁸²

Alongside its burgeoning numbers the rebellion’s military apparatus and effectiveness developed noticeably. The High Commissioner offered the following appreciation in mid-July:

It is notable that during the last three months the tactical skill of the armed bands has developed. They now operate according to plan and under leaders whose instructions they understand, trust and obey; they have, *as is only natural*, excellent “intelligence”; and many of the schemes owe such local success as they have achieved to a discipline and sense of guerilla tactics which are, I am informed, more marked today than they were, for instance, in the concluding stages of the disturbances of 1936.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁹ Survey, 2.9.38-8.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁴⁸⁰ Events in the bands’ camp, 21.9.38, HA 281/105. The RAF estimated that some 1-2000 rebel cadres were present (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.10.38, resume of operations (Sept 1938), PRO – Air 5/1248).

⁴⁸¹ Report on the situation in Palestine, Sept 1938, enclosure to: Todd (WO) to Downie (CO), 9.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

⁴⁸² *Al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 42.

⁴⁸³ Narrative dispatch #8, HC to Colonial Secretary, 14.7.38, p. PRO – CO 935/21; emphasis added.

The “naturally” superior rebel intelligence apparatus was subsequently praised again two months later when it was dubbed a “service” that was growing ever more “efficient.”⁴⁸⁴ Finally acknowledging the scale and character of the revolt as a nationalist uprising, HC MacMichael noted that the rebels fought at great personal risk and without thought of personal or financial gain. All social classes had a hand in the rebellion, and although its partisans suffered “heavy reverses and casualties” on the battlefield, its appeal did not dim and its ranks did not thin.⁴⁸⁵ In September Zionist authorities bemoaned the disappearance of government, contending that only in the coastal plain did it still function.⁴⁸⁶ ADC Bell agreed, writing that when he arrived in Palestine in early fall 1938 poorly armed rebels held more than half of the country. Government was “mainly confined to the principal towns, and even there the control was marginal.” Movement on any road, even in daylight when the bands feared to tangle with the RAF, was prohibitive without an armored car as escort and risked chancing upon one of the many mines for which the rebels became famous. At night “the country belonged to the gangs.”⁴⁸⁷ As the High Commissioner and the GOC concurred, “rebel leaders were becoming more feared and respected than the Government of Palestine.”⁴⁸⁸

Militarily the rebels still faced long odds, fighting more numerous, more heavily equipped and professionally-trained foes. Yet their tactical development was apparent in a number of more successful or damaging operations they mounted. A steady flurry of

⁴⁸⁴ Narrative dispatch #9, HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.9.38, p. PRO – CO 935/21.

⁴⁸⁵ Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 54-55, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁴⁸⁶ Report on the situation in Palestine, Sept 1938, enclosure to: Todd (WO) to Downie (CO), 9.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

⁴⁸⁷ Bell, *Shadows on the Sand*, p. 89.

⁴⁸⁸ Amended note of a meeting at Treasury, 5.9.38, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

activity was directed against Jewish colonies, but as these were hardened targets boasting coteries of well-armed men w/ searchlights, if not a tower and stockade, attacks on transport were most likely to cause casualties.⁴⁸⁹ On 16 August a lorry of Jewish supernumeraries in Mount Carmel was set upon and rebel fighters killed eight of their number while injuring two women present; state forces coming to the supernumeraries' rescue killed seven of the attackers.⁴⁹⁰ On 10 September seven Jewish supernumeraries were slain in an ambush of a Jewish convoy near al-Masmiya on the Jaffa-Gaza road. The attackers lost two men in the encounter, though they withdrew their dead so the state was unaware.⁴⁹¹ Days later a convoy of the Palestine Potash Company was entirely destroyed east of Jerusalem. Five cars were reduced to burnt-out husks, but this time it was two Arab employees who perished; the assailants escaped without any casualties.⁴⁹² Although most action directed at the colonies consisted of ineffectual sniping, the Histadrut regarded attacks on Yoqna'am, 'Ayn Hashofet, and Mishmar Ha'emeq in the Beisan valley to have been dangerous and successful.⁴⁹³ In no doubt one of the most perplexing incidents, men under Abu Durra raided Giv'at 'Ada in the coastal plain in June and managed to kidnap three young members of the settlement. Back-channel negotiations were opened to secure their release, but these came to naught and the three

⁴⁸⁹ According to one informant, 'Arif 'Abd al-Raziq wrote to the CCJ at length on the difficulties and risks of attacking the colonies more forcefully. Jewish supernumeraries had military training and the colonies' defenses were hard to breach (Conversation w/ J. 'A. in Jaffa, 21.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22191).

⁴⁹⁰ Narrative dispatch #9, HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.9.38, p. 50, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁴⁹¹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 14; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 430. The account reaching Akram Effendi claimed incorrectly that additionally two Jewish workers and two British soldiers were also killed.

⁴⁹² *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 14.

⁴⁹³ Histadrut Executive Committee minutes, 7.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

were never seen again.⁴⁹⁴ Giv‘at ‘Ada was heavily attacked again the next month with insurgents inflicting major property damage as well as killing two supernumeraries and injuring a settler.⁴⁹⁵ Despite periodic rebel proclamations that scorching victories had been won over this or that colony, full-bore assaults on them were not in great abundance, and the attacks were sometimes repelled with great loss to the insurgents.⁴⁹⁶

According to official statistics on sniping, British and Jewish targets were fairly evenly hit throughout the revolt’s peak period. In certain regions, particularly the Nazareth subdistrict and the Galilee (excluding the frontier) and the southern region around Jaffa-Tel Aviv, the *yishuv* faced the brunt of the uprising, but the overall balance of rebel engagements throughout the year were with state forces.⁴⁹⁷ While lower in lethality than their bloodiest strikes on Jewish targets, rebel encounters with police and soldiers showed growing skill. On 18 July at Tall Abu Jammal in the Jordan valley the TJFF killed at least eight rebels and village auxiliaries but were surrounded by the Arabs and compelled uncharacteristically to retreat.⁴⁹⁸ RAF planes were shot down or forced out of combat with growing frequency. Rebel marksmanship brought down a plane and killed its two pilots at Kafr Haris southwest of Nablus on 18 August while a coordinated mine and ambush attack on the ground killed one soldier; the rebels lost 10 men.⁴⁹⁹ A

⁴⁹⁴ Shertok’s diary notes, p. 10, CZA S/25 – 22447.

⁴⁹⁵ Narrative dispatch #9, HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.9.38, p. 45, PRO – CO 935/21. Abu Durra claimed after the second assault to have killed the colony’s entire population (‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 13.7.38, *Te‘udot*, p. 35).

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⁴⁹⁷ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 19. A total of 827 attacks on Jewish colonies, quarters, and persons were registered for the year as against 986 attacks on police and military. Transport attacks are not disaggregated. For weekly rates see numerous reports from the High Commissioner to London in PRO – CO 733/366/4.

⁴⁹⁸ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 10.8.38, resume of operations (July), PRO – Air 5/1248.

⁴⁹⁹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.9.38, resume of operations (August), PRO – Air 5/1248.

week later rebels shot down another RAF plane near Shwayka, killing its two crew members, this time without any known injury to the insurgents.⁵⁰⁰ As rebel strength grew bands were sometimes able to harry official search parties. In one notable instance, on 18 July after taking 13 men into custody at Kawkab Abu al-Hayja, a remote hilltop hamlet in the Nazareth subdistrict where “Practically all the inhabitants were anti-British,” the military was ambushed at nearby Kafr Manda. Some 50 attackers took five casualties but managed to free many of the prisoners, some of whom the rebels claimed joined their cause. A number of other prisoners were reported shot while trying to escape, which may indicate they were in fact executed. Further suggestive of rebel success in the incident, state forces soon returned to Kawkab Abu al-Hayja and burned at least part of it down. Bishop Graham-Brown, a critic of the suppression campaign, claimed that the entire village was destroyed.⁵⁰¹ Rebels in the Beisan valley in particular fought a number of large-scale battles with the colonial authorities while taking only minimal casualties. In late August rebels at Ashrafiya estimated at 200 in number lost only 4 men; a month later at Wadi Shubash a 300-strong party lost 5, according to the RAF.⁵⁰²

Mines were a particularly efficient means of striking at the rebellion’s foes and were used with increasing proficiency and “ingenuity.” Some were hidden inside piles

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 10.8.38, resume of operations (July), PRO – Air 5/1248; Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 414; Kaukab Abu Heja police file, ISA (17) 4212-8m; Norris, “Repression and Rebellion,” p. 36. Quote from the police file.

⁵⁰² RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.9.38 and 20.10.38, resumes of operations (Aug and Sept), PRO – Air 5/1248.

of rocks used to barricade roads, exploding when they were removed.⁵⁰³ Others were remotely detonated with electric triggers, which had the advantage of sparing the Arab hostages that were increasingly used as “mine sweepers” for mobile transport.⁵⁰⁴ Four Jews were killed and 13 wounded in several mine attacks in the coastal plain in August.⁵⁰⁵ After British troops suffered one loss from a mine attack near al-Sha‘b in the Galilee they went on a rampage that eventually embroiled a major portion of the Acre subdistrict in a days-long string of battles (see below). In September landmines killed or injured 12 British troops and nine Jewish supernumeraries – and this over the length of a single week.⁵⁰⁶ Among those hit was the ADC-‘Afule, who survived the attack, unlike three passengers.⁵⁰⁷ As DC Kirkbride summarized, mines became the most “trying ordeal” for the *yishuv* and the security forces.⁵⁰⁸

Rebel sabotage also grew in effectiveness. Government property and modern infrastructure were far and away the chief targets.⁵⁰⁹ In July almost £P 3400 of damage was done to telephone lines while two trains were derailed and the engine of another was destroyed. In August losses to the telephone network rose to £P 6000 and six trains were derailed. A supply train was captured by rebels and its cargo seized.⁵¹⁰ In early September a fire set in the railyard at Lydda destroyed cars valued between £P 8-

⁵⁰³ Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 57, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.10.38, resume of operations (Sept), PRO – Air 5/1248; HMS Malaya, Report of proceedings, 8.9.38, appendix IV, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

⁵⁰⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 12.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵⁰⁷ DC-Galilee to Chief Secretary, 3.10.38, Report for Sept 1938, p. 14-15, PRO – CO 733/372/18.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁰⁹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 19.

⁵¹⁰ Narrative dispatch #9, HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.9.38, p. 46, 50, PRO – CO 935/21.

11,360.⁵¹¹ Arson was particularly common in Haifa, where it may have been used as a recompense for the terrible bombings by Revisionists: throughout much of July and August an average of over 11 incidents occurred each week.⁵¹² In one of the most serious subsequent episodes, the major Jewish concern, Levant Bonded, saw its warehouses go up in smoke to the tune of £P 60,000 in early November.⁵¹³ Damage on the rail line between Lydda and Rafah in September temporarily halted traffic between Palestine and Egypt.⁵¹⁴

Without a doubt the most spectacular military accomplishments of the rebels in the summer and fall of 1938 were a series of stunning urban offensives. In the simplest operation a lone gunman, nicknamed “the gazelle” for his speed, was sent by Abu Durra to execute the ADC-Jenin, Mr. Mofatt.⁵¹⁵ Something of a suicide mission from its start, the assassin, ‘Ali Ahmad Mustafa, burst into the ADC’s office at the well-guarded governor’s mansion on 24 August and slew Mofatt with a pistol while shouting “*Allahu akbar!*” He was captured and then killed while allegedly trying to escape. Along with several other British deaths at the time, the High Commissioner remarked that the ADC’s killing “created a profound impression throughout the country” and underlined the colonial regime’s inability to rely on Arab government employees, who were believed to have colluded in the deed.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹¹ Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 58, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁵¹² HMS Repulse, report of proceedings, 27.8.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

⁵¹³ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 76, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁵¹⁴ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 14-15.

⁵¹⁵ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 152-53.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*; HMS Malaya, report of proceedings, 28.8.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4; Narrative dispatch #9, HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.9.38, p. 49, PRO – CO 935/21.

During the same month bank heists added to rebel coffers. In Nablus two “well-organized and executed” operations spirited away £P 7200 from Barclays Bank, in the first instance taking the money straight from the branch’s safe while another detachment ensured that phone operators put through no calls for assistance.⁵¹⁷ At Hebron rebels under al-Jawlani’s hand carried out an even more impressive raid on 19 August. With 100 men positioned around the city, a detachment of 20 or so were sent to its branch of Barclays where they captured local supernumeraries and, finding the bank empty of cash (which had recently been transferred to Jerusalem), torched it. Outside they killed an Arab police officer and captured four more at the post office. With part of the town in a lather, a crowd then proceeded with the fighters to the central police station, which was besieged. The rebels took two more Arab police captive and ransacked the station’s armory before the rebels emerged into the streets to be carried aloft by the crowd. Although the insurgents neglected to cut the phone lines to Jerusalem and reinforcements subsequently arrived, the adventurers decamped without any losses.⁵¹⁸

Ironically, within two months of the reoccupation plan, rebels had returned to the triangle in force, with Nablus a kind of model insurgent center. Government clerks in the city passed all manner of information to the insurgents, who were able to conduct fundraising unmolested and to make use of the hospital without detection.⁵¹⁹ In turn Nablus became a steppingstone to the reestablishment of the rebels in the villages of the triangle, which unfolded within weeks.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁷ Narrative dispatch #9, HC to Colonial Secretary, 13.9.38, p. 49, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.; Details of the events in Hebron, 25.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁵¹⁹ Survey, 22.7.38-31.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁵²⁰ Survey, 1.8.38-11.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

The focused raids of August were a prelude to an even more vigorous set of assaults in September that brought Palestine south of Jaffa under a brief rebel hegemony. Al-Jawlani, an unsung mastermind of the insurgency in the central and southern regions of the country, led the charge with the “occupation” of Beersheba on 10 September at the head of a party estimated by naval intelligence to comprise 500 men. Working in a disciplined manner the fighters broke into three groups when they reached the town, one destroying the wireless station, a second raiding the police station, where they captured a Lewis gun and a sizeable quantity of badly-needed arms, and the third releasing all of the detainees at the town gaol.⁵²¹ Zu‘aytir relates that the insurgents were greeted with ululations and rose water by the public.⁵²² Bethlehem was next. Some 150 rebels penetrated the town on 13 September and laid waste to its police station, post office and municipal offices.⁵²³ The same day rebels returned to Beersheba and robbed government offices of £P 1500, and a week later they returned for a third time, during which they destroyed all of its remaining government buildings.⁵²⁴ Concurrently, on 20 September separate parties went to Bethlehem to raze the telephone exchange and to Jericho, where the police station, post office, customs house, and agricultural office were all arsoned.⁵²⁵ In all of these regions, plus Ramallah, which also temporarily fell into insurgent hands, the government’s defenses collapsed with remarkable ease and the rebels carried out

⁵²¹ HMS Malaya, report of proceedings, 15.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4; Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 58, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁵²² *Yawmiyat*, p. 447.

⁵²³ HMS Malaya, report of proceedings, 15.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4; Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 59, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁵²⁴ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 14.

⁵²⁵ Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 61, PRO – CO 935/21.

their missions without any serious resistance.⁵²⁶ On the contrary, the government withdrew its police and other resources from village after village and town after town until only heavily reinforced stations at Hebron and Gaza remained in the Southern half of Palestine.⁵²⁷

The climax to the urban offensive came in October, with a major operation at Tiberias resulting in a massacre of 19 Jews, and in central Palestine where insurgents seized control of the Old City of Jerusalem for a number of days. According to the rebel communiqué that broadcast the Tiberias attack of 2 October, it was well-laid, with all communications lines in the area downed and all of the roads leading into town blockaded. Some 300 men singing anthems then entered the city and destroyed government buildings, much as in the south, and assailed the Jewish quarter. Y. Ben Tzvi claimed that local troops and police did not engage the rebels, but fired ineffectually. The rebel communiqué boasted that 70 Jews had met their demise, and though far fewer actually died, most were women and children and most died at close quarters from stab wounds, not gunshots. The grisly slaughter was unusual for the rebels, who generally saw the intentional killing of women and children as lowly if not dishonorable. Ben Tzvi believed that the scale of roadblocks set beforehand required

⁵²⁶ At Beersheba a British policeman was killed in the initial raid. HC MacMichael reported that Ramallah also slipped out of government control (Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 57, PRO – CO 935/21) and daily dispatches reveal something of a game of cat and mouse between rebels and the state (HC to Colonial Secretary, 7.9.38, #546 and 9.9.38, #557, PRO – CO 733/366/4), but the local structures of colonial authority weren't as solidly thrashed there as in the south.

⁵²⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.10.38, resume of operations (Sept), PRO – Air 5/1248. The High Commissioner later explained that absent "sufficient force... it was unavoidable during this period to concentrate available resources at the most important points rather than to dissipate troops and police in relatively small strength over the countryside." The situation was aggravated, of course, by the suspect nature of Arabs serving on the police force (Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 57, PRO – CO 935/21).

hundreds of villagers to arrange and therefore demanded “severe punitive action” against area villages.⁵²⁸ The government went into overdrive to exact retribution. It asserted that it hit the perpetrators that night, killing six, then again the following day at Ghuwayr Abu Shusha where 35 were killed, and finally also on 3 October north of Safad, where another 18 fell.⁵²⁹ Wingate exacted his own brand of vengeance by taking the SNS to nearby Hittin, where 10 men were chosen and summarily executed.⁵³⁰

The occupation of Jerusalem was long forecast and had been openly announced by rebels. In mid-September, after the disastrous surprise of the rebel confab at Dayr Ghassaneh, a defensive communiqué from insurgents declared that at the meeting 7000 fighters prepared to march on Jerusalem, where the Arab flag would be hoisted over both the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.⁵³¹ According to Zionist intelligence, ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq directed the actual assault from Ramallah. On 15 October rebels closed the Old City’s Gates and ran up the Arab flag as promised.⁵³² When police intervened they were hit with a bomb and on 16 October the government declared a 24-hour curfew in the area.⁵³³ Rebels using the parapets along the city walls fought running battles with the police, sniped the Jewish quarter and succeeded in

⁵²⁸ Official communiqué #2, General Command of the Army of the Arab Revolution in Palestine, n.d., in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 508; Ben Tzvi to Tegart, 7.10.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4; *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 15. Zionist demands for collective punishments and for more strenuous treatment of the Palestinians were common, and grew increasingly so, as the revolt pregressed. In mid-1939, after a steady stream of Zionist “retaliations” killing Arabs, HC MacMichael remarked on the dirty tactics they employed by contrasting them with those of the insurgents: “Excepting the bad case of Tiberias early last October, Arab outrages have at least been aimed at men and property” (HC to Colonial Secretary, 5.7.39, PRO – CO 733/398/1).

⁵²⁹ Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 62-63, PRO – CO 935/21

⁵³⁰ Knight, “Securing Zion?,” p. 534.

⁵³¹ Communiqué from General Command, Southern Syria, 21.9.38, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 506.

⁵³² The situation in the Old City of Jerusalem, 23.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁵³³ Ibid.; HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.10.38, #694, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

burning down the police station inside the Old City grounds.⁵³⁴ Shakib al-Qutb, a rebel court judge from Nablus, led the insurgents, one of whose goals was to eradicate “traitors.”⁵³⁵ The temporary capture of the symbolic center of Palestine – so proximate to the seat of government – precipitated the devolution of authority from the civilian administration to military commanders on 18 October, with Major-General Richard O’Connor assuming responsibility for Jerusalem.⁵³⁶ Searches were initiated using human shields to protect British troops.⁵³⁷ At least 19 Arabs were killed, including 4 women, in the state’s retaking of the city.⁵³⁸ There is no way to tell how many were insurgents, as the search for men and arms largely failed while Zionist intelligence noted that most of the dead were curfew breakers and many of the rebels slipped outside the Old City to avoid capture.⁵³⁹ Additionally, the High Commissioner acknowledged that hunger afflicted part of the population during the government’s multi-day siege (ending on the 23rd), and Zionist sources counted at least seven Arabs who died of starvation in

⁵³⁴ HC to Colonial Secretary, 18.10.38, #699, PRO – CO 733/366/4; The situation in the Old City of Jerusalem, 23.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁵³⁵ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 111; Army action in the Old City on 21-24.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 172. Al-Qutb is misidentified as al-Qasab in the Zionist report. Yasin writes that one of the units operating in the Old City was geared towards eliminating “those who sell their consciences.”

⁵³⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 18.10.38, #699, PRO – CO 733/366/4; Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 193.

⁵³⁷ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 110-11; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 240.

⁵³⁸ HC to Colonial Secretary, 19.10.38, #708, PRO – CO 733/366/4. As usual the casualty counts that reached the exiles and Akram Zu’aytir at the CCJ’s propaganda office in Damascus were significantly higher than the state’s, with 67 Arabs reported killed or injured, while the government put the total at 44 (Zu’aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 491-92; Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 72, PRO – CO 935/21).

⁵³⁹ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 72, PRO – CO 935/21; The situation in the Old City of Jerusalem, 23.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

its midst.⁵⁴⁰ The rebels issued a communiqué afterwards explaining their withdrawal as an effort to spare civilian lives; they claimed to have killed over a dozen police and soldiers and to have suffered no casualties themselves.⁵⁴¹ Al-Qutb, who refused to surrender, was apprehended and tortured severely, according to Abu Gharbiyya, who was also picked up by authorities.⁵⁴² With this episode the rebels signaled their power throughout the country, stealing next door to the teetering colonial government itself, which only reconquered the Old City hiding behind helpless Palestinians and atop the hungry poor. The transfer of power subordinated first the police and then the civilian officials throughout the country to military commanders, which, along with the troop reinforcements following the Munich Pact, completed the transition to a fully militarized counterinsurgency regime.⁵⁴³

If Tiberias and Jerusalem were the bloody and symbolic peaks of insurgent power, it was Jaffa which came under the most sustained rebel thrall. Unlike most of the other urban assaults, the rebel hold on Jaffa did not come at a stroke, but through a steady and surreptitious accumulation of forces in the surrounding region. Jewish representatives complained to the Palestine administration in August that rebel bands ringed Tel Aviv while Zionist intelligence reported that villagers were the real authority in the area and the government in retreat.⁵⁴⁴ In Jaffa the bands both paraded openly and

⁵⁴⁰ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 72, PRO – CO 935/21; Army action in the Old City on 21-24.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁵⁴¹ Announcement and news from The Council of the Higher Leadership of the *Mujahidin* in Jerusalem, n.d., CZA S/25 – 9332.

⁵⁴² *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 110-11.

⁵⁴³ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, appendices E and F, p. 55-56.

⁵⁴⁴ Extracts from a discussion on security, 24.8.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4; Survey, 19.8.38-25.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

imposed a sartorial edict, subsequently generalized in urban and rural areas, that required male Arabs to wear the *kaffiyah*, the checked headscarf of the countryside, in place of the *tarbush*, the Ottoman-era felt cap donned by elites.⁵⁴⁵ The shift helped the rebels conceal themselves when they willed and had wide symbolic resonance.⁵⁴⁶ The police were infiltrated, intimidated, and attacked, with the central station overpowered and its armory pilfered at 2 a.m. on 7 September.⁵⁴⁷ Before this the police reputedly feared even to take down rebel notices pasted around the city.⁵⁴⁸ They were also enjoined to resign.⁵⁴⁹ As in Jerusalem one of the rebels' preoccupations was to root out collaborators and "traitors," and this campaign escalated with trials and death sentences against offenders multiplying by October.⁵⁵⁰ The government could only understand the rebel grip on the city as the result of gross coercion. DC-Southern Crosbie declared in early September that Jaffa was "completely terrorized" and the High Commissioner later singled out Jaffa, along with Gaza and Jerusalem, as areas where the government could put on "a show of force" but where "terrorists... [were] so difficult to control."⁵⁵¹ Yet the rebels collected funds for the uprising from merchants and workers without dispute in September and when the insurgent control of Jaffa attracted adventurers and extortionists who sensed an opportunity for plunder, rebel authorities expelled some of

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., both sources; Exchanging the *tarbush* for the *kaffiyah* and '*iqal*', 30.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁵⁴⁶ As discussed below, the *kaffiyah* order was one of many administrative decrees issued by the ascendant rebel formations as they struggled to begin a process of social reformation alongside their quest to expel the colonial powers from Palestine.

⁵⁴⁷ HMS Malaya, report of proceedings, 8.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

⁵⁴⁸ Extracts from a discussion on security, 24.8.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4; Survey, 19.8.38-25.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁵⁴⁹ On the security situation in Jaffa and its environs, 5.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.; Survey, 2.9.38-8.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; On events in Jaffa, 3.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁵⁵¹ DC-Southern to Chief Secretary, 9.10.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4; Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial secretary, 3.12.38, p. 68, PRO – CO 935/21.

them (a group of Transjordanian Bedouin) and brought others to trial, fining them and forcing the return of stolen goods.⁵⁵² When Abu Khalid, one of the foremost commanders of the rebellion, was killed in mid-September, the city observed a strike and leaflets memorializing him circulated.⁵⁵³ It wasn't until the second division of troops arrived that the state was strong enough to conduct major operations intended to restore its hold over the city, which remained a "hotbed of terrorism."⁵⁵⁴ Subsequently, rebel strength in the city diminished, and like elsewhere, became confused with criminal elements. The administration proclaimed that the multi-day search conducted in Jaffa between 31 October and 3 November led to a general lessening of the insurrection's vigor in urban areas.⁵⁵⁵

At the height of their power the rebels attacked the colonial state with great ferocity. In September they fought "almost daily encounters with the troops and police" and the following month the scale of the insurgency drove "constant military and police activities." Their successes, and the ramified pressure they brought to bear on the government, forced it to withdraw from large patches of the country while undermining what was left of its hold elsewhere. For this the rebels paid a great price, with the highest number of confirmed monthly casualties registered in September and October.⁵⁵⁶ DC Keith-Roach held that the British regime faced "a whole nation at war."⁵⁵⁷ The U.S.

⁵⁵² Surveys, 23.9.38-28.9.38 and 29.9.38-6.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

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⁵⁵⁴ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial secretary, 3.12.38, p. 74, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁵⁵⁵ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 17. See below.

⁵⁵⁶ The tallies for both months were 311 and 282 respectively, although "the actual casualties were considerably higher, because on practically all occasions every effort was made by Arab bands to remove and conceal casualties" (*Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 14-15, 20).

⁵⁵⁷ Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 201.

Consul-General at Jerusalem agreed.⁵⁵⁸ ADC Bell concluded that the uprising was “a deeply rooted peoples’ revolt and the seeds of its success, in so far as it had succeeded, lay in the fact that thousands of simple and normally peaceful villagers were prepared to risk their lives to fight what they regarded as oppression and injustice as represented by aggressive Zionism supported by British imperial interests.”⁵⁵⁹

The rebels fought with courage and boldness, if not foolhardiness, but their struggle wasn’t solely to eject British imperialism and destroy the Jewish National Home. It was to repair and refashion their broken and ravaged society, and to restore justice to the peasantry and the poor that had born the brunt of both the emergence of capitalism and the displacements – economic, social, and political – brought about by the dual colonial order.

The emergent rebel social order, the “peasant agenda,” and the revolution within the revolution

Over the months of their ascent through the spring and summer of 1938 the rebels became, for a brief time and in limited but growing geographic zones, the masters of their own country. Reflecting popular optimism, one of the slogans of the time was “*ma fish hukuma*” – literally, “there is no government” – hence the path was open to the public to shape its own destiny.⁵⁶⁰ The courts apparatus the rebels built was supplemented by a kind of indigenous, protean revolutionary administration, complete

⁵⁵⁸ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 194.

⁵⁵⁹ Bell, *Shadows on the Sand*, p. 90.

⁵⁶⁰ The slogan is noted in Survey, 22.12.38-28.12.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

with a degree of internal functional specification and separation of powers. In its monthly assessment for September, RAF intelligence commented that the “Increase in rebel authority throughout the country has been remarkable.” Perhaps the most crystalline example of this for the colonial authorities was the “astonishing obedience” of the population to the *kaffiyya* stricture, not just in Jaffa, but throughout Palestine.⁵⁶¹ The courts were noted to have a wide application, doling out fines, corporal punishments, and death sentences. The extent of their popularity and breadth of activity was evident in their solicitation of, among other issues, cases dealing with adultery.⁵⁶² The top field commanders came to act as governors-general in their respective territories,⁵⁶³ and with their advisors, issued diverse injunctions and regulations. Conservative norms from the countryside were spread to the cities and towns. Rebel proclamations forbade the use of electricity derived from the Rutenberg concession, the wearing of shorts, “loose morals” and even the use of harsh language.⁵⁶⁴ The *Qassami* commanders banned liquor, mandated that stores close on Fridays, and on some occasions punished instances of domestic violence and disobedience by children.⁵⁶⁵ Attempts were made to limit the price of commodities and keep merchants and traders from gouging the public.⁵⁶⁶ In a word, rebel ambitions were great and the zeal of some leaders and judges for conservative Islamic social reform was quite pronounced.

⁵⁶¹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.10.38, resume of operations (Sept), PRO – Air 5/1248.

⁵⁶² Ibid.; Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 54, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁵⁶³ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 226.

⁵⁶⁴ Surveys, 9.9.38-22.9.38 and Histadrut Executive Committee minutes, 2.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 54, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁵⁶⁵ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 306-07.

⁵⁶⁶ E.g. Formation of al-Kifah platoon, 9.11.38, item #12, *Te'udot*, p. 92-94.

With the prominence of the peasantry in the revolt, and their apparent victories over the shrinking geographic purchase and ideological reach of the colonial state, the uprising took a new turn in the late summer. Cadres and field commanders who held deep sympathies with the oppressed and harbored historic grievances against the Arab aristocracy and the bourgeoisie initiated a project of internal social revolution, aimed at recalibrating class relations and stemming the rank and quotidian exploitation of the lower peasantry, the dispossessed, and the urban poor. The revolution within the revolution complicated the Palestinian struggle, and only began to gel shortly before the successful retooling of the British counterinsurgency in the fall of 1938.

As the revolt bloomed, the exiles became anxious to maintain their claim as the recognized political leadership of the Palestinian movement. They also grew concerned over the harsh methods employed against accused collaborators and informants and the occasional gruff handling of villagers and *shaykhs*. As complaints found their way from notables in Palestine to the exiles, the latter endeavored to assert themselves and regulate the conduct of the revolt. The AHC correspondingly issued admonitions in May 1938 to the fighters against ill-conduct, along with the aforementioned instructions from the CCJ that imposition of the death penalty required a “warrant” – i.e. permission of the exilic leadership.⁵⁶⁷ In the summer a more detailed set of prescriptions was issued by the CCJ. The program it authored was aimed at stanching internal rivalries and feuds as well as maintaining proper relations with the villages. According to the new standing orders, *mukhtars* could not be killed without being taken before a court. They were to be

⁵⁶⁷ CID, 28.5.38, periodical appreciation summary 3/38, PRO – CO 733/359/10; Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 216.

warned once after an incident of informing, with repeated offenses a capital crime. Rebels were enjoined further to ingratiate themselves with village elders, instead of running roughshod over them.⁵⁶⁸ This regime was reportedly put into effect in the north, where active conciliation campaigns among village rivals and with *mukhtars* were judged to bring about a remarkable alignment between the population, including village leaders, and the rebels.⁵⁶⁹

More auspiciously, at the urging of the CCJ, several of the main field officers agreed in August to form a united command, the Bureau of the Arab Revolution, or *Diwan al-thawra*. The *Diwan* was designed to bring about greater coordination between the top rebel commanders and included Abu Kamal, ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq, Abu Durra, and Hasan Salameh, with ‘Abd al-Fattah al-Hasan as materiel logistics coordinator and Mamduh al-Sukhn as secretary. Notably absent from the ranks of the group were ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, who looked down upon the other commanders as peasant upstarts, Abu Khalid, and al-Jawlani. The *Diwan* did not extinguish existing inter-band tensions or much facilitate increased military cooperation between commanders, as was hoped.⁵⁷⁰ Nor was it able to centralize control of urban operations or the appointment of subcommanders and platoon heads, which remained the purview of the field

⁵⁶⁸ Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 10-11.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 14. This report names Abu Khalid, a triangle area commander (Yasin, *al-Thawra al-Arabiyya*, p. 122), as the executor of the northern developments, but is considerably confused on the issue, mixing him up with several other figures. Most likely it was Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir, the *Qassami* ally of the CCJ and longtime northern field marshal, who deserves credit.

⁵⁷⁰ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 213; Decisions of the *Diwan*, n.d., *Te’udot*, p. 22-23; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 214; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 244-45; Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 260-61. Porath and Nafi both make much of ‘Abd al-Qadir’s non-participation, but it is difficult to discern how this tangibly affected things.

commanders.⁵⁷¹ Still it did serve several purposes beyond being a public relations front. For one, it put the commanders into increasing dialogue with one another, helping to initiate some measure of internal reconciliation, particularly between Abu Kamal and ‘Abd al-Raziq, whose rivalry remains the stuff of lore. It also provided a transregional platform for the exertion of internal discipline, such as in the Sa‘id Shuqayr case noted above, and for modeling best practices in terms of financial exactions, etc.⁵⁷²

From the CCJ’s perspective, the *Diwan* afforded a new avenue for keeping tabs on the independent-minded commanders and attempting to influence or direct them. But in many respects that ship had already sailed by the time the *Diwan* was formed, which was an imperfect vessel for the exiles in any case. The inadequacy of the CCJ in funding and provisioning the insurgents weakened its leverage over the commanders. According to RAF intelligence, beginning in May the rebels became increasingly reliant on the in-country Palestinian population to finance the insurrection. This correspondingly bolstered the commanders’ predilection towards autonomy, which deepened as the rebellion mushroomed in the summer.⁵⁷³ The development of the counter-state and its capacities added further institutional gravity to the rebellion’s in-country leadership. The men fighting colonialism on the ground and administering over growing numbers of Palestinians delinked from the colonial state came increasingly to act as the power brokers of the rebellion. They managed a nascent counter-government that collected taxes, legislated social issues, administered justice, organized

⁵⁷¹ These aims are stated in an undated letter relating recent resolutions of the *Diwan*: no sender or addressee, in *Te‘udot*, p. 24. From the contents it appears to be from the *Diwan* to an unknown figure.

⁵⁷² See *ibid.*, and Decisions of the *Diwan*, n.d., *Te‘udot*, p. 22-23. This is also not to suggest that the practices of the *Diwan* met with acclaim from fellow commanders and subcommanders.

⁵⁷³ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.10.38, resume of operations (Sept), PRO – Air 5/1248.

paramilitaries, waged combat, conscripted levies, ran an intelligence service, and produced propaganda. During the summer and fall of 1938, and even thereafter when the conditions of the revolt became greatly embattled, the rebel administration and its institutional subcomponents continued to grow and develop.⁵⁷⁴ Each step in building the revolt's infrastructure lent further momentum to its authorities in-country. Where the prestige of the exiles had garnered them respect and importance in the past, their removal generally hurt them after their dispersion in late 1937. In place of personalized relations and the status hierarchy they came up against the growing, if chaotic institutionalization of the uprising, as materialized in the counter-state, over which they had little control.

Watching these developments, Zionist analysts recognized the increasing complexity of rebel organization, but as was their habit, attributed it to the former mufti and his men, who as one report put it, ran "all activity in Palestine" through an apparatus with varied and distinct branches "like a government."⁵⁷⁵ In some Arab and Palestinian histories the flowering of the rebellion's institutions has also been chalked up to the elite exiles.⁵⁷⁶ These contentions miss not only the decreasing influence of the exiles during the revolt's peak, but the coincident turn against the social classes from which they emanated. By late summer it became a refrain in both the civilian and military branches

⁵⁷⁴ The communiqué of the meeting at which the *Diwan* was formed, for instance, called for the multiplication of local support networks, including committees to manage the transportation of men and goods for the fighters (HMS Malaya, report of proceedings, 2.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4). Ezra Danin notes that village-level committees collecting funds for the insurgency and managing provisioning "arose in most areas of the country." This process continued late into the revolt (*Te'udot*, ft. 196, p. 92). Dozens of notices on the founding of conciliation committees, as they were sometimes called, may be found in CZA S/25 – 22591 (the Yamun cache).

⁵⁷⁵ Survey, 12.8.38-18.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22437. In the report the deeds put at the exiles' feet as proofs of this misplaced claim are minimal, including paying clerks working with rebel formations and caring for refugee families abroad.

⁵⁷⁶ E.g. Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 262.

of the colonial state that the exiles had lost their standing. Military intelligence believed that the accumulation of funds inside Palestine by the bands (derived from “robbing and extorting”) left the external leaders’ authority over the commanders “doubtful,” especially if the former called for a ceasefire.⁵⁷⁷ GOC Haining subsequently added that the rebels were less dependent on external linkages than they had been in 1936, and concluded that no leader outside Palestine had predominant or commanding influence over events inside.⁵⁷⁸ The High Commissioner agreed that the politicians had “lost much of their influence over the gangs” yet obstinately continued to blame al-Hajj Amin for the revolt.⁵⁷⁹ More penetratingly, he observed in early September that what he called the *effendis* had been “discredited” and that “the national hero is the gang leader in the hills, whether he be a ‘foreigner’ or an ex-effendi, or a villager.”⁵⁸⁰

In short, as the rebellion progressed and deepened in 1938 the balance of power shifted even more firmly to field commanders in Palestine. At times they welcomed the initiatives of the exiles and paid them respect by regarding them as the movement’s political leadership. At others they followed their own course, maintaining their freedom of action. The rebel regime that the insurgents were building inside Palestine was the key to this relationship, and to the emergence of the rebellion’s social revolutionary tendencies. To understand both the consolidation of the revolt around the

⁵⁷⁷ HMS Malaya, report of proceedings, 15.9.38, appendix III, PRO – CO 733/366/4. This was raised in connection with the diplomatic bid initiated under Colonial Secretary Malcolm MacDonald. See chapter 10.

⁵⁷⁸ Cited in HC to Colonial Secretary, 25.9.38, #621, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

⁵⁷⁹ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 66, PRO – CO 935/21. He gave as evidence for his claim about al-Hajj Amin the ties of Abu Faysal and Abu Durra to the former mufti. See also HC to Colonial Secretary, 2.11.38, #782, PRO – FO 371/21865.

⁵⁸⁰ HC to Colonial Secretary, 7.9.38, PRO – FO 371/21881.

counter-state and the promulgation of the peasant agenda, I will explore rebel taxation in greater detail.

Arguably the rebels reached a turning point in organizational terms in April 1938. That month, according to one Zionist intelligence report, which may well be exaggerated, the commanders' frustrations with police interdictions of weapons and funds supplied by the exiles boiled over. After bullets, bombs, and £P 650 from abroad were seized, unnamed rebels reputedly held 'Izz al-Din al-Shawa of the CCJ responsible, even hauling him before a court, from whence he was released to Beirut and Damascus to revivify the external supply lines, on pain of severe punishment. The same report also summarizes a conversation purported to have occurred between Abu Kamal and Sulayman Tuqan in which the former related the bands' woes, including the necessity of local fundraising, which some fighters found distasteful and tantamount to theft.⁵⁸¹ The question of veracity hangs over both of these items; nevertheless, accounts of internal fundraising multiplied in frequency thereafter.

Among the first instances of rebel taxation noted by Zionist intelligence, which appears to have given the question more attention than did the government, were small imposts raised from villages. Khirbat Zalafa and Manshiya in the coastal plain and Nufay'at and Nuzla in the Haifa subdistrict were each requested to provide £P 15 in April.⁵⁸² In Gaza rebels gave out a receipt for monies collected from al-Masmiya al-Saghira, which researcher Sonia El-Nimr says became a common practice in order to

⁵⁸¹ On the situation of the terrorists in the north, 5.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁵⁸² Letter from Hadera, 24.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

distinguish legitimate collections from those of con men and shakedown artists.⁵⁸³

Whatever inhibitions rebels had on developing in-country lines of financial support quickly eroded. In the summer the rebels were observed to have a “tax division” (Hebrew: *mahlakat ha-masim*) that collected local monies and oversaw their orderly distribution among the bands in a given region.⁵⁸⁴ Tax operations weren’t always smooth of course. Collections were given to local variations and depended on the inclinations of local band leaders. Indicating growing confidence in the strength of the rebellion, both exactions and receipts grew over time. Miske, a hamlet perhaps comparable in size to Nufay‘at, was taxed £P 60 in August.⁵⁸⁵ Collections of £P 150 and £P 100 were made from Shwayka and Irtah in the triangle in June.⁵⁸⁶ Sabbarin and its surrounding villages in the Haifa region were each assessed £P 50 in September.⁵⁸⁷ The existing evidence is piecemeal, but suggestive of a wide system of taxation throughout the countryside. When Abu Faysal’s men went south to Jaffa (after the triangle reoccupations), their collections were reportedly rather healthy. In a first round, £P 1460 were gathered under three subcommanders; in a subsequent round the figure rose to £P 1700.⁵⁸⁸ These sums dwarfed the subventions delivered by the CCJ.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸³ Hirshfeld to Zaslani, 24.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Sonia El-Nimr, “Oral History and Palestinian Collective Memory,” *Oral History* v. 21, n. 1 (spring 1993), p. 60. Several English translations of original documents concerning “coupon books” of receipts, apparently dating to 1939, may be found in the Sanur cache, a subdivision of CZA S/25 – 22591.

⁵⁸⁴ Secret information, n.d. [August?], CZA S/25 – 22489.

⁵⁸⁵ ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 29.8.38, *Te‘udot*, p. 41. The comparison in size – which is rather rough – is made using figures in *All That Remains*, p. 145 (for Nufay‘at) and the Palestine Remembered website (for Miske): <http://www.palestineremembered.com/TulkarmTownsSnapshot.html>.

⁵⁸⁶ Survey, 1.7.38-7.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁵⁸⁷ Survey, 2.9.38-8.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁵⁸⁸ ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 29.8.38, *Te‘udot*, p. 40-41.

⁵⁸⁹ Porath states that Abu Kamal and Abu Faysal received £P 600-800 each per month (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 243). However, according to ‘Izzat Darwaza and another interviewee, the

The towns and cities also became important sources of revenue for the rebels. Given their larger population and their concentrations of wealth, greater exactions were made of them. Tulkarm, for instance, was assigned £P 3000 in taxes in early July.⁵⁹⁰ Based on fragmentary evidence, urban revenues were typically smaller than this. Weekly totals found in one JA report, probably from the summer of 1938, show £P 700 raised from Jaffa, £P 300 from Haifa and £P 400 from Jerusalem.⁵⁹¹ In the first half of August £P 1000 was reputedly raised from Ramallah.⁵⁹² Oral testimony by former fighters and some wealthy urbanites has suggested that many upper class Palestinians gave freely to the revolt, in common cause with its nationalist objectives.⁵⁹³ This was hardly universal however, and as in 1936 and 1937, many in the upper classes were disinterested in bankrolling the uprising and, as local collections and the power of the rebels increased, thousands left the country.⁵⁹⁴ Of those who remained, many were compelled into funding the revolt. The Dajanis, for example, were impressed by a Ramallah band leader into providing winter clothing and shoes for 150 men.⁵⁹⁵

northern command, including Haifa, which was more closely tied to the exiles, received some £P 300 per month (Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 208). Another former rebel from the triangle stated to Sonia El-Nimr that the CCJ's subventions were monthly or bi-monthly and varied ("Oral History," p. 60). Abu Durra saw his allotment decrease in the last months of 1938. According to two letters from Abu 'Ali he was accorded £P 200 in November (when he had expected £P 250), only to see it dwindle to £P 100 in December. See letters dated 17.11.38 and 10.12.38 (addressed to Abu al-'Abd), Yamun cache, CZA S/25 – 22591.

⁵⁹⁰ Survey, 1.7.38-7.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁵⁹¹ Secret information, n.d., CZA S/25 – 22489.

⁵⁹² 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 16.8.38, *Te'udot*, p. 38. Danin casts doubt on the veracity of this collection (ft. 73, p. 38-39).

⁵⁹³ El-Nimr, "Oral History," p. 60; Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 82-83.

⁵⁹⁴ DC-Galilee to Chief Secretary, 3.10.38, report for Sept 1938, p. 3 and DC-Southern to Chief Secretary, 5.10.38, report for Sept 1938, p. 11 in PRO – CO 733/372/18; Kayyali, *Palestine*, p. 214.

⁵⁹⁵ On the causes of Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani's murder, 16.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

Whether they contributed voluntarily or by compulsion, the economic elite soon became the prime focus of the rebel tax regime. Peasant animus towards the urban notables may have helped to bring this about,⁵⁹⁶ but the continuing economic depression and food insecurity experienced by the poor was doubtless also a key cause for the shift. At least in some rural areas, the rebels took from property owners and the well-off, while leaving the rest of the population.⁵⁹⁷ The protocols that evolved resurrected earlier methods of soliciting funds by letter. Property owners and workshops were the principal recipients of requests for amounts usually ranging between £P 50-200. The letters allotted a window of time to ready liquid assets which, on appointed dates, band representatives would then collect. Anyone failing to produce the required sum on time was warned; a second instance of non-payment resulted in property destruction, and if the third period elapsed without compliance, then the recipient was in potential physical danger.⁵⁹⁸

Although in the Galilee and the north the model put in place of cooperation with local elders and notables was regarded to work well, rebels elsewhere did not refrain from lacing their demands with threats. The Jaffa notables, studded with orchard-owners and landed elites, faced successive demands from Abu Kamal and Abu Faysal during the revolt's peak, each of whom threatened to kill them.⁵⁹⁹ Abu Durra, who earned a reputation for being stern and harsh, menaced the community of 'Adasiyya in the Beisan valley, even though it cooperated and repeatedly paid imposts such as those

⁵⁹⁶ Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 289.

⁵⁹⁷ 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 3.9.38, *Te'udot*, p. 42; Miller, *Government and Society*, p. 127. These make references respectively to Ramallah/al-Bireh and the Ramle subdistrict.

⁵⁹⁸ Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 18, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁵⁹⁹ Survey, 19.8.38-25.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 267.

made through his lieutenant, Husayn al-Radi.⁶⁰⁰ Some scholars have posited that most rebel collections were compelled,⁶⁰¹ but the evidence is mixed. One man hostile to the revolt who survived an assassination attempt by bands (which accused him of obstructing the rebels and colluding with the government and Zionism) claimed that anyone failing to donate to the insurgents was seen as suspect.⁶⁰² The actual resort to force over rebel taxes (as opposed to collaboration) seems to have been relatively rare before the final months of 1938, when non-payment could result in abduction and ransoming.⁶⁰³ Instead intermediate pressures were often brought to bear. One recalcitrant orchard owner in al-Ramle, for instance, tried to enlist British aid against the bands' demands and hired guards to protect his domains. Rebels made their collection regardless, but as the master of the estate, Rif'at al-Mufti, came up short, they took the belt of his irrigation pump as collateral, clearly looking to bargain for the remainder.⁶⁰⁴

The rebels could be brusque and used duress, yet their demands were not always to be taken literally. This was the case for both tax impositions and conscription, which grew to fantastic scales in the later months of 1938. Danin notes in this regard that demands for men and for rifles – a common method of taxation, which also left the burden of procuring weapons with the villagers – were parleys. In his estimation, bands accepted as little as 10-33 percent of what they requested.⁶⁰⁵ The conscription system served, perhaps quite unanticipatedly, as another form of taxation. When the *Diwan* was

⁶⁰⁰ Husayn al-Radi to 'Adasiyya populace, n.d., *Te'udot*, p. 111.

⁶⁰¹ E.g. Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 295.

⁶⁰² From a private letter, top secret, 4.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22489.

⁶⁰³ E.g. On events in Jaffa, 3.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22191. In the research conducted here, I have found almost no clear instances of physical harm being done to the taxed elites.

⁶⁰⁴ Conversation with Shaykh Salman Abu Salim on 23.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁶⁰⁵ *Te'udot*, ft. 74, p. 39.

formed in late August 1938 it issued a call for universal conscription. All able-bodied men were to serve with the rebels for six months, it declared, or face a court martial.⁶⁰⁶ This overambitious order, issued while the total ranks of the bands were swelling to their greatest size, was rumored to have as its aim a fighting force of 40,000 men, or twice what Britain fielded in 1936 and what it would again mobilize in 1938 after the Munich Pact.⁶⁰⁷ The call-up was clearly beyond the rebels' capacity to implement, but the High Commissioner observed shortly thereafter that a "buyout" option existed, where would-be conscripts paid a sum or produced rifles in lieu of service with the fighters.⁶⁰⁸ Curiously, the opposite also held true in at least some cases. Those unable to pay taxes assigned to them could volunteer themselves as fighters and thereby work off the imposts.⁶⁰⁹ It appears accurate to conclude that in general the calls for resources, both human and material, were greatly open to negotiation and could be met on fluid terms. They acted to harness the public's assets, to materially strengthen the rebels, and to engage and activate wide segments of the public in the anti-colonial struggle.

Government employees and civic associations were part of the rebel tax system. As in 1936, Arab government workers were induced or volunteered to contribute portions of their salaries.⁶¹⁰ They did so through support committees of their own and, increasingly, through women's committees.⁶¹¹ Women's organizations, charitable

⁶⁰⁶ HMS Malaya, report of proceedings, 2.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

⁶⁰⁷ Survey, 9.9.38-22.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁶⁰⁸ HC to Colonial Secretary, 7.9.38, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

⁶⁰⁹ Letter #5 ('Arif 'Abd al-Raziq to 'Abdullah As'ad, 8.9.38), 'Atil documents, file 2, CZA S/25 – 22541.

⁶¹⁰ Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 18, CZA S/25 – 22191; Survey, 19.8.38-25.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁶¹¹ Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 18, and Political information on Arab activities, 15.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Survey, 9.9.38-22.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

societies, and some of the Chambers of Commerce acted as funnels collecting monies for the revolt.⁶¹² Many district officers were also involved in secretly soliciting and transmitting funds to the insurgents.⁶¹³ As with other rebel taxation, government employees were asked to pay more over time.⁶¹⁴ Interestingly, some intelligence collected by the JA shows that the rate of their contributions (20 percent of salaries as of the end of November 1938) was significantly lower than it had been in 1936.⁶¹⁵ The rebels left no stone unturned and sometimes chose to tax their opponents rather than harm them. When supernumerary police weren't being attacked or harassed to resign, they could be compelled to turn over money and weapons.⁶¹⁶ Given the great commotion surrounding government employees during the 1936 strike it is perhaps surprising that they didn't face greater pressure to openly join forces with the rebels, though this is indicative of their importance as sources of intelligence, weapons, and other resources.⁶¹⁷ In some cases they were indeed called to resign. A blanket call for Arab police to quit the service was made in September, for instance, though even then, the public notice had the gumption to include a caveat saying that those who were capable of aiding the rebels while on the job should stay put.⁶¹⁸ In another case, when rebels demanded in July that *mukhtars* in the Tulkarm subdistrict resign, the district officer, 'Abdullah Khayr, who cooperated with the insurgents, advised them to maintain

⁶¹² El-Nimr, "Oral History," p. 60.

⁶¹³ *Te'udot*, ft. 249, p. 118-19.

⁶¹⁴ Political information on Arab activities, 15.9.38 and 30.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁶¹⁵ Political information on Arab activities, 30.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁶¹⁶ One apparent though somewhat ambiguous example, may be found in: Committee and elders of Rafat to the leader of the revolution [Abu Faysal], n.d., *Te'udot*, p. 97-98.

⁶¹⁷ Unlike his reading of the strike, Porath acknowledges that Arab police and civil servants were of crucial importance to the revolt in its second phase (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 264-65).

⁶¹⁸ Survey, 9.9.38-22.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

the *mukhtars* in office so that they could continue to act as communications and intelligence relays between the bands and informants in government, and so as to facilitate the free and safe movement of cadres.⁶¹⁹ The bands' accession to this suggestion illustrates that tactical considerations often guided rebel praxis as much as ideological preoccupations (such as symbolically hitting the colonial state through a mass resignation of office-holders). The commonplace cooptation and pressing of government employees was not without its risks. As Danin notes, the government sometimes encouraged its officers to forge links to the bands so that they could act as moles.⁶²⁰

The return to the 1936 strike's financial *modus operandi* of taxing the wealthy presaged a deeper confrontation with Arab society's class hierarchy. As the rebellion reached its zenith in late summer 1938 and the government's territorial, legal, financial, and symbolic power shrunk in favor of the insurgents, the imminent failure of the fall harvest and the ongoing economic crisis in the Arab countryside helped to bring about a social revolutionary turn within the rebel camp.⁶²¹ The founding of the *Diwan* in August was accompanied by its declaration of a one-year ban on debt collecting.⁶²² Within days 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad sent letters to known debt-collectors warning them and creditors in general against leaning on any peasant or villager, including by taking the latter to court, and threatening them with "Unpleasant disciplinary action" if the order was flouted. The same letters also castigated land brokerage, quoting an

⁶¹⁹ Information from Tulkarm, 17.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁶²⁰ *Te'udot*, ft. 249, p. 118-19.

⁶²¹ HC MacMichael warned of impending famine, on account of the failed wheat harvest, in mid-September (HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4).

⁶²² HMS Malaya, report of proceedings, 2.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

admonition from the Qur'an to the effect that death would be the recompense of the *samasira*.⁶²³ The mention of these two issues side-by-side, credit networks and land sales to Jews, affirmed the view of many rebel fighters that they were facets of the same corrupt social order that had produced Palestinian dispossession and contributed to the economic, social and cultural erosion of the rural order and village life. That dispossession and land sales continued during the revolt illustrated that part of society profited from the misery of the weak, even at the expense of undermining the Arabs' continued existence in Palestine and certainly at cost to its national movement during its most critical hour. Abu Kamal voiced his personal vexation at the compound crises afflicting Arab Palestine in a letter to fellow commander Abu Khalid, in which he distinguished the rebel movement from the preceding period, opining: "We found the land [Palestine] groaning under the yoke of subjection, slavery, and ignoramuses, without any national sentiment, from the start immersed in corruptions and schism."⁶²⁴ His pithy and romanticized summation illustrates the emergent sensibility among the insurgents that Palestine's fate was in their hands, and that the politicians and others who had come before had failed because they were steeped in exploitation of the masses and mired in quests for personal and familial power and glory.

At least in the short term the rebel injunction relieved the peasantry and the rural population of the weight of debt.⁶²⁵ The rebels solidified the social turn by announcing a

⁶²³ The letter is reproduced and translated in Imperial Chemical Industries, Ltd to Colonial Secretary, 25.8.38, PRO – CO 733/371/10.

⁶²⁴ 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 11.9.38, *Te'udot*, p. 46.

⁶²⁵ Todd (WO) to Downie (CO), 9.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4. It is unclear for exactly how long, or to what extent, debt collections were forestalled. The fact that the government was already overextended meant that it could not post any of its security personnel to protect debt collectors in the immediate term.

year-long moratorium on urban rents alongside the ban on credit collections. This order again hit at the upper classes that owned a great deal of the urban properties. As Porath and Swedenburg have pointed out, by doing so the rebels acted to shore up their base in urban as well as rural areas and, in the process, underscored their rejection of the class order.⁶²⁶

The nascent social revolutionary impulse was famously given sartorial expression when the rebels banned the *tarbush* and imposed the *kaffiya*, as noted above. Although the immediate cause of the move may have been tactical, to allow rebels to seed themselves and operate throughout Jaffa unhindered, the public widely understood the change in apparel as intended to induce identification with the rural partisans.⁶²⁷ The measure quickly spread elsewhere, symbolically inverting the urban domination of the countryside. Urban women were not exempted from the new sartorial code. Western dress was condemned, including hats, and as a complement to the *kaffiya* the veil was imposed, with women expected to wear a *mandil* (kerchief) or *hijab*.⁶²⁸ Urban male youth prodded the population, both men and women, sometimes forcefully, to abide by the headgear strictures.⁶²⁹ Swedenburg has argued that the veiling order represented an effort by nationalists, not just “Islamic ultraconservatives,” to discipline the activities of urban women, particularly those of the upper and middle classes most likely to favor

The Colonial Office believed that the issue would be resolved with the restoration of government control of the country. See the correspondence and minutes at PRO – CO 733/371/10.

⁶²⁶ Survey, 9.9.38-22.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 268; Swedenburg, “The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry,” p. 492.

⁶²⁷ Exchanging the *tarbush* for the *kaffiyah* and ‘*iqal*, 30.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁶²⁸ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 182-83.

⁶²⁹ Exchanging the *tarbush* for the *kaffiyah* and ‘*iqal*, 30.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 181-83.

Western fashions. This is all the more so since rural women often didn't veil and *enjoyed* greater personal freedoms than their urban counterparts. It is perhaps for these reasons, as well as bowing to the ascendance of rural forces that, rather remarkably, some urban women took to wearing *kuffiyas* instead of the prescribed female headgear.⁶³⁰ If the revolt witnessed women handling all manner of unusual tasks, such as concealing and transporting weapons, for instance, the limits of these departures from gender norms were attained in the rebel movement's urban ascent. There the hegemony of the rural element within the revolution, which issued the *kuffiya* and veiling orders, was visualized on the bodies of their urban compatriots, and especially the men and women whose class background and privilege were associated with rural oppression and exploitation.

Not surprisingly, the rebellion's social turn was hardly universally welcomed. As will be discussed in chapter 10, the increasing assertiveness of subaltern social elements spurred some elites, both urban and rural, to directly participate in open counterattacks against the revolt and against its restive lower class constituencies. Within the nationalist camp opinion was also mixed on the injection, or rather reemergence, of questions of class and geographic power into the insurgency and the counter-state. Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, exiled to the Seychelles at the time, later reflected the consternation and qualms that this caused among some, if not most, of his middle and upper class comrades-in-arms. In a postmortem on the revolt he writes in his memoirs that the uprising faced a choice, as he put it, of pursuing social reform or of

⁶³⁰ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 179, 181-85.

aiding the national leadership, by which he meant the exiles and social elites that had always seen themselves as the natural leaders of Palestinian society.⁶³¹ The implication is clear: whatever merit the challenges to the class and status orders had, they were secondary to the necessity of maintaining a unity of purpose on the political front. The class inflection of this judgment – which naturalizes the social hierarchy and elite political leadership – is clear. Yet it ignores the fact that it was not at the hands of wealthy landed and mercantile elites, but at those of peasant insurgents – whom a person of Rashid Bey’s background often saw as almost innately inferior – that the colonial regime had been brought to its knees. Despite this, the temptation to see the foundational matters of class and urban power as a distraction from the “real” conflict with Zionism and the British has cropped up in some scholarly discussions of the revolt.⁶³²

With the debt and rent moratoriums and the sartorial orders the top rebel commanders confirmed that the revolt was dedicated to the cause of social justice as well as to political and anti-colonial revolution. These measures followed on the heels of the counter-state’s development of a “progressive” tax regime targeted at the monied classes and of the rebel courts’ investment in the defense of the interests of the poor and the marginalized. Each of these components formed part of the agenda of social reformation that coalesced as the uprising accelerated. For the fighters and the lower classes, they were integral to making the rebellion a social as well as political project. They aligned the counter-state squarely with the social and economic interests of the

⁶³¹ *Al-Difa' 'an Haifa*, p. 165.

⁶³² E.g. Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 260-61.

impoverished and struggling Arab majority and buttressed the growing popularity of the revolt. The social revolutionary turn represented an understanding, perhaps in some senses exaggerated, that the upper classes and their adjutants (typified by the land brokers) had profited under colonial rule at the expense of their fellow countrymen. The increasing identification of the uprising with the cause of social justice spoke to its partisans' and their constituencies' sensibilities and to a widespread desire to reverse what amounted to a century of dramatic and corrosive social change and class oppression. The impulse towards social revolution was already evident in 1936. It manifest more clearly in 1938 as a consequence of both the newfound political power and influence of the underclasses within the revolutionary formations and the bleak economic outlook, in which failed harvests and famine looked to exacerbate the suffering caused by the depression.

The hopes of rebels to break free of colonial domination became intertwined with their hopes of reclaiming their own society. For this they had no blueprint or articulated long-term vision. Instead they found their way as they had throughout the rest of the rebellion, more or less from one moment to the next. The increasingly unmistakable signs of lower class assertiveness helped incite a backlash. The portent of social revolution was seen by some Arabs as more frightening than Zionism or British colonialism, and with some prompting from the latter, a reactionary movement gradually arose, much to the detriment of the uprising.

Conclusion

Over the course of the first year of the renewed uprising, rebel forces grew in strength and mounted the most serious challenge to British rule in Palestinian history. Irrespective of the heavy losses they sustained in combat both in the earlier phase as they regrouped and after the revolt gathered critical momentum the rebel movement expanded. As the insurgents eluded or outmaneuvered the colonial regime's successive counterinsurgency measures, the scope of the latter's effective authority shrank dramatically until it was geographically reduced to military and police camps in various villages and a civilian rump at Jerusalem and in several urban centers. At the height of their war of liberation the rebels enjoyed wide popularity among the Arab public and ran a rudimentary yet popular parallel government that threatened to extinguish the "prestige" of its colonial rival.

The colonial state's weakness was abundantly evident as its Arab employees, including the police, were targeted for elimination, defected, or were pressed into service by the insurgents, while its British and Jewish personnel were subject to constant assault. William Battershill, Chief Secretary and Acting High Commissioner for part of the period noted in his personal papers that the civil staff "went on with their daily work in conditions of personal hazard which had probably never before been equaled in any British dependency."⁶³³ Arab accounts point to similar statements in summer 1938 made by the new Colonial Secretary, Malcolm MacDonald, who is said to have declared the Palestinian rebellion to be the most severe situation faced by the British empire since

⁶³³ Quoted in Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 204.

World War I.⁶³⁴ As in 1936 the bureaucratic regime of indirect rule was overmatched by the expansion of the nationalist field. Tegart later inadvertently acknowledged the strength of this development when he referred to the collapse of the Arab section of the police force as “an inevitable concomitant of the rebellion.”⁶³⁵ After the unsuccessful venture with Arab supernumeraries changes were instituted in the state’s spatial framework to compensate for the near total implosion of Arab incorporation in the state. This was manifest first in the reoccupation of villages and then in the construction of a literal fortress state. In 1938, as police stations and billets were eviscerated and state personnel endangered, the government embarked on the construction of some 70 fortified compounds, known as Tegart forts, strategically located at key crossroads and in critical areas of the country. These bases, built over several years and designed to house the police and shield state officials, came to dominate the landscape of the late Mandate, becoming living monuments to the imperial suppression of the Palestinian campaign for independence.⁶³⁶

In 1937-38 the colonial authorities’ turn towards militarized autocracy in place of indirect rule grew increasingly blatant, as even loyal Opposition figures were snubbed and pushed aside.⁶³⁷ The result was a regime of liberal despotism, commanded until late 1938 by the High Commissioner (and thereafter by the military) and managed in tightening conjunction with the Cabinet in London. The legal infrastructure provided by

⁶³⁴ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 427. See also Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 230.

⁶³⁵ Tegart to Chief Secretary, 31.1.39, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4.

⁶³⁶ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 206. The government ultimately counted a smaller number of structures within the purview of the program (54), 13 of which had facilities for non-security personnel (*Survey of Palestine*, v. 2, p. 586).

⁶³⁷ On the position of the Opposition see the next chapter.

the Order-in-Council empowered the erection of a military judicial system and the continuous issue of repressive regulations that divested the colonial encounter of any semblance of regard for notions of liberty or individual rights. The lurch towards despotic power was justified as a quest for public order though simultaneously the security and rights of the Arabs, the majority of the public, were increasingly trampled upon and disregarded. This defining paradox of the Mandate continued to shape British interactions with the Palestinians throughout the revolt and licensed ever harsher treatment of the Arabs in its final phases.

While the brutishness of the counterinsurgency fed the stream of rebel recruits and supporters and the economic desperation of the poor and the struggling lent the uprising further life, the propulsive drive of the revolt in the first year after the Andrews murder was anything but foreordained. Many accounts omit almost entirely the long rebel ascent, much less endeavor to explain it. Porath, for example, decenters it in his narrative, covering it in two pages (237-38) compared to fifteen pages dedicated to internal tensions and disorder (243-49 surrounding the CCJ and the revolt's institutions; 266-69 on class conflict; 269-73 on strains with the Druze and Christians) and eight more on counterrevolutionary forces (250-57).⁶³⁸ This lopsided view of the revolt's highwater mark is not unique.⁶³⁹ Nor is the corresponding argument, of which Porath is again an exemplar, that the reasons for the revolt's downfall were internal.⁶⁴⁰ Zionist narratives more than others typically see the uprising as a glass half empty and

⁶³⁸ All page notations are to *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, chapter 9.

⁶³⁹ Arnon-Ohana's *Herev mi-bayit* offers another example (p. 275-88, with notes to 293).

⁶⁴⁰ The British counterinsurgency mostly gets three pages (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, 239-41). Arnon-Ohana is again another instance of such a construction.

overemphasize its disintegrative aspects and internal fault lines. But they are not alone in failing to explicate the longevity, ferocity, and popularity of the revolt. While they thematically occlude attention to the rebellion's increasing strength – impelled by an ideologically-committed view that the Palestinians were their own worst enemies – other scholarly research has also underplayed the accomplishments of the insurgent movement and the sources of its potency.

One general means by which this has occurred is the underestimation of rebel institutions. Ann Lesch, for instance, contends that “No alternative political structure emerged in the countryside” and that the insurgents “needed the elite to articulate the[ir] political demands and negotiate with the British.”⁶⁴¹ In a more nationalist and *majlisi* vein, Musa argues that in the absence of a unifying structural framework the mufti's symbolization of Palestinian people gave the revolt its cohesion.⁶⁴² As I have argued, a closer reading reveals that the development of rebel institutions from intelligence to the courts system were instrumental to the rebellion's flourishing and to its success against the colonial regime. Arab observers and participants like Zu'aytir and Abu Gharbiyya gloried in the spread of the courts in particular and at its best Zionist intelligence likewise underscored the importance of the rebel judicial arm in propelling the insurgent movement. Together, the ensemble of institutions and state-like practices constituted, as even the High Commissioner was forced to concede, a nascent counter-state. While the rebels courts have been caricatured as doling out hangman's justice and the insurgent administration, when noted, has mostly been seen as ad-hoc and of little significance,

⁶⁴¹ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 227.

⁶⁴² Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 241.

such views omit the extent of the state-building project within the revolt and fail to grasp that it acted in important fashions to strengthen the insurrection's appeal as a viable alternative and to reinforce the integration of the Arab public into the insurgent movement. It was these same institutions that swung the balance of power within the rebel movement decisively in favor of in-country formations and rendered the CCJ and the exilic backers secondary authorities, at least until late 1938.

Contrary to commonplace views, the decentralized character of the revolt did not hobble its growth. The rebels were able to roll back the colonial state without a concerted and agreed-upon central leadership, chain of command, or strategic plan. A number of the commanders formed the *Diwan* in the summer, but the insurgency was already roiling by the time they did. In fact decentralization may have been an asset over the first year, inspiring local initiative and allowing the movement to sprout new branches without fetters or preconditions.⁶⁴³ Likewise the insurgency's acephalousness saved it from several potential decapitations as a host of key leaders were killed between November 1937 and May 1938. This is not to say that the field commanders didn't joust for control or didn't desire to centralize power in their own hands. Clearly they did and, as will be discussed in the next chapter, internal divisions and the contest over leadership came at great cost to the revolt and to the national struggle. Yet the fact remains that centralized military command and uniform lines of control were not preconditions for the rebel conquest of much of the country. Localized, migratory, and loosely

⁶⁴³ Khalidi agrees with this assessment for the "early stage" of the renewed rebellion, but contends that decentralization ultimately weakened it thereafter ("The Palestinians and 1948," p. 28). As I will show in the next chapter, there isn't much basis for the second half of this judgment, as the insurgency's weakness by late 1938 stemmed in its most critical dimensions from exogenously-driven factors that in turn negatively effected the revolt's internal dynamics.

interconnected rebel formations using flexible tactics and, operating with the support of great swathes of the public, brought the colonial state to the brink of collapse.

Towards the end of the first year after its rebirth, when enthusiasm for the anticolonial struggle was at its utmost and many thought victory was not only possible but impending, the quest to preserve Palestine's Arab society gave way to a further radical impulse. The men-at-arms who fought for the preservation and independence of Arab Palestine instituted a program of social reform and transformation that was designed to elevate the status of the peasants and workers from which the rebellion drew life and to alleviate the economic strains that had decimated their fortunes. The revolution within the revolution derived not from misplaced zeal or mere class resentment, but from deep class contradictions emblemized foremost by the elite's late Ottoman vintage economic strategy of accumulation through debt and by the growing marginality of the lower ranks of the peasantry. The nascent social turn was ill-starred. Its timing was not fortuitous, coming on the eve of major reinforcements that turned the tables on the rebels in the fall of 1938 and sent them scrambling to retain their footing and position, let alone drive through a major restructuring of the Palestinian social order. Moreover, the social turn helped catalyze the discontents of the upper classes, particularly those in the Opposition who came under increasing attack from *majlisi*-affiliated and other rebel forces. The elite elements that were most alienated by the rebellion and most perturbed by the ascent of peasants and workers under arms coalesced into an active counterrevolutionary force in late 1938. This revanchist fragment within Arab society fought to restore the class order, to expunge the growing

threat to its social and economic status, and to preserve its privilege and power. Together with a complement of other complications and alongside the dramatic escalation of HMG's forces, the counterrevolutionary elements contributed to breaking the rebel movement's momentum. The rebel project was thrown back on the ropes and the vision of social emancipation, uplift, and reform that had begun to crystallize during its peak was soon relegated to a distant second-order priority as the insurgent movement battled for survival.

Chapter 10: Counterinsurgency, counterrevolution, and the demise of the revolt

The rebellion reached the end of summer 1938 and the early fall in its fullest flush. The insurgent thrall throughout much of the country and the alternative order over which they presided was based in popular support and had pushed the colonial state to the wall. The high-water mark that the insurgents attained – bringing with them much of Arab society which supported the aims of evicting the British regime, arresting the growth of the *yishuv*, and preserving Palestine as an Arab homeland – was not to last. Limited reinforcements began to arrive in the summer and by fall, the threat of rebel victory was judged so severe that a second full division of troops was deployed, bringing the force strength in Palestine to equal one-tenth of the imperial army.¹ Despite the vastly lopsided battlefield ratio of imperial to rebel forces that this produced (10:1 or higher, with the police included), a goodly number of accounts portray the rebellion as imploding under the weight of its own contradictions.

As Ted Swedenburg has poignantly observed, accounts of the Great Revolt (and particularly its second phase) have often depicted the Palestinian movement as devolving into a maelstrom of “fratricide” while occluding the momentousness of the challenge it mounted to colonial rule and the Zionist project.² The crudest renditions of this framing place ungainly analytical weight on the organization of Arab society in *hamula* units, explaining the political and economic conflicts that characterized the revolt as merely a

¹ As commented by Lord Gort, Chief of the General Imperial Staff, in February 1939: Narrative dispatch #2, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.3.39, p. 15, PRO – CO 935/22.

² “The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry,” p. 494; *Memories of Revolt*, p. 84.

reflection of ineluctable primordial divisions and hatreds.³ An alternate, non-Orientalist and less dismissive line of argument posits that the revolt's internal fractures damaged Palestinian Arab society and its independence struggle for “generations” by precipitating a deadly civil war.⁴ While contemporaneous Palestinian voices have mournfully lent credence to this lachrymose view,⁵ in many respects the civil war narrative continues the elitist tradition of the old historiography, representing the bloody embroilments of warring elite factions as emblematic of the political movement and society as a whole. It also obscures the role of the dual colonial order in stimulating and enabling the counterrevolutionary forces that came to be known as the “peace bands.”

The rebellion did exacerbate internal social cleavages and, thanks in significant measure to the mufti's eliminationist agenda of wiping out his competitors during the upheaval, some of whom were, it should be said, collaborating with the colonial authorities, Palestine witnessed virulent internecine bloodletting between the Jerusalemite factions. But the decline in rebel position and the growing chaos inside the rebel movement and Palestinian society did not reach a critical threshold until the military balance swung decisively away from the insurgents. This chapter elaborates the observation that some scholars have made, correlating external repression with internal disorder and dysfunction.⁶ In late 1938 not only did rebels lose the initiative on the battlefield and have greater difficulty finding sanctuary from the escalating suppression

³ Arnon-Ohana, *Herev mi-bayit*, p. 295-99; idem., “The Bands,” p. 247; Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 228-29.

⁴ E.g. Kabha, “The Courts,” p. 209.

⁵ Al-Hajj Ibrahim, *al-Difa’ ‘an Haifa*, p. 165, 167.

⁶ Seikaly, *Haifa*, p. 157; Norris, “Repression and Rebellion,” p. 25 (abstract). This linkage has already been suggested in the previous chapter in noting that commanders often took revenge, sometimes unscrupulously, on those whom they blamed for close calls or bruising encounters.

campaign. The counter-state that they had worked to craft – their protean political apparatus and the ethos of social reform that it proclaimed – came progressively to pieces. By the end of 1938 the revolt was deeply embattled, if not in a state of free-fall. Many of its institutions grew increasingly coarse or anemic, no longer earning the acclaim or acceptance that they previously had and signaling the weakening of the uprising as a whole. Stripped of the synergy that the counter-state had generated with the public, the rebellion was reduced to a shadow of its former self: its vitality dimmed and its military capacities dwindled.

The upending of the insurgency was not simply a matter of force strength and greater numbers, salient though these were. A number of additional developments were crucial to the process. Colonial Secretary MacDonald proclaimed in public that the counterinsurgency in Palestine and the restoration of order would be secured with respect for the civilian population and “perfect humility” on the part of the troops and privately asserted to Palestinian representatives that the suppression campaign would be recorded as gentler than that of any previous regime in the land’s history.⁷ A number of historians have more or less echoed this claim, arguing that “atrocities” were rare and campaign “relatively humane” on balance.⁸ In truth, the colonial state was militarized effectively in September, with uniformed officers taking charge and martial law all but declared. Both before and after this final stage of the transition to a military regime, the security forces employed a series of different counterinsurgency strategies, the point of

⁷ Speech by the Colonial Secretary in the House of Commons, 24.11.38, *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, appendix D, p. 50; Conversation, Colonial Secretary w/ ‘Izzat Tannus, 20.10.38, PRO – FO 371/21882.

⁸ Hughes, “The Banality of Brutality,” p. 354.

departure of which for each was the expansion of the collective punishments system and the further development of its underlying logics of collective responsibility, guilt by proximity, guilt by association, and the absence of legal safeguards for the indigenous population. Far from being shielded from the dangers of the counterinsurgency, the Arab public was increasingly seen as indivisible from the rebellion.

Still, the “strenuous warfare” of colonial security forces⁹ and the redrawing of strategy throughout the long rebel ascent wrought much havoc for the Palestinians but brought little in the way of rooting out the insurgency. This changed when the British chanced upon a new tactic in mid-1938 that proved to be pivotal. In the hot months of the summer, as the insurgency grew to fever pitch, some military officers began to experiment with the mass detention of male villagers. Mass detention was then combined with the search regime, retooling it and converting it into a system of rolling mass (male) incarceration and surveillance. The result, as I will argue, was a liberal, colonial model of concentration camps. The shadow prison system created by the new search regime bore hallmarks of the more infamous European camps but operated on a much more temporary and much less lethal basis. The techniques of the new search regime provided the authorities with the means of cutting the Gordian knot of deficient intelligence.

Two other factors aided the intelligence breakthrough. The first was the tightening cooperation between Zionist intelligence and the military. The second was the emergence, with military and Zionist assistance, of a counterrevolutionary current,

⁹ Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 24.8.38, CP 193 (38), p. 6, PRO – CAB 24/278.

complete with its own militia forces, from within Palestinian society. Both of these allies of the military contributed to developing a network of informers that penetrated or already knew the rebel camp. The intelligence they provided advantaged the colonial state and yielded increasing opportunities to deliver the battlefield initiative to its security services.

While ambient killings and brutality suffused the intensifying search operations in the latter half of 1938, they were complemented by further tactical innovations that dramatically increased the cost to the public of the insurgency. Building off of the regimen of frequent curfews, the military authorities imposed a system of movement controls in late 1938 that radically constrained the Arab population's ability to conduct its daily affairs, threatened its business interests with severe losses or destruction, and menaced the collective health of the public by jeopardizing its access to adequate food and nutrition. The regime of movement controls was tied, in turn, to new techniques of surveilling and tracking the population through a mandatory system of identity cards. The construction of an identity regime and database further increased the rebel movement's visibility and diminished its capacity to hide in plain sight.

The final blow to the rebel movement came with the return to diplomacy inaugurated under the Colonial Secretary's leadership. The roundtable talks with Arabs and Jews that he oversaw were fully expected to be "abortive," their real aim being to help create the context within which Britain could impose a policy of its choosing in Palestine, designed to help bolster its regional position in light of the potential for a new

European war.¹⁰ The final abandonment of partition and the announcement of negotiations between London and the Palestinians buoyed the position of the exiles and created the mistaken impression in many corners of the Arab public that the long struggle was on the verge of victory in the form of major concessions to the Arabs or even the granting of Palestine's independence. The reopening of the diplomatic front thus helped take the final wind out of the revolt's sails, even as its hard-sought goals never materialized.

This chapter surveys the mounting panoply of pressures brought to bear on the uprising and the consequent withering of the popular movement.

Rebel disorder and overextension

In narrating the downfall of the revolt, 'Izzat Darwaza stresses the overwhelming military forces arrayed against the Arab fighters but also sharply criticizes some of the field leadership for egoism, small-mindedness, and ultimately a lack of cooperation and unity. Rebel captains competed with each other for authority and territory in divisive manners: "each of them saw himself as prince of a fiefdom [*iqta*'] within which his independence of action was necessary."¹¹ Acting as "feudal lords" each "had their own seals, documents, communiqués on the events of the revolution, and various other public directives [*tawjihāt*]" as well as "their own scribes, gatekeepers, guards, and executors of [their] orders." Key in this description is the comparison with feudalism, with its predicate of parcellized sovereignty, or, as employed in describing many Levantine

¹⁰ Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 24.8.38, CP 193 (38), p. 7, PRO – CAB 24/278.

¹¹ *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 247.

contexts, implying a rich tradition of fierce and competing local autonomies.¹² While hardly a disinterested analysis – Darwaza offers no critique of the CCJ, of which he was the chief officer – his frustration with in-country commanders wasn't lacking in foundation. The decentralization of the rebel movement did promote a tendency towards fragmentation and drew on models of autonomy in which peers often competed instead of cooperated with one another. At its worst, internal strife was manifest in bands fighting and scheming against each other, turning on and exploiting the public, or provoking identitarian cleavages (i.e. with Druze and Christian communities).

As Darwaza suggests, contests over authority, turf or jurisdiction were important sources of internal friction and discord. Most if not all of the field commanders established personalized regimes, despite the shared goals, norms, and institutions of the counter-state apparatus. No doubt this owed in no small measure to the strong personalities and convictions that made the principal commanders compelling leaders for the rank and file. The trend towards personalization or regionalization was also sometimes promoted from below by villagers and other local supporters. ‘Abd al-Halim al-Jawlani’s headquarters outside Hebron at Sha‘b al-Milh, for example, was known as “the state of Sha‘b al-Milh,”¹³ denoting respect for Jawlani’s efforts and affirmation of the popular state formation of which it was part. While the provinciality of many commanders has been exaggerated, it is equally true that they were susceptible to regional identities, pride, and rivalries that may have, in some cases, disposed them towards localist, sub-national agendas or impulses. Without adequate regulation by

¹² See chapter 4.

¹³ Ma‘ali, *Dawr al-Khalil*, p. 115.

commanders and subcommanders – and a relentless focus on the overarching aim of expelling and replacing the colonial authorities throughout Palestine – the tendencies towards personalization and fragmentation could detract from or impair the revolt's progress, corrode its image, or even devolve into hostilities.

Important as the centrifugal qualities of the revolt were in diluting its power in late 1938, internal disorder was critically propelled by the wider context of Arab society's economic collapse. Even as the courts' network thickened and grew, the thieves and con men that rebels had earlier warned against and sought to squelch proliferated. As Arab Bureau intelligence reports in the spring and summer noted, the depression spurred an increase in theft.¹⁴ With government first neglecting non-political crime in areas of rebel operations and later retreating from many of them, the task fell to the insurgents. The rebels continued to struggle against criminal elements as they had before, staging arrests of gangs committing extortion and warning against fake fighters who used the name of the revolt to purloin the public.¹⁵ Sometimes the insurgents posted notes in prominent mosques and public places naming known extorters and thieves and warning them to desist.¹⁶ The Palestine government was aware that “free lance gangs of brigands” were piggy-backing on the revolt, impairing its “cohesion.” It described some regions, such as Tulkarm, as caught between bands of extorters and the

¹⁴ Information from Hebron, 11.5.38, and Political information on Arab affairs: survey, 6.7.38, p. 19, CZA S/25 – 22191; CZA S/25 – 22191.

¹⁵ The terror around Jerusalem, 21.7.38, and Information from Nablus, 5.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Surveys, 1.8.38-11.8.38 and 19.8.38-25.8.38, CZA S/25 - 22437.

¹⁶ Information from Hebron, 11.8.38, and Conversation w/ shaykh Salman Abu Salim on 23.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

“political” bands of the revolt. This, the High Commissioner declared, was an “encouraging” development.¹⁷

The confusion induced by the con men caused some leaders to threaten them with death, and on occasion to follow through. To add to the effect, some of the executions were conducted in public and the bodies left on display as a deterrent to others. Such practices and the quickness with which action was taken, DC-Southern Crosbie remarked, stimulated much “terror and admiration” in Arab society.¹⁸ Yet despite these harsh measures the crisis in public security grew. The chaotic conditions reigning in parts of the country, and the profusion of extortion, stimulated disaffection with the rebels by October 1938 and led some, ironically, back towards the colonial government that had largely forsaken them.¹⁹ By November the counter-state was experiencing difficulties in tax collections in some regions because of the rash of pretenders, as well as on account of overlapping exactions made by ambitious local rebel captains.²⁰

The loss of focus and blurring of purpose that paradoxically accompanied the revolt’s peak perplexed several commanders. In late August 1938 Abu Kamal wrote to Abu Khalid plaintively on the subject: “I fear that our issue will fail because everyone is trying to act in an independent manner. The greatest of my fears is that our endeavor has changed into an instrument to satisfy personal interests, and civic interests are [merely]

¹⁷ Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 55-56, PRO – CO 935/21.

¹⁸ The terror around Jerusalem, 21.7.38 and 24.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; DC-Southern to Chief Secretary, 5.10.38, report for Sept 1938, p. 8, PRO – CO 733/372/18.

¹⁹ Information on Arab activity, 12.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

²⁰ Abu ‘Adnan to Abu Mansur, 17.11.38, Sanur cache, CZA S/25 – 22591.

the symbol [covering] for this.”²¹ In a subsequent letter he stressed the need for discipline and vigilance against the “irresponsible people who’ve joined the rebellion,” while underscoring the imperative to fight fraudulent tax collections.²² The problems of extortion and rampant taxation grew particularly acute at Jerusalem, where Hasan Salameh complained to Abu Mansur (al-Jawlani) in mid-November after the state’s reconquest of the Old City that local bands were engaged in looting instead of fighting the British. Salameh bluntly condemned the situation, declaring “our rebellion did not rise for oppression and tyranny, looting and robbery and taking everything on which the eye falls[,] but rose to restore to the oppressed their rights and [to] the country its honor.”²³

One of the culprits responsible for the devolution at Jerusalem was Ahmad Muhammad Abu Sha‘ban, a subcommander from Lifta. Abu Sha‘ban was a prototypical example of the self-interested bandit masquerading as revolutionary that Abu Kamal had warned about. He was one of the Jerusalem commanders referenced in Salameh’s correspondence and his unauthorized collections drew ‘Abd al-Rahim’s attention, who issued a specific injunction against them. In spite of this, Abu Sha‘ban continued to siphon monies from the public in the name of the revolution, and one estimate put the sum he amassed at a remarkable £P 8000.²⁴ ‘Abd al-Rahim then issued an order to all captains to stop Abu Sha‘ban, who tried to flee the country with his stash.²⁵ Instead he was caught and brought before a rebel court – perhaps the High Court – and given an

²¹ ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 23.8.38, in *Te‘udot*, p. 40.

²² ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 3.9.38, in *Te‘udot*, p. 42.

²³ H. Salameh to Abu Mansur, 18.11.38, Sanur cache, CZA S/25 – 22591.

²⁴ Survey, 27.10.38-3.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 266.

²⁵ Ibid., both sources

unknown sentence; details of his trial and punishment were circulated to all commanders and subcommanders.²⁶ It appears that notwithstanding his abuses, Abu Sha‘ban was able to leave Palestine shortly after his ordeal. The CCJ was alarmed to learn in December that he supposedly carried a letter from Abu Kamal authorizing his return to the Jerusalem area – a situation that it strongly protested.²⁷ The wayward captain’s fate after this date is unknown but his doings and the failure to punish him more strenuously exemplify the shrinking accountability of rebel leaders, and their increasing conflation by part of the public with robbers and posers in late 1938.

The problem of superabundant financial exactions, bona fide and fraudulent, grew as the insurgency passed its greatest moment of strength. Neither trials like Abu Sha‘ban’s nor repeated notices from the *Diwan* and the CCJ stemmed the problem. At the street level a portrait of the ensuing trouble is offered by Tajo al-Ja‘uni, a merchant at Jerusalem visited “daily by different people demanding from him in the name of Mansur [al-Jawlani] ten or twenty five pounds and who threaten his life and the lives of his son and nephew.” Al-Ja‘uni left the country and took his case to the former mufti in hopes of succor.²⁸ Rebel forces did try repeatedly to stanch such shakedowns, but the larger issue of renegade collections remained.²⁹ As the revolt came under heavy pressure following the arrival of a second division of HMG’s troops in October, the

²⁶ Letter relating decisions of the *Diwan*: no sender or addressee, n.d., *Te‘udot*, p. 24.

²⁷ CCJ to Abu Kamal, 26.12.38, *Te‘udot*, p. 15. It is unclear whether Abu Sha‘ban did indeed possess such a letter.

²⁸ Abu ‘Adnan to Abu Mansur, 17.11.38, Sanur cache, CZA S/25 – 22591.

²⁹ For detail on another episode at Jerusalem where rebels sought the arrest of an extortioner, see Copy of a letter from Hasan Khalil Abu Hasan to [Jiryis] Salti, n.d., the accompanying note, and Muhammad al-Khalaf “Abu ‘Umar” to al-Aqsa detachment (Bayt Hanina), 29.10.38, Dayr Istiya cache, CZA S/25 – 22591.

demands of the rebels themselves became fantastic. They imposed gargantuan levies on several urban centers in December 1938. Worst hit was Jaffa, which was ordered to pay £P 60,000. Next was Jerusalem, assessed a £P 30,000 sum, while Nablus and Ramle each were assigned £P 14-16,000.³⁰ These stratospheric amounts vastly exceeded the regular collections that had preceded them, and had the unfortunate appearance of mirroring the government's collective fines. The lumpen and exorbitant qualities of the imposts deviated from the prior, more targeted policy of "progressive" taxation generally aimed at the wealthy. More than anything the colossal levies signified growing indiscipline and probably a desperate desire to combat the government's reinforcements with new resources and recruits. Watching from afar, the CCJ was shocked at the motions and counseled against them. It estimated that Jaffa could pay perhaps £P 10,000 and Nablus £P 3500 and regarded that smaller amounts taken by legitimate means were far better than more forceful efforts to eke out larger sums.³¹ Not surprisingly the urban populations balked at the orders. In Ramle the reaction was first one of panic, but then turned to mocking the wild order, the proceeds of which were assumed to be for feathering the rebels' nests. DC Crosbie reported that perhaps five percent was gathered. As well as eroding public support for the rebels, the order afforded the insurgents' rogue doppelgangers another opportunity, under its cover, to fleece the public.³²

³⁰ CCJ to Mamduh al-Sukhn, 26.12.38, *Te'udot*, p. 12-13; DC-Southern to Chief Secretary, 4.1.39, report for Dec 1938, p. 1-2, 8, PRO – CO 733/372/18; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 267.

³¹ CCJ to Mamduh al-Sukhn, 26.12.38, and CCJ to "respected brother" [Abu Kamal], 26.12.38, *Te'udot*, p. 12-13, 19.

³² DC-Southern to Chief Secretary, 4.1.39, report for Dec 1938, p. 8, PRO – CO 733/372/18

Several plans were put forward to reform the rebel taxation system as it spiraled out of control. The most ambitious was put forward by the *Diwan*. It called for rebel units to cease the imposition of “fines” for violations of rebel orders and to stop all collections in urban centers, from which they were also ordered to fall back entirely. In their stead new forces would be posted to the cities that would be answerable to trusted urban leaders, thereby providing a further check on the behavior of (rural) outsiders. All taxation would then be conducted by elected urban committees – revived national committees essentially.³³ There is no indication that this rather serious overhaul to the urban revolt ever left the drawing board. Perhaps a more mundane version of reform was advanced in Qalqilya, where a new fighting unit called al-Kifah (the struggle) was inaugurated in November with a written constitution. The detachment’s writ empowered it to impose taxes on property owners, but arrogated decisions related to both its judicial and tax operations to a supervisory council that directed the band and kept strict record of all financial transactions.³⁴ If articulating standards far beyond those of most bands, the Kifah platoon’s organizational layout at least demonstrated an acknowledgement on the part of some rebels of the need to retool the bands’ capacities and institute or strengthen a greater division of powers within the rebel apparatus, including regarding the control of taxation.

As the rebels were quick to announce, and as some accounts of the revolt have verified, the government was not a passive observer to these events.³⁵ Without much

³³ Letter relating decisions of the *Diwan*: no sender or addressee, n.d., *Te‘udot*, p. 25.

³⁴ Formation of al-Kifah platoon, 9.11.38, *Te‘udot*, p. 92-94.

³⁵ Nonetheless, some have erroneously depicted the rash of criminal activity and extortion as solely the work of rebels turned, as it were, into raiders (e.g. Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 151, 165).

detail, Porath writes that not only did the government stand by while con men did their work and soiled the revolt's image, but it itself contributed to the phenomenon "by sending extortionists who pretended to be true rebels" into the field. This was all the easier, he says, given the disagreements and rivalries between the rebel commanders.³⁶ The regime of rolling mass incarceration that the British employed from the summer of 1938 onward surely also facilitated the recruitment of useful predatory elements from the Arab population.³⁷ One general case that can be adduced is that of Husni al-‘Abd al-‘Ali, a former *simsar* and informant for the JA who turned patriotic in 1936, only to become an extortionist during the second phase of the revolt. His racket was to blackmail individuals on the threat of turning them over to the government as rebels, while helping the government clandestinely buy rifles from the public.³⁸ Undoubtedly this was just one unique design of many put in motion by thieves and schemers. By December 1938 the rebels blamed British-sponsored provocateurs, Arab collaborators, and "Jewish noxiousness" for the wave of extortion, the flight of many from the country, and the increasingly toxic environment inside the Arab community.³⁹

Imposter rebels also caused or exacerbated divisions and tensions in the rebel camp. Fawzi Fayad al-Jarrar, a band leader in Nablus and the north who served under ‘Abd al-Rahim and Abu Durra, came from a Jenin-based family which reputedly

³⁶ *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 249. Porath exaggerates the discord among band leaders rather considerably, suggesting that they were split by serious "political, family and regional dissensions, personal jealousies and criminal abuse" from the start of the second phase of the revolt and largely occluding their cooperation in building the revolt to its peak.

³⁷ See below.

³⁸ *Te‘udot*, ft. 90, p. 45. Husni was later killed by his nephew.

³⁹ Second announcement of the Leaders of the Palestine Revolution, 7.12.38, as relayed by al-Maktab al-Qawmi, notice #274, CZA S/25 – 9332. The notice is signed by ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq, Abu Kamal, H. Salameh, and ‘Abd al-Rahman Salih.

required much pressing before some of its members joined the insurgency.⁴⁰ Al-Jarrar did not get on well with Abu Khalid, the popular *Qassami* commander in the Nablus region, who cast aspersions on the former's family.⁴¹ The rift widened when Abu Khalid had his men under 'Abdullah al-As'ad disarm Fawzi, which was a common tactic of inter-band competition. Abu Kamal had counseled Abu Khalid to avoid stirring up antagonism with the Jarrars and their allies and after the disarming incident he took Fawzi's side in the matter.⁴² Fawzi was soon reported to have impeded the rebels at Haifa and was rumored to have contacts with Fakhri 'Abd al-Hadi, who had returned to Palestine to make war on the rebellion.⁴³ However, the truth of these claims, delivered in a letter to Abu Durra in October, is far from certain. It came to light that a gang associated with one Mahmud 'Ali Nursi "claim[ed] to be working under" Fawzi al-Jarrar while in reality it "swindl[ed] the people."⁴⁴ Al-Jarrar, who was wanted by the Palestine government,⁴⁵ was later injured and removed himself to Damascus where he went to hospital. Recuperating there, he showed his loyalty to the revolt when he asked that his own former men be well-provisioned and outfitted and by suggesting to 'Abd al-Rahim that a man from Kafr Ra'i who knew many rebel secrets and was "in a bad state" in

⁴⁰ Gangs, Northern sector, n.d. MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3; Information from Jaffa, 17.6.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 897. The report in Tegart's papers misnames Jarrar as Fawzi Jarrah.

⁴¹ 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 3.9.38, *Te'udot*, p. 43. Danin insinuates that Fawzi's relation to the shaykh of the Bani Saqr Bedouin tribe at Beisan, who was wealthy and cooperated at some points with government, may have had something to do with the *Qassami*'s dislike of the man (ft. 86, p. 44).

⁴² 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 3.9.38 and 6.9.38, *Te'udot*, p. 43-44.

⁴³ Abu Muhammad to Abu Durra, 18.10.38, Yamun cache, p. 2, CZA S/25 – 22591. See below.

⁴⁴ Unknown to Abu Durra, n.d., Yamun cache, p. 14, CZA S/25 – 22591. Reproduced in *Te'udot*, p. 109.

⁴⁵ *Te'udot*, ft. 85, p. 43.

Damascus should be handled cautiously.⁴⁶ He also warned Abu Durra that Fakhri ‘Abd al-Hadi’s activities were a growing problem and recommended firm action be taken against him.⁴⁷ As Fawzi’s story makes clear, poor relations between commanders could easily be degraded further by savvy posers, who themselves robbed under the guise of unlucky bona fide captains.

The well-known conflict between ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq and ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad was also stoked in part by fake rebels. The two top commanders were from families that had long fought for dominance in the Tulkarm region.⁴⁸ By many accounts, Abu Kamal’s reputation for scrupulousness and tireless action catapulted him into the position of Palestine’s top field commander. Abu Faysal, on the other hand, was dogged by unflattering rumors that he met with British military men, that he sold his men’s arms for cash, and that he was skimming funds from rebel collections.⁴⁹ He was attributed with an assault on the village of al-Tira (Ramle subdistrict) in spring 1938 and his command was seen as coarse, with some sub-regions “plagued by rebel aggressions based on Husayni partisanship and by rebel misdeeds against villagers.”⁵⁰ The two men also had distinct relationships with the exilic leaders. Unlike Abu Kamal, Abu Faysal made himself useful to the exiles’ anti-*mu‘arada* program and was charged with

⁴⁶ Fawzi al-Jarrar to Abu Kamal, 22.12.38, Sanur cache, p. 6, CZA S/25 – 22591.

⁴⁷ Fawzi al-Jarrar to Abu al-‘Abd, n.d., Yamun cache, p. 10, CZA S/25 – 22591.

⁴⁸ ‘Abd al-Raziq was from the al-Hajj Ibrahim family while ‘Abd al-Rahim hailed from the Samara clan (Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 245-46).

⁴⁹ Conversation w/ B.S. on 25.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Survey, 3.4.38-9.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; GOC Haining, “Hostile Propaganda,” 1.12.38, p. 4, PRO – FO 371/21869.

⁵⁰ Survey 3.4.38-9.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 86-87. Quote from Swedenburg.

assassinating Sulayman Bey Tuqan.⁵¹ Abu Kamal famously rejected the *majlisi* faction's desire to convert rebel commanders into partisan assassins. When an emissary of the *majlisi* exiles, Dr. Da'ud al-Husayni, visited his camp and presented a list of "traitors" to be disposed of that was conspicuously larded with the former mufti's enemies, he is reputed by his personal assistant, one Abu Shahir, to have replied "I don't work for Husayniyya [the Husaynis] but for *wataniyya* [love of country]." ⁵² As noted herein, 'Abd al-Rahim often promoted what those around him understood as "an expansive national solidarity" by trying to bring Opposition figures into rebel formations and the counter-state.⁵³ 'Abd al-Rahim's desire for national unity was misrepresented as closeness to the Opposition, especially the Hanun and Hamdallah families of Tulkarm, which were antagonists of 'Abd al-Raziq.⁵⁴ This cast suspicion upon him in the eyes of the CCJ.

The quarrel over preeminence, or pretensions thereto, festered for months before boiling over. By some accounts their men came to blows, though this is uncertain.⁵⁵ Among the factors bringing things to a head was the murder by 'Arif's men of Farid Hamdallah, a relative of 'Abd al-Rahim's, on suspicion that he was collaborating with the authorities.⁵⁶ Abu Kamal also related to Abu Khalid that he had intervened against

⁵¹ Political information on Arab affairs: survey, 6.7.38, p. 13, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁵² Quoted in Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 87. I have changed the bracketed translations provided by Swedenburg slightly. A hit list, complete with cash rewards specified, was captured by the JA and appears in Political information on Arab affairs: survey, 6.7.38, p. 11, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁵³ The quote is from Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 87.

⁵⁴ Survey, 27.10.38-3.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437. For some detail on Abu Kamal's conciliation with Hamdallah leaders, see Information about terror in the north, 21.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

⁵⁵ Porath claims that the two fought each other (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 246) but the GOC, writing in early December says that they only came close to doing so (GOC Haining, "Hostile Propaganda," 1.12.38, p. 3, PRO – FO 371/21869).

⁵⁶ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 246.

‘Abd al-Raziq’s men in August at Saniriya in the Tulkarm subdistrict, while they were engaged in theft and abusing local women.⁵⁷ Yet again the truth of the matter is murky, since men pretending to be Abu Faysal’s attacked villages in Abu Kamal’s sphere of influence though ‘Arif hotly denied responsibility for these incidents.⁵⁸ After they traded insults while seeking to win him over, the young and charismatic Abu Khalid prevailed upon them to meet and seek reconciliation.⁵⁹

In mid-September rebel contingents from numerous areas of the country gathered at Dayr Ghassaneh in the Ramallah region for the *sulha* (truce) brokered by Abu Khalid. Eventually the assembled field officers included ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, Faris al-‘Azzuni, Abu Fuad, Abu Shawkat, and al-Jawlani as well as ‘Abd al-Rahim, ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq, and Abu Khalid. Rebels paraded and celebrated for a couple days in several adjacent villages before Abu Kamal and Abu Faysal made peace publicly in front of rural elders and then met in council with the other commanders.⁶⁰ Unfortunately for them, the government had received multiple tips of the unusual events unfolding. At Dayr Ghassaneh on 15 September 1938 the assembly was spotted by the RAF, which sent an onslaught of planes to attack. Using 40 bombs and 4000 rounds of ammunition the RAF asserted that it killed at least 132 rebels while sustaining damage to six planes.⁶¹ The real death toll is unknown, though it appears to be devastating. The High

⁵⁷ ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 1.9.38, *Te‘udot*, p. 95. Saniriya was one of Abu Faysal’s hideouts (ft. 198 in *ibid.*), hence the encounter was on his home turf.

⁵⁸ *Te‘udot*, ft. 200, p. 97.

⁵⁹ See various letters of ‘Abd al-Rahim to Abu Khalid in *Te‘udot*, p. 35-46 and two letters by ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq to Abu Khalid, n.d. and 4.9.38, p. 96-97. Porath notes Abu Khalid’s role (*The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 247).

⁶⁰ Events in the bands’ camp, 21.9.38, HA 281/105.

⁶¹ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.10.38, resume of operations (Sept 1938), PRO – Air 5/1248.

Commissioner later raised the estimate to 152 and Zionist intelligence put it at 170.⁶² Arab sources contended that it was anywhere from 70 to 140 with another 80-100 wounded; however, the communiqué issued by the rebels denied that there had been a major rout (which had been broadcast on the state radio channel), and admitted only three casualties.⁶³ Rather amazingly only one body was ever recovered.⁶⁴ In a further sour turn for the insurgency, search operations mounted the following day killed Abu Khalid, whom the Palestine administration posthumously named the third most important commander in Samaria, after Abu Kamal and Abu Faysal, whose rivalry had dealt the rebels their single most costly loss.⁶⁵

Making matters worse, the truce didn't hold. The CCJ and the exiles' factionalist assassination program did much to break it up. When the CCJ sent 'Abd al-Rahim a blacklist around October 1938, he rejected the orders, angrily intoning that "The shoe of the most insignificant mujahid is nobler than all the members of the Society [the CCJ], who have indulged in pleasure while their brethren suffer in the mountains."⁶⁶ The order was then passed to Abu Faysal, who did not share Abu Kamal's qualms. This elicited a threat from Abu Kamal to disarm his rival if he followed through with the liquidations. Abu Kamal's rejection of internecine bloodletting was backed by public opinion, which

⁶² Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 60, PRO – CO 935/21; Survey, 29.9.38-6.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁶³ Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 60, PRO – CO 935/21; Events in the bands' camp, 21.9.38, HA 281/105; Communiqué from the General Command, Southern Syria, 21.9.38, in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 506.

⁶⁴ DC-Jerusalem to Chief Secretary, 5.10.38, report for Sept 1938, n.p. (section IV), PRO – CO 733/372/18.

⁶⁵ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.10.38, resume of operations (Sept 1938), PRO – Air 5/1248; Narrative dispatch #10, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.10.38, p. 60, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁶⁶ Survey, 27.10.38-3.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; CID, 18.10.38, intelligence summary 73/38, PRO – CO 733/359/10.

was repulsed by the escalating cycle of political murders.⁶⁷ When ‘Abd al-Rahim signaled the depth of his indignation by ceasing tax remissions to the CCJ, it turned sharply against him, floating the idea that he was in league with Fakhri ‘Abd al-Hadi and openly soliciting Abu Faysal as his replacement.⁶⁸ To undermine Abu Kamal, the CCJ sent orders that al-Jawlani and the Hebron forces were to take charge of the south and it promoted the formation of village committees favorably disposed to itself.⁶⁹ ‘Arif then displayed his fealty to al-Hajj Amin by declaring in a public notice in early November that the mufti was the Palestinians’ supreme leader in political matters (a reference to the roundtable talks for which arrangements were then being made) while the split between he and ‘Abd al-Rahim continued to dog the revolt.⁷⁰

A number of other band leaders also came to blows with one another. In the Upper Galilee Abu Durra stirred up trouble by late summer 1938 after trampling upon elders connected to the Zu‘bi family. According to Zionist intelligence, Abu Durra’s men killed perhaps five or six members or associates of the family.⁷¹ Na’if Diyab al-Zu‘bi, its patriarch, and Abu Durra subsequently traded raids into each other’s territories and affiliated villages.⁷² In the south, al-Jawlani killed a fellow subcommander, Khalil Muhammadiyya, allegedly after they got into a row over dividing the spoils from the Beersheba police station’s armory. The dispute reportedly fragmented forces in the area

⁶⁷ Survey, 27.10.38-3.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁶⁸ Ibid.; CID, 18.10.38, intelligence summary 73/38, PRO – CO 733/359/10.

⁶⁹ Survey, 27.10.38-3.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁷⁰ Survey, 3.11.38-16.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁷¹ *Te‘udot*, ft. 199, p. 95.

⁷² Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 224. Na’if Diyab al-Zu‘bi approached the exiles and, looking for redress, demanded a trial (Na’if Diyab Sa’id al-Zu‘bi to X [CCJ?], 31.8.38, *Te‘udot*, p. 109). The exilic leaders instructed al-Zu‘bi to field rebel units and then to contact them again if the trouble continued. Al-Zu‘bi did as instructed and his men became prominent attackers of the oil pipeline (*Te‘udot*, ft. 199, p. 95), but the issue with Abu Durra persisted.

into several smaller commands.⁷³ Sa‘id Shuqayr, who had earlier been (lightly) disciplined for coercive taxation and served under ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, was accused by the close of 1938 of plotting to kill three other band captains. He was put on trial for his misdeeds, dismissed from his command, and sent out of the country.⁷⁴ ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq quarreled with some families from Qalqilya, some of whom had connections to one of his subcommanders, Abu Nujaym al-Shanti.⁷⁵ He first disarmed Abu Nujaym during summer 1938 – much to Abu Kamal’s alarm – before eventually killing him.⁷⁶ Through his underlings Abu Faysal also disarmed some of Abu Khalid’s men, who, adding insult to injury, were then beaten in public. Abu Kamal regarded this as a criminal affair because of its damage to the public image of the rebellion, and summoned the feuding subcommanders in order to try to straighten affairs out.⁷⁷

More damning yet for the rebels was the well-documented fissure that grew between the rebels and the Druze. The small Druze community of Palestine, residing in the Haifa subdistrict and around Shafa ‘Amr, had participated in the 1936 revolt, but not extensively. After the general strike ended, demobilized rebels from Umm al-Zaynat, which became an Abu Durra base, attacked their Druze neighbors at ‘Isfiya and Daliyat al-Karmil in late 1936.⁷⁸ This and successive affrays between the Sunni Muslim majority and the Druze, including attacks on the Druze villages of Yanuh and Yarka,

⁷³ Survey, 27.10.38-3.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; *Te‘udot*, ft. 240, p. 115.

⁷⁴ CCJ to Abu Kamal, 26.12.38, *Te‘udot*, p. 15-17.

⁷⁵ Survey, 7.10.38-19.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁷⁶ ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 13.7.38, *Te‘udot*, p. 35-36; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 256.

⁷⁷ Abu ‘Abdullah [‘Abd al-Hafiz] to Abu Khalid, 17.7.38, and ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 30.7.38, 1.8.38, and 2.8.38, *Te‘udot*, p. 35-37.

⁷⁸ Parsons, *The Druze*, p. 26, 28.

progressively alienated the latter, who were also being courted by representatives from the JA (Yosef Nahmani) and the Histadrut (Abba Hushi) to remain neutral or to join forces with the Zionists.⁷⁹ Druze elders viewed the revolt with disfavor and at least one Druze band leader from 1936, Qasim al-Diban, offered to make common cause with the Zionists afterwards. While this proposal went nowhere, the Druze declined to field rebel units during later stages of the revolt.⁸⁰ In late 1937 two Druze *mukhtars* were killed at Suhmata and Kafr Sami'. Druze religious leaders in Lebanon warned their Palestinian co-religionists against rejoining the rebel ranks and the community around Haifa proved impervious to Abu Durra's lobbying to gain their support.⁸¹ The final straw came in October and November 1938 when Abu Durra conducted a series of punitive assaults on 'Isfiya and Daliyat al-Karmil. On 27 November his men killed three villagers, kidnapped at least one *mukhtar*, beat and abused the inhabitants including women and children, and desecrated Druze religious texts. One of those killed was shaykh Hasan Abu Rukn of 'Isfiya, who was a known friend of the Zionists.⁸² The Abu Rukns, who shared their fallen relation's sympathies, took their revenge by leading the army to Abu Durra the next day at Umm al-Zaynat, where his forces experienced a blistering loss of 43 men.⁸³ The CCJ pled in December with Abu Kamal to undertake urgent reconciliation with the Druze community, but the situation was too far gone.⁸⁴ Druze tobacco farmers were boycotted by Sunnis by early 1939 and further killings of Druze

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 27-28; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 165-66.

⁸⁰ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 92; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 165-66.

⁸¹ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 166; Parsons, *The Druze*, p. 28.

⁸² Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 92-93; Parsons, *The Druze*, p. 28-29.

⁸³ Parsons, *The Druze*, p. 29; Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 87, PRO – CO 935/21.

⁸⁴ Al-Sahrawi to Abu Kamal, 20.12.39 [1938], Sanur cache, p. 3-5, CZA S/25 – 22591.

leaders, including shaykh Hasan Khnayfus of Shafa ‘Amr and two others, took place in January.⁸⁵ Druze forces responded by fighting against the rebels in an array of forms. Militarily, groups of Druze combatants variously paired with a unit of the Haganah, joined the counter-rebel bands formed by Fakhri al-Nashashibi and Fakhri ‘Abd al-Hadi (see below), or fought on their own.⁸⁶ They acted as informants and helped the British identify rebel partisans during search operations. As Cohen notes, rebel leaders continued to try to stanch the divisive split between the Druze and their fellow Arabs, with the “northern command” issuing a proclamation in April 1939 against defaming or abusing the Druze and advocating the preservation of national unity, of which the community was an integral part.⁸⁷ These measures failed, and not only did some Druze cooperate with the counterinsurgency and the counterrevolution, but the wounds opened during the revolt helped cement Druze cooperation with Jewish forces a decade later in the 1948 war.⁸⁸

For his role in sowing division within Arab society, particularly after the insurgency’s peak it may be added, Abu Durra has been singled out as an example of “the narrow horizons” of one variety of rebel leadership. Musa has argued that he blurred personal antagonisms with the revolt and moreover, trampled upon the rights of the common people, driving many away from the uprising.⁸⁹ Those rights were to be protected by the rebel courts, but Mustafa Kabha has shown that Abu Durra’s severity

⁸⁵ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 93; Parsons, *The Druze*, p. 29; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 166.

⁸⁶ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 166-67; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 273.

⁸⁷ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 167.

⁸⁸ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 93; Parsons, *The Druze*, p. 29.

⁸⁹ Musa, *Thawrat ‘am 1936*, p. 220. Musa is oblique but his reference certainly seems to be a veiled allusion to the Druze, among other issues.

and harshness actually had much to do with the courts' devolution and decline towards the end of 1938. As part of a purge of collaborators and land dealers Abu Durra and his underlings tried 38 northern notables in late 1938 *in absentia* and convicted them of capital crimes. Four *mukhtars* and a notable were consequently assassinated in January 1939 and six other *mukhtars* were injured. According to the son of Abu Durra's judge, Fayad Hasan Tamish Mahajna, this soured the public considerably on the rebel justice system and reinvigorated its support for the state's courts.⁹⁰

The Opposition and the counterrevolution

The return to insurgency in 1937 left the Opposition in an odd and uncomfortable position. Prominent members of the grouping associated themselves with Amir 'Abdullah and the notion of partition, and thus with HMG's government, before the Royal Commission's proposal saw the light of day. For backing Transjordanian expansionism and advocating an alternative to al-Hajj Amin and the *majlisiyyin* they were then subject to assaults and assassination plots. When the terms of the Peel Commission plan were unveiled, the DP did an about-face, recanting its position on partition, but to no avail. The belief that its principals were partners of British imperialism and aides to Palestine's covetous neighbor to the east had gained too many adherents. The assassination plots against *mu'arada* figures continued, even hitting those that had been part of the national committees in 1936. The Opposition held forth against the renewal of the uprising, but after Andrews's murder, the administration

⁹⁰ Kabha, "The Courts," p. 205.

distanced itself from all Arab parties, leaving the battered Arab loyalists in the lurch.⁹¹ To the government's subsequent complaints that the Opposition had disappeared, one member, Hashim al-Jayyusi of Tulkarm, pointedly replied in April 1938 that the government had left it high and dry. The Opposition's hesitation, he said, derived from its fear for its own historical reputation and standing amid "nationalist revolution" and from its fears of precipitating a civil war.⁹² Not all of the *mu'aridin* were as cautious or circumspect as Hashim Effendi.

The history of the triangular relations between the *mu'arada*, the rebels and the *majlisi* exiles has often been presented as a tortuous tale in which the mufti and his men persecuted and assassinated their political enemies, only to have counterrevolutionary paramilitaries rise to help the British crush the rebellion. The reality is somewhat more tangled. Whitewashing his own role in the long sordid feud, 'Izzat Darwaza denies that the CCJ and the mufti had any hand in the dozens of killings of Opposition figures and activists that piled up throughout the revolt, arguing that from 1937 on these slayings stemmed from the Opposition's rejection of the rebellion itself.⁹³ As noted in the previous chapter, this contention was gainsaid by Jamal al-Husayni among others, but the point stands that the *mu'aridin* were not innocents.⁹⁴ They had provisionally accepted the partition of the country and the creation of a Jewish state, and when the revolt reemerged, they sometimes collaborated with the government against the rebel

⁹¹ Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 4, CZA S/25 – 22191; Musa, *Thawrat 'am 1936*, p. 197.

⁹² Conversation w/ B.S. on 25.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22191. Al-Jayyusi's remarks were made during a conversation with an army officer. He went on to serve as mayor of Tulkarm from 1939-48.

⁹³ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 218-19.

⁹⁴ Al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 403.

movement. For these derogations from the nationalist platform that had (tenuously) united the Arab community in 1936 the Opposition reaped a whirlwind. The perception that its political stances were self-interested, rather than based in the well-being of the nation, worsened its image further and added to the desires of some rebels, as well as the *majlisi* faction, to smite them.

The attacks directed against the Opposition since mid-1937 continued after the renewal of the revolt. Attempts made on the lives of Sulayman Bey Tuqan and Waqif Shak'a in December 1937 led many *mu'aridin* to keep out of sight and under watch of armed guards.⁹⁵ At the same time the mufti's men castigated Raghīb al-Nashashibi and called for war against any who defied the AHC.⁹⁶ Abu Kamal was allegedly ordered late the same year to assassinate both Raghīb Bey and Fakhri al-Nashashibi, the latter of whom had already survived at least one plot earlier in the year.⁹⁷ Although there is no evidence that 'Abd al-Rahim took the instruction seriously, A. Shak'a and Tuqan, alerted to the issue, came to the conclusion that they must do him in first.⁹⁸ Tuqan, clearly one of the most prominent leaders of the faction, suffered repeated death threats and attempts on his life.⁹⁹ By spring 1938, the state of anxiety prevailing amongst the *mu'arada* led it to oppose the annual Nabi Musa procession, which it feared would provide ample opportunity for political murder.¹⁰⁰ According to one of the JA's informants, as summer

⁹⁵ CID, 13.12.37, bulletin #238/37, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 1; Survey, 10.12.37-16.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

⁹⁶ Survey, 10.12.37-16.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227.

⁹⁷ Survey, 3.12.37-9.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22227. See chapter 8 for the previous incident with Fakhri Effendi.

⁹⁸ Survey, 30.12.37-21.1.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

⁹⁹ DIG-CID to IG-Police, 29.4.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

¹⁰⁰ Information on Nabi Musa, 18.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

arrived a near constant stream of foreign Arabs were captured at Nablus, all intent on killing Opposition leaders, the blacklist of which featured top rewards of £P 500 each for Tuqan and Raghīb Bey, £P 300 for Fakhri al-Nashashibi, and like amounts for some SMC officers.¹⁰¹

As the killings of *mukhtars* and village elders cooperating with the government gathered steam in the spring, Opposition leaders directed some of their vexation at the colonial authorities, which they charged with prolonging the rebellion. The aforementioned Hashim al-Jayyusi, for instance, criticized the military's tendency to, as he put it, shoot randomly in villages and kill the innocent breadwinners of families while the relatives of top rebel commanders, such as the 'Abd al-Raziqs, went unscathed and continued to enjoy remunerative state employment. Embodying the logic of the *hamula* and greatly underestimating his foes, he contended that if these state posts were made contingent on turning over Abu Faysal, the revolt could be wrapped up in a matter of days.¹⁰²

Almost from the inception of the revolt's second phase, members of the Opposition began to organize against it and to plan counterrevolution. In December 1937 Fakhri al-Nashashibi proposed in a secret meeting with Tuqan and others that they take up arms to defend themselves and fight the rebels.¹⁰³ Raghīb al-Nashashibi

¹⁰¹ Information from Nablus, 29.6.38, and Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 11, CZA S/25 – 22191.

¹⁰² Conversation w/ B.S. on 25.4.38, CZA S/25 – 22191. It is not difficult to see how claims such as al-Jayyusi's, and the grounds on which they were predicated, have resonated with similar Zionist arguments that also fault the British for dragging out the years-long rebellion.

¹⁰³ Survey, 17.12.37-23.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

approached the JA the same month to request funding for the endeavor.¹⁰⁴ In March 1938 Raghīb Bey pitched the plan again to the JA, which rejected it.¹⁰⁵ Tuqān made a similar proposal to the British military in April.¹⁰⁶ Short of assembling full-scale armed units to fight the rebel bands, and facing the prospect of assassination, elements of the Opposition elected to respond in kind. In December 1937, Salīm ‘Abd al-Rahmān’s father, the mayor of Tulkarm, dodged an assailant who was believed to be trying to avenge the attack earlier in the month on Tuqān.¹⁰⁷ In January 1938 A. Shak‘a and Tuqān reputedly put a hit on ‘Abd al-Rahīm al-Hajj Muhammad.¹⁰⁸ The same month an assassination plot against Darwaza and ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Shawā was disclosed by a friend of Akram Zu‘aytir’s who had posed as a gunslinger in order to travel north and warn his comrades.¹⁰⁹ In February the Syrian government apprehended what it claimed were four assassins that had been dispatched from Nablus to kill the mufti, Darwaza, and al-Shawā.¹¹⁰ Undeterred, another hit was issued on the mufti and ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Shawā the same month at a meeting attended by Fakhri al-Nashashibi.¹¹¹ Rumors were soon floated that DP leaders were organizing a counter-revolutionary band.¹¹² In early summer JA intelligence reported that Sulaymān Tuqān had his own gang of “terrorists,” one of whose first acts was to threaten Rashad Abu Ghazala, a mufti supporter in

¹⁰⁴ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 251.

¹⁰⁵ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 146.

¹⁰⁶ DIG-CID to IG-Police, 29.4.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c.

¹⁰⁷ Survey, 17.12.37-23.12.37, CZA S/25 – 22437.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Jaffa, 18.1.38, CAZ S/25 – 22191.

¹⁰⁹ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 349-50. This incident followed on the heels of the arrest of a British intelligence agent in Damascus, employed by the consulate to conduct surveillance on the exiles, who had been instructed to kill Akram Effendi and Darwaza.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Nablus, 4.2.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

¹¹¹ Letter from Nablus, 22.2.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

¹¹² Survey, 17.3.38-24.3.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; Political information on Arab activities, 20.5.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

Nablus, with death.¹¹³ Nevertheless, as noted above, Tuqan and many of his colleagues soon decided to leave Palestine in mid-1938.

Although the Opposition's willingness to engage in eliminationist tactics to save itself from the same met with little result, its other efforts against the revolt were more consequential. Its members propagandized and organized within Palestinian circles, including among youth, and dissuaded segments of the population against participating in the uprising.¹¹⁴ Moreover, Opposition activists supplied the colonial state with information on the insurgents. The Opposition in Nablus led the way, assisting the government as early as October 1937 in apprehending several rebel leaders.¹¹⁵ Northern residents angry with the bands turned over a list of their leaders to Fakhri al-Nashashibi in May 1938 for transmission to the authorities. Only days later Fakhri Effendi provided the government with another such list of Jerusalem area figures, compiled from notables in the area.¹¹⁶ But Fakhri was not content to act as an intelligence asset for the state. His determination and growing contacts with British military and intelligence services brought about the first Arab counter-force, in all manners the rebels' opposite number, in September 1938. The first unit of what became known as the "peace bands" was

¹¹³ Information from Nablus, 29.6.38, and Political information on Arab activities: survey, 6.7.38, p. 12, CZA S/25 – 22191; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 251.

¹¹⁴ Political information on Arab activities, 13.1.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; DIG-CID to IG-Police, 29.4.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 1: 3c. See also mention above of similar action in Hebron and Opposition-aligned Nablus villages.

¹¹⁵ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 250.

¹¹⁶ Political information on Arab activities, 25.5.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Survey, 27.5.38-2.6.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

founded in Ramallah, after the killing of a good friend of Raghīb al-Nashashībī from the area village of Bayt Rima, Ibrahim ‘Abd al-Rāziq.¹¹⁷

Word of British interest in Arab counterrevolutionary paramilitaries reached the exiles by late May, who saw the idea as an admission that the existing counterinsurgency had failed.¹¹⁸ Although Fakhri Effendi was the first to field a peace band, it was not he, but Fakhri ‘Abd al-Hadi, the skilled former deputy of Fawzi al-Qawuqji, that they sought to entice into the role. And it is ‘Abd al-Hadi’s participation and leadership that really put the counterrevolutionaries on the map as an effective paramilitary force. Following his departure from Palestine in 1936 ‘Abd al-Hadi, whose profligacy and trouble-making in Baghdad was chronicled in chapter 8, eventually found his way to Damascus, where he was refused a command under the exiles’ auspices and immersed himself in disputes over extracting further sums from the CCJ.¹¹⁹ This experience embittered him towards the rebel cause and gradually he became open to the multiple overtures he received to turn against the rebels, from a host of personalities including the Consul MacKereth at Damascus, Amir ‘Abdullah, and Fakhri al-Nashashībī.¹²⁰ Darwaza, repudiating ‘Abd al-Hadi, remarked that he was “a gang leader and... never a nationalist activist.”¹²¹ A British official who met with him, ADC Newton, dubbed him “an aristocratic bandit” who was partially driven by his distaste for the revolt’s lower class leadership and

¹¹⁷ Political information on Arab activities, 15.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p.252; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 147. According to the JA report, there were two commanders initially, named Abu Julama and Abu Ra’s.

Although the name given to these forces is dubious in the extreme, I will henceforth drop the quotes with the understanding that its ideological character is evident.

¹¹⁸ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 397.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 516; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 252.

¹²⁰ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 516; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 252-53; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 150.

¹²¹ Quoted in Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 150.

sympathies.¹²² After his return to Palestine in September ‘Abd al-Hadi became widely disliked by many villagers and earned the nickname “the butcher,” for the ease with which he resorted to violence.¹²³

‘Abd al-Hadi was placed on the British payroll as early as spring 1938.¹²⁴ At about the time of his arrival back in Palestine he published an editorial assailing the mufti and his camp for their actions in the homeland.¹²⁵ ‘Abd al-Hadi’s return, and the rumors swirling around it, were viewed with suspicion by rebel commanders. To ascertain his position, Abu Kamal issued an order for Fakhri’s capture for questioning at the beginning of September.¹²⁶ ‘Abd al-Hadi eluded this inquiry and proved Abu Kamal’s instincts right. In part through Fakhri al-Nashashibi’s contacts with the army and the RAF (especially the latter), the peace bands forged ties to the military, from which they obtained weapons and funding in return for intelligence and cooperation in hunting the rebels.¹²⁷ Under ‘Abd al-Hadi’s guidance, the counter-bands grew from a nuisance to a major thorn in the side of the rebels. Trying to milk his former reputation as a leading light of the 1936 campaign, and even in one missive taking credit for the

¹²² ADC Newton to ADC-Samaria, 17.12.38, CZA S/25 – 22793.

¹²³ Survey, 3.11.38-16.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; Danin, *Te‘udot*, ft. 56, p. 24, ft. 193, p. 90. Like his opponents, Fakhri ‘Abd al-Hadi “taxed” the rural population, though ostensibly for the opposite political purposes. Porath says that Fakhri entered at the head of a Druze force partially recruited by Consul MacKereth at the end of September (Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 253), but a letter from ‘Abd al-Rahim to Abu Khalid at the beginning of the month notes that Fakhri returned earlier (*Te‘udot*, p. 41-42).

¹²⁴ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 252. He had previously made himself a public spokesman defending and praising Amir ‘Abdullah in the Syrian paper *Alif Ba*, for which he received the potentate’s patronage.

¹²⁵ Survey, 23.9.38-28.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

¹²⁶ ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to Abu Khalid, 3.9.38, *Te‘udot*, p. 41-42. Fakhri kept disreputable company – Tawfiq al-‘Abd al-‘Ali, the brother of the aforementioned extortionist, Husni – from the get-go. Tawfiq’s arrest was also authorized in this letter and in a subsequent letter (*ibid.*, 44-45).

¹²⁷ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 256; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 153. Curiously, the RAF’s regular intelligence summaries don’t discuss the peace bands (PRO – Air 5/1248).

insurgency of the first phase, ‘Abd al-Hadi issued a number of statements claiming that he was true to the Arab cause and the rebellion and decrying what he claimed were misunderstandings surrounding his actions in 1938.¹²⁸ Whether this subterfuge fooled many, the peace bands gained momentum as military reinforcements revitalized the counterinsurgency campaign and space was created for Arab opponents of the rebels to mobilize.

While claiming to stand for the revolt, ‘Abd al-Hadi’s men attacked its partisans, hitting rebel units and their village bases of support.¹²⁹ Incensed, the rebels issued multiple orders to place Fakhri’s familial seat, ‘Arrabeh, from whence he had raised some 200 men, under “siege.”¹³⁰ The siege was more of an attack which fizzled and failed to dislodge the turncoat commander.¹³¹ ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq’s men were among the first to clash with Fakhri, and reportedly lost 12 men versus only three from the peace band unit.¹³² Full of cheek, ‘Abd al-Hadi may have been responsible for letters sent to the rebels in November calling on them to lay down their arms.¹³³ Later in the month, a day after Fakhri’s units caught Abu Durra off guard and inflicted one casualty at Silat al-Harithiyya,¹³⁴ a triangle stronghold for the insurgency, Abu Kamal declared

¹²⁸ See copies of two statements signed by Fakhri ‘Abd al-Hadi, n.d., Yamun cache, p. 3, 8, CZA S/25 – 22591.

¹²⁹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 253.

¹³⁰ Decisions of the *Diwan* and Letter relating decisions of the *Diwan*: no sender or addressee, n.d., *Te‘udot*, p. 22-24; Survey, 27.10.38-3.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

¹³¹ *Te‘udot*, ft. 56, p. 24.

¹³² Survey, 27.10.38-3.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

¹³³ Survey, 3.11.38-16.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

¹³⁴ Abu Durra to Abu Faysal, 19.11.38 and Abu Durra to Abu Ibrahim, 20.11.38, Yamun cache, p. 4, 13, CZA S/25 – 22591. This encounter appears strange. By Abu Durra’s telling he had only a small entourage of guards with him and Fakhri wasn’t aware he was in the village. When the latter learned of Abu Durra’s presence, he withdrew his attack, despite having 35 men on hand to Abu Durra’s five. This may have owed to Fakhri’s desire to court Abu Durra, which he tried to do repeatedly in 1939 (see

that the population of ‘Arrabeh was fair game, even down to shepherds and ploughmen.¹³⁵

The call for indiscriminate retribution, derogating from the general principles of the revolution, was duplicated in the rebels’ treatment of the extended ‘Abd al-Hadi family, whose members were targeted as proxies for Fakhri, irrespective of their actual relations with him or the rebellion. This desperate and unavailing response neither stemmed Fakhri’s budding offensive in the triangle nor halted the peace bands’ growing ability to capitalize on Arab discontent with the rebels and their nascent rule. Nablus’s merchants, tired of exactions, used Fakhri’s return to sponsor a local peace band by late November. Abu Kamal, on a personal visit to soap magnate Tawfiq ‘Arafat for support, was rudely surprised by this new force, which assaulted and injured him, forcing his retreat from the city. At the same time sagging rebel morale in the face of the Palestine government’s renewed drive and the peace bands’ appearance, according to one JA report, led to the embarrassing dissolution of the band headed by Hamid Zawata, a lieutenant of Abu Faysal, while the former was paying a condolence call in the countryside. Under these conditions Abu Faysal fell back and Abu Kamal was unable to keep Fakhri from extending his reach into Umm al-Fahm. With Abu Durra’s defeat at Umm al-Zaynat rounding out the month, November saw the rebels’ position in the triangle and the Haifa region deteriorate significantly.¹³⁶

multiple letters from Fakhri to Abu Durra, Silat al-Harithiya cache, CZA S/25 – 22591), but the episode is far from transparent.

¹³⁵ Abu Kamal to Abu Durra, 21.11.38, Yamun cache, p. 9, CZA S/25 – 22591.

¹³⁶ On the security situation, 26.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

As the rebels were pushed onto the defensive, the peace bands network expanded. The counter-bands tapped into the bad blood that had been wrought between commanders and select families and brought about some critical defections from the rebel camp. The Irshayds are perhaps the most infamous example. In May 1938 two members of the family, Ahmad and Muhammad, were killed, some say by Abu Kamal's men.¹³⁷ This blow sent Farid Irshayd, an important Jenin subcommander and former Haifa underground operative, into the arms of the uprising's opponents. Farid founded a peace unit and began to pursue Abu Kamal, ultimately providing the intelligence that led to the army raid at Sanur (Jenin subdistrict) in March 1939 that fatally caught him by surprise.¹³⁸ In the Hebron area subcommanders from the 'Amr and al-'Azza families that had led detachments from the important villages of Dura and Bayt Jibrin also switched sides, joining the counter-bands. Their exit from the uprising undercut the rebel position in the area and spoiled a tentative peace settlement among local parties that had aimed to reunify the subregion behind the revolt.¹³⁹ In the Huleh valley in the north, the former YC leader Kamil al-Husayn joined the counter-bands. He had been declared a collaborator and sentenced to death at the instigation of two rival community leaders from the valley who headed rebel platoons. Although Huleh was not a major

¹³⁷ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 102; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 152.

¹³⁸ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 158; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 152; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 257.

¹³⁹ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 254; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 152; Hamad 'Abd al-Qadir Hamad to 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad, n.d. [October 1938?], *Te'udot*, p. 114-17. The peace settlement was intended in part to smooth over tensions caused by a death sentence issued by A.Q. al-Husayni on Husayn 'Amr, an Opposition activist, and by killings carried out by al-Jawlani (ibid.).

arena of the revolt, after several months Kamil's opposition to the revolt was reported to turn its Arab public against the insurrection.¹⁴⁰

The threat of social revolution also attracted influential families and disgruntled elites to the peace bands. The powerful Fahum family of Nazareth, for instance, owned great amounts of land in its hinterlands and had become much disliked for selling land to the Zionists and for turning the screws financially on their Arab tenants. The police depicted their participation in the revolt as an opportunistic means of protecting their assets and wealth. When a senior member of the family, Rafiq 'Abdullah, was killed in December 1938, apparently over his pro-government sensibilities, the family used the event to turn against the rebellion and join in the peace bands.¹⁴¹ In the Latrun the Abu Ghosh family, some of which had strong ties with Zionists, found several reasons to join the peace bands. One of their relations, a former guard for the district officer at Jaffa, was brutally murdered and delivered to them in a dismembered state in mid-1938. Closer to their home base, peasants they formerly employed rose up and attacked them on their own lands. As Cohen underscores, the "rebels' ambition to overturn the social order" was a threat to wealthy rural families, and led some, like the Abu Ghoshes, to join the peace bands network, aid state authorities, and cooperate with Zionism.¹⁴² The same general chain of events happened elsewhere, as peasant resistance to elites brought lords

¹⁴⁰ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 153. Some caution is probably due in giving Kamil al-Husayn credit for quieting Huleh. By the time his opinion predominated, February 1939 according to Cohen's sources, the rebellion was facing very heavy pressures on multiple fronts, and most directly from the military. But Huleh had been mostly quite throughout 1938 (DC-Galilee [to Chief Secretary], n.d., extracts from report for Nov 1938, p. 11, PRO – CO 733/372/18) and was reported in December to be the most cooperative area in the district (DC-Galilee to Chief Secretary, 4.1.39, report for Dec., p. 9, *ibid.*).

¹⁴¹ Nazareth police file, ISA (17) 4212-8m.

¹⁴² Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 148-50.

and chiefs of the countryside to make common cause with Zionists and the British regime, acting as informants at the least, if not directly taking up arms to defend their estates and their social and economic privilege.¹⁴³ Given the overwhelming elite background of the peace band network,¹⁴⁴ the peace bands were, as Porath has it, a kind of defense force for the notability.¹⁴⁵

While the counterrevolution was still in its early stage Fakhri al-Nashashibi applied himself to resuscitating an active and vocal opposition to al-Hajj Amin, whom he blamed for the uprising. In an open letter to the High Commissioner released in mid-November that the Arab press refused to carry, Fakhri Effendi asserted that the vast majority of the monied Arab classes and a clear majority of the total population supported the Opposition and favored an end to the revolt. From exile in Cairo Raghīb Bey quickly denounced his nephew's statements in *The Times* of London and proclaimed that the DP fully opposed the Balfour declaration and the Mandate. HC MacMichael believed that both the incendiary press coverage in Arab Palestine, which accused Fakhri of receiving payoffs from Zionists, and Raghīb's hasty disaffiliation from Fakhri's pronouncements were the products of compulsion. The DC-Jerusalem related that his Arab contacts saw Fakhri's pronouncement as a government-inspired

¹⁴³ Cohen, whose work has provided a richer look at the social origins of the peace bands than his predecessors, points to another case in Tiberias (*Army of Shadows*, p. 160), but there are likely numerous others out there waiting to be found.

¹⁴⁴ Other peace band figures besides those noted above included A. Shak'a, shaykh Husam al-Din Jarallah (of the SMC), 'Abd al-Fatah Darwish (Jerusalem), and the mayors of Gaza, Jaffa, and Bethlehem, respectively: 'Adil al-Shawa, 'Asim Sa'id, and 'Isa al-Bandak (Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 152).

¹⁴⁵ *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 262. This is against the *hamula* and tribalist-based explanations sometimes offered by Danin (*Te'udot*, ft. 236, p. 117; see also Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 157 for more on Danin's thinking).

“stunt.” The rebel response was quick. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Khatib, suspected of co-authoring Fakhri’s letter, was assassinated almost immediately after its circulation.¹⁴⁶

The younger Nashashibi was not disheartened. He next published a series of letters, mostly to foreign Arab supporters of the revolt, that accused the mufti of deliberately murdering his political rivals from the Opposition. The letters were collected in a pamphlet, the distribution of which led to brawls, entitled *Sawt min al-qubur* (Voice from the Graves).¹⁴⁷ Reading one of the missives, Akram Zu‘aytir naively denied that the factionalist bloodletting was orchestrated by the mufti, labeling it the product of indiscipline which the CCJ was striving to eradicate.¹⁴⁸ As irony would have it, he committed those lines to paper as probably the most feverish cycle of inter-factional assassination took place, with most of the bodies falling from the Opposition side.¹⁴⁹ ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad, incensed at trouble caused in a number of villages that he attributed to the doings of Opposition figures, steadily lost his will to coopt *mu‘aridin* into the rebellion and by mid-October branded them traitors.¹⁵⁰ At almost the same time, after the murder of Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani around about 12 October, apparently by men acting under his erstwhile friend, ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq, the

¹⁴⁶ Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 80, 86, PRO – CO 935/21; Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 518, 521; DC-Jerusalem to Chief Secretary, 7.12.38, Report for Nov 1938, p. 2, PRO – CO 733/372/18.

¹⁴⁷ The pamphlet is available at CZA S/25 – 9332. The letters were addressed to Nabih al-‘Azmeah,

¹⁴⁸ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 530.

¹⁴⁹ To offer some sense of perspective, at least seven murders of Opposition or non-*majlisi* affiliated public personalities – mostly municipal council members, some of whom were accused of cooperating with government – took place between 10 November and 15 December (Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 86, PRO – CO 935/21).

¹⁵⁰ ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to ‘Abdullah al-Bayruti, 19.10.38, *Te‘udot*, p. 46-47.

High Commissioner bitinglly commented in a summary report that “The Arabs... strove to close the[ir] ranks, but by way of murder rather than negotiation.”¹⁵¹

Despite mounting lethal pressure Fakhri Effendi stoked the resurrection of the DP. In November various members in exile began to talk of returning home and the following month they commenced doing so.¹⁵² Their return was a clear signal of the growing interest in counterrevolution. This agenda crystallized around the peace bands, which bore fruit for the revived DP and its associates. As November closed with victories for the peace bands and insecurity for the rebel enterprise, the military’s links to Fakhri Effendi became more transparent. By early December the army materially assisted his efforts to draw more voices and personalities into his camp, providing protected transport for his meetings.¹⁵³ As the counterrevolution blossomed, Fakhri Effendi was soon reported to coordinate his activities with Amir ‘Abdullah and the High Commissioner (through their staffs) on a daily basis.¹⁵⁴

The height of Fakhri’s politicking came on 18 December 1938, when he organized an open mass meeting with the military and some press at the village of Yatta, on the outskirts of Hebron. The event was attended by perhaps 3000 villagers, whose chosen representative, shaykh Shahada of Dura, a respected scholar of tribal law,

¹⁵¹ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 66, PRO – CO 935/21. As he would with some later incidents, Zu‘aytir reacted with shock to news of al-Dajani’s killing, insisting that whatever the man’s faults, he didn’t deserve death for them and referring to the incident as one of the revolt’s “blemishes” (*shawwa’ib*) that needed correcting (*Yawmiyat*, p. 472). Various accounts of the murder may be found at: Narrative dispatch #11, op. cit., p. 70-71; On the causes of Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani’s murder, 16.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 130-31. Abu Faysal issued a communiqué declaiming responsibility for the episode.

¹⁵² DC-Galilee to Chief Secretary, n.d., extracts from report for Nov 1938, p. 14, and DC-Southern to Chief Secretary, 4.1.39, report for Dec 1938, p. 1, PRO – CO 733/372/18.

¹⁵³ Political information on events among the Arabs, 4.12.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., and On Fakhri al-Nashashibi’s activities, 18.12.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

delivered a speech ghost-written by Fakhri Effendi. In it he reiterated the claim that the mufti was behind the revolt, that his scheming was responsible for the barrage of what he (exaggeratedly) claimed were 200 political murders, that Abu Faysal was the mufti's chief executioner, and that the majority of the public were happy to have HMG's military forces in the country and wished for the cessation of hostilities. The Military Commander of the Jerusalem District, General O'Connor, replied that he was "glad to welcome all those who realise that the Government is paramount and must be obeyed." DC Keith-Roach, who had little but contempt for Fakhri, recorded that most attendees had no idea what the meeting was about beforehand and that afterwards many dissociated themselves from it. The Arabic press savagely rebuked the event, comparing it to the ritual mass displays of loyalty found in totalitarian states. The Egyptian press wrote with trepidation that a civil war was brewing in Arab society and, like clockwork, a series of attacks followed. Before the close of the month, Fakhri's cousin Diyab's house in Jerusalem was assaulted three times, Nashashibi property was arsoned, and two family members, one a child, were injured by gunfire.¹⁵⁵

Again, neither Fakhri Effendi nor those gravitating to the peace bands lost their nerve. On the contrary, a number of associates, some newly aligned to Fakhri's camp, discussed holding Yatta-style public meetings. 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Bitar, the head of the Jaffa Chamber of Congress who had recently returned from exile in Beirut, pushed

¹⁵⁵ Narrative dispatch #13, HC to Colonial Secretary, 16.1.38, p. 91-92, PRO – CO 935/21; DC-Jerusalem to Chief Secretary, 5.1.38 [1939], report for Dec 1938, p. 2-4, 18-19, PRO – CO 733/372/18. Quote from the DC's report.

eagerly for his region to be next, but owing to the furor caused by the Yatta gathering, the Palestine administration refused it a permit.¹⁵⁶

The spread of the peace bands met a mixed response from the government. On one hand, the fervent denunciations of the former mufti and his men were music to colonial ears. Outside of the military, where the counterrevolutionaries were greeted heartily, British officials were generally wary. Fakhri al-Nashashibi himself was not the administration's ideal frontman for a pro-government constituency. Keith-Roach mocked Fakhri's weakness in his home bases of Jerusalem and Ramallah, where the poor performance of the peace bands in combat against the rebels was marked.¹⁵⁷ DC-Haifa and Samaria Morris Bailey summarized some shared concerns thusly: "Such support as he possesses, and can obtain, will feed only upon the powerful but limited feudal impulse to avenge family wrongs and upon the inevitable 'war-weariness' of a population worn down by terrorism, uncertainty, and official restrictions."¹⁵⁸ That is, the peace bands had the great potential of stirring even greater conflict and bloodshed and further complicating the projected future return of rule under the civil bureaucracy. Added to this were Fakhri's thinly disguised aspirations. He angled for an invitation to the roundtable talks announced in November, but in part owing to the fact that his stated political program with respect to Zionism was a virtual mirror image of the nationalist

¹⁵⁶ On F. al-Nashashibi's activities, 18.12.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Survey, 22.12.38-28.12.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

¹⁵⁷ Narrative dispatch #13, HC to Colonial Secretary, 16.1.38, p. 92, PRO – CO 935/21; DC-Jerusalem to Chief Secretary, 5.1.38 [1939], report for Dec 1938, p. 5-6, PRO – CO 733/372/18.

¹⁵⁸ DC-Haifa to Chief Secretary, 6.1.39, report for Dec 1938, p. 1-2, PRO – CO – 733/372/18.

platform and in part because of his past history and his “mediocre talents,” the High Commissioner deemed him “not a big enough man for that.”¹⁵⁹

The cool reception by the administration’s permanent officials, with the sole exception of the DC-Galilee, left the peace bands in the hands of the military, and it is in this domain that they largely remained. Indeed, as Black and Morris put it, perhaps somewhat exaggeratedly, the peace bands were outfitted and “directed” by the RAF and Zionist intelligence.¹⁶⁰ As a fighting force they were only sporadically significant in 1938, but grew more so in 1939.¹⁶¹ Late in the revolt, as insurgent activity tapered off, the scales tipped further in favor of the counter-revolutionaries. Yet their greatest contribution to altering the balance of forces and putting down the rebellion was probably in the realm of intelligence. As well, their growth over many months could only have been deleterious for insurgent morale.

Mass incarceration and the carceral search regime

For many long months as the insurgency grew the British counter-campaign was an abject failure. Successive strategies put in place by Charles Tegart, the military and the Palestine government did not bring the rebels to heel. As the revolt moved towards the peak of its ferocity, a new direction emerged in the counterinsurgency. Beginning in

¹⁵⁹ Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 80, PRO – CO 935/21. MacMichael later described Fakhri as “a young blackguard whose energies are chiefly devoted to self-interest and who is believed to be in Jewish pay” (quoted in Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 79).

¹⁶⁰ Black and Morris, *Israel’s Secret Wars*, p. 16.

¹⁶¹ The GOC was dismissive of the peace bands before December 1938 (GOC Haining, “Hostile Propaganda,” 1.12.38, p. 4, PRO – FO 371/21869). One of their first victories in 1939 was the killing of Jamil Abu Khanfar, a lieutenant of Abu Kamal, at Kafr Ra’i in December or January by a counter-band leader known as Abu Sakram (‘Abd al-Rahman Muhammad Irshayd to ‘Abd al-Rahim X, 18.1.39, Sanur cache, CZA S/25 – 22591).

summer 1938 new practices of generalized surveillance, mass detention, and movement controls were introduced. Where the imprisonment of activists, fighters, and politicians had failed since 1936 to halt the rebellion, the new techniques were less discriminating. The GOC believed that the Mandate faced a “deep seated rebellion in which the vast majority of Arab inhabitants are potential rebels” and that “active rebel and peaceful citizen are inextricably mixed.”¹⁶² As the distinction between combatants and civilians lost meaning for the military what began as little more than an exercise in intimidation, rounding up male villagers *en masse* into outdoor cages for short-term stints, developed into a new, more invasive and carceral search protocol.

The transition to a new mode of searches began in the north. The military’s gun battery bases at the villages of Iqrit and al-Malakiyya, near the frontier, became sites of an experiment. At al-Malakiyya a 50 m. x 50 m. cage was set up in early July to which the military forces brought some 1000 men from the surrounding Arab villages for mass detention. One of Zaslani’s contacts, probably in the Palestine police, described what unfolded as an example of “very radical means” where military units acted “without sentiment.” The plan was to hold the men for several days without providing them anything to eat, drink, or survive the elements with, save what the women of their villages could bring.¹⁶³ A pen was then set up at Iqrit and the experiment in mass incarceration was expanded upon. In subsequent rounds of mass detention, continuing throughout the summer and beyond, the men were used as forced labor on the gun

¹⁶² Pownall (WO) to Colonial Undersecretary, 22.11.38, PRO – FO 371/21867; GOC Haining, “Hostile Propaganda,” 1.12.38, p. 2, PRO – FO 371/21869.

¹⁶³ Joseph to Zaslani, 3.7.38, CZA S/25 – 22489.

battery installations and for other purposes.¹⁶⁴ I have not found explicit mention of it, but it seems that the detainees were also employed as human shields (“mine sweepers”), which one late summer report offhandedly noted were always kept on hand.¹⁶⁵ As the enterprise was repeated the soldiers sometimes marked the bodies of the detainees as if they were herd animals, painting the necks of men from certain villages so as to make their origins visually identifiable to their captors.¹⁶⁶

The tactics employed at the northern frontier reshaped the conduct of searches. Mass detentions of male populations became commonplace and were often combined with forced labor and other forms of punishment. On 20 July a multi-day combing operation was initiated in the environs of Tulkarm. Its purpose was to arrest all males between the ages of 16 and 60 and bring them to Tulkarm and the prison camp at Nur al-Shams for what was officially described as “questioning.” Men from ‘Allar, ‘Atil, Qufin, al-Hanana, and ‘Ar‘ara were among the first to be picked up. They spent days exposed in outdoor pens without food before they were joined by their compatriots from ‘Anabta, Bal‘a, Dayr al-Ghusun, Kafr Ruman, and Shwayka. HC MacMichael estimated that some 4000 men were temporarily detained. The duration of their incarceration is unknown, but the scale of the undertaking was unprecedented and RAF intelligence lauded its effects: “It is reported that the operation resulted in restoring morale to villagers who were wavering and has severely shaken the faith of the hostile villagers in the power of the gangs to protect them.” One village, Baqa al-Gharbiyya, the largest in

¹⁶⁴ HMS Repulse, report of proceedings, 10.8.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

¹⁶⁵ HMS Malaya, report of proceedings, 28.8.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

¹⁶⁶ Naval howitzer detachment, Iqrit, to HMS Repulse, 14.8.38, appendix to HMS Repulse, report of proceedings, 27.8.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

the subdistrict, was singled out for special punitive treatment. Its inhabitants had struggled against the nearby “security road” constructed to reoccupy the area, stealing equipment and kidnapping construction personnel. This landed the village a punitive police post. Rebels then attacked the police post, sniping at it and killing a police officer. When a police patrol was also assaulted and one of its members slain in July, an order was given under the Defence Regulations to raze part of Baqa al-Gharbiyya. Official accounts state that during the sweep 53 houses were destroyed in the village. Arab witnesses put the number at 93 and add that all crops and threshing floors were also wrecked while many of the villagers were beaten with rifle butts. The RAF again noted the repression to have had a beneficial effect, but the AWC related that the population of the surrounding villages dispersed in fear.¹⁶⁷

Elements of the *yishuv* became involved in the carceral search regime early on. The colony of Karkur, north of Tulkarm and due west of Jenin, was another mass detention and interrogation site. Before the Tulkarm subdistrict operation was completed, Brigadier Evetts put in motion a plan to incarcerate an estimated 1500 men from 15 villages there, in an effort to smother rebel organizing.¹⁶⁸ The Karkur camp must have had some additional significance for the military because it was soon utilized as a depot for such incarcerations, even from rather far afield. Men from the northern

¹⁶⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 5.9.38, with enclosure, AWC to HC, 25.7.38, PRO – CO 733/368/9; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 10.8.38, resume of operations (July), PRO – Air 5/1248; Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 415-18.

¹⁶⁸ HMS Repulse, report of proceedings, 26.7.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4. Unfortunately this report does not clarify which villages were involved or even from which region in the country, though it seems probable that they were in the Galilee, triangle, the Haifa region, or some combination.

border villages were dispatched there in mid-August, for instance.¹⁶⁹ Like the northern pens, its cage was employed repeatedly.¹⁷⁰ Most likely the use of Karkur and detention facilities had to do with the integration of the Haganah into the suppression of the revolt.¹⁷¹

The second phase of the revolt was a “golden age” for cooperation between the Haganah and the military.¹⁷² While the police was less enthusiastic about cooperation with the Zionists, the army and the RAF had cultivated significant ties with Zionist intelligence since at least 1937.¹⁷³ Arab documents captured by the British were sent to the JA and the Haganah for translation.¹⁷⁴ In turn, Ezra Danin and Reuven Zaslani, with their networks of agents and informants and their presumptions of deep ethnological knowledge about Arab society, customs, and “thinking,” provided the military with information on the rebels and events in Arab circles. As they strengthened, these ties diversified beyond the domain of intelligence cooperation. Beginning in 1937 the army provided military training to hundreds of Haganah members which was then passed on by them to thousands more. In early 1939 the British army organized over 16,000 Haganah cadres into 10 paramilitary battalions dubbed the Jewish Settlement Police, who were deployed throughout the colonies and in Tel Aviv and Haifa. Late in the revolt striking parties were assembled from the battalions under the rubric of “mobile

¹⁶⁹ HMS Repulse, report of proceedings, 27.8.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4. It wasn’t an issue of capacity at the northern pens, because in the instance dated in this report to 11-14 August, 3-400 men were taken, where previously the numbers kept in outdoor cages in the north had been higher.

¹⁷⁰ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 456-57.

¹⁷¹ Another detention facility of some sort existed at Bat Galim (Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 528).

¹⁷² Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 156.

¹⁷³ Black and Morris, *Israel’s Secret Wars*, p. 16; Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 202. Black and Morris date Danin’s contacts with the military to 1933 (p. 30).

¹⁷⁴ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 202. Some of these documents exist in English translation in the Central Zionist Archives. Two primary files in this regard are: S/25 22591 and S/25 22541.

patrols;” at least 500 men served in these units in the spring of 1939.¹⁷⁵ Previous to this however, cooperation grew to the point that Haganah members episodically accompanied the military on search operations, and in rare instances were afforded the opportunity to directly strike at their Arab neighbors, beating villagers as the British often did, on the latter’s watch.¹⁷⁶

The flourishing of cooperative relations between the military and the Haganah impacted the development of search regime protocol in a critical fashion. From his contacts and intelligence gathering, Danin was able to supply informants who were used during what were called “identification parades,” which became a standard practice as mass round-ups became the operant mode of searches.¹⁷⁷ ADC Bell describes the procedure: “The combing of a village entailed all the men and boys being collected and lined up. There would then be a search for wanted men. This meant that these people would be obliged to file slowly past a police armoured car in which a Government informer was concealed.” The informant would indicate anyone “he recognized or thought he recognized... on the wanted list” to CID or military personnel. Bell readily acknowledged that the parades were “open to abuse” and “frequently corrupt,” given the power that was accorded to the informants, some of whom were on the payroll of either Zionist or British intelligence agencies.¹⁷⁸ The GOC himself observed that paid informants were liable to prosecute “personal or family feuds” under the guise of

¹⁷⁵ David Ben-Gurion, “Britain’s Contribution to Arming the Haganah,” reproduced in *From Haven to Conquest*, p. 373-74. See also Bauer, “From Cooperation.”

¹⁷⁶ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 156.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.; Black and Morris, *Israel’s Secret Wars*, p. 15.

¹⁷⁸ Bell, *Shadows on the Sand*, p. 94. On the payment of informants: Black and Morris, *Israel’s Secret Wars*, p. 8; Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 210.

cooperation, yet there was no reason to think that unpaid informants weren't interested in the same.¹⁷⁹ None of these concerns halted the growing employment of informants – the typical example of which was described as “usually a repentant thug or something of that sort” – under murky circumstances.¹⁸⁰ Here the Haganah and the peace bands each applied themselves to help identify those prisoners taken by the British who could be turned and made into useful instruments for intelligence collection.¹⁸¹ Thus a feedback loop between searches and collecting informants was established, with Jewish and Arab counterrevolutionary assistance, wherein informants picked arrestees during mass round-ups, from whom a new crop of informants was culled. It is highly likely that this evolving set of relations between the military, Zionist intelligence, and Arab collaborators – facilitated in part by the new search regime – was responsible for the considerable growth of informing against the rebels that began in the early winter of 1938, breaking the cloak of protective silence that the insurgents had formerly enjoyed.

The collection of informants appears to be a somewhat *sub rosa* agenda for carceral searches and identification parades. Their foremost stated purpose was to catch “bad eggs” – rebels or those thought to be security risks – who were arrested and sent to “a Concentration Camp for a spell.” Mass detention and surveillance allowed the colonial authorities to penetrate and encroach upon insurgent sanctuaries more effectively than previous searches, and their advent led to the capture of important documents as well as cadres. The new searches also enabled the state to exploit the

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 210.

¹⁸⁰ GHQ, extract from D.O. no. G.S.I. 27/1, 25.11.38, PRO – CO 733/379/3.

¹⁸¹ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 153, 156.

labor of detainees, who were made to move military materiel, dig trenches, build security roads, or serve as human shields. The military made light of this by claiming that suspects were “detained locally for ten days or so and given a little road work or other exercise for the good of their souls.”¹⁸² In truth, as the GOC acknowledged, forced labor was extracted from those villagers deemed innocent of any crime or affiliation.¹⁸³

Beyond these features, mass detentions were obvious instruments for menacing and intimidating the Arab public, or producing what was called a “moral effect.”¹⁸⁴ The humiliations and degradations of cage round-ups and identification parades were a profound demonstration of state power and military might. Peasants, workers, and the middle and upper classes alike experienced the colonial state as a tangible, corporeal force capable of depriving Palestinian males of food and shelter for days, subjecting them arbitrarily to beatings or torture, and confining them in cramped pens like animals all while their female relations were left anxious over their fate. In line with the notion that collective punishment was culturally appropriate and intelligible among Arabs, searches were intended to break the sway of the rebels and induce public cooperation with government. The new methods would peel away those who the insurgents had “terrorised” (i.e. pressed) and afford space for political “moderates” to come forward.¹⁸⁵

The denial of the dehumanization embodied in the practices of mass incarceration was persistent. Mass round-ups had, as far as I know, no connection to the

¹⁸² GHQ, extract from D.O. no. G.S.I. 27/1, 25.11.38, PRO – CO 733/379/3.

¹⁸³ GOC Haining, “Hostile Propaganda in Palestine,” 1.12.38, p. 8-9, PRO – FO 371/21869. One JA report from November notes that 50-60 people were taken from “each village” for forced labor (Information on Arab activity, 17.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22191).

¹⁸⁴ GHQ, extract from D.O. no. G.S.I. 27/1, 25.11.38, PRO – CO 733/379/3.

¹⁸⁵ GOC Haining, “Hostile Propaganda in Palestine,” 1.12.38, p. 9-10, PRO – FO 371/21869.

law and represented the abrogation of even fig-leaf notions of individual rights. In their stead, a hardening notion of collective guilt – present since 1936 but growing more severe – underwrote the new searches. Indeed, the individual was effaced as the search regime became carceral, with only “bad eggs” poking through an otherwise undifferentiated alien mass that itself was seen as suspect, devoid of legal protections, and residually deserving of punishment. The subhuman treatment of Arabs during carceral searches fit well with the military rank and file’s racialized conception of its mission as “oozling” (from “oozlebart” or “oozabart”).¹⁸⁶ In the hunt for “bandit” Arabs such tactics, and the effacement of the humanity of the colonized, were part of “game.”¹⁸⁷

By early fall 1938 mass detentions became a new form of collective punishment for armed activity as well as the norm for searches. After Migdal, an old northern colony, was sniped in early September, 93 Arabs were arrested from a nearby village. Days later, the killing of a Jewish policeman at Safad, and injuring of an Arab policeman there, resulted in 80 arrests. Following the mine the same month that almost killed the ADC-Affula (in which three Jews were killed), 193 men were rounded up. At Ramle, also in September, a mass detention of 1500 was organized after a British police officer was killed.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ The term “oozling” is noted with some (limited) explanation in Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 194, but obviously connoted a sense of hunting down a racial other.

¹⁸⁷ References to counterinsurgency as sport may be found in Bell, *Shadows on the Sand*, p. 94 and Hughes, “The Banality of Brutality,” p. 332.

¹⁸⁸ Reports of the DC-Galilee (3.10.38) and DC-Southern (5.10.38) to Chief Secretary, PRO – CO 733/372/18.

Practices of mass detention escalated after the arrival of the second division of reinforcements was completed in October. Troop strength roughly doubled to 15,500 ground forces and 700 RAF personnel. To compensate for benching the Arab police, the British section of the service almost doubled to 3000 in number and 3000 more Jewish supernumeraries were enrolled, raising the latter to roughly 6000.¹⁸⁹ The new British officers were recruited from ex-servicemen and “Black and Tan” behavior proliferated.¹⁹⁰ In mid-September the police were subordinated to military control, giving the GOC charge of approximately 25,000 men under arms (16,200 military, 9000 British and Jewish police). With the security services substantially enlarged and lines of command concentrated in the military’s hands, a large-scale counteroffensive was quickly put into motion. An additional 1500 British police with armored cars and machine guns were deployed in urban centers, particularly in Nazareth and Haifa in the north and Jaffa and Jerusalem in the south.¹⁹¹ Large sweeps and “constant searches” were conducted in the countryside and in urban centers.¹⁹²

Since the military view was that “practically every village in the country harbours and supports the rebels” either willfully or under duress, the new regime was given wide application.¹⁹³ On 1 November an encounter with rebels at Mazra‘a al-Sharqiyya was followed by the detention of 100 villagers, and according to Arab

¹⁸⁹ Kolinsky, “The Collapse,” p. 157; Ben-Gurion, “Britain’s Contribution,” p. 372-73.

¹⁹⁰ Knight, “Securing Zion?,” p. 532; Kolinsky, “The Collapse,” p. 157.

¹⁹¹ Kolinsky, “The Collapse,” p. 159.

¹⁹² *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 17. The annual report highlights searches in rural areas foremost.

¹⁹³ GOC Haining, “Hostile Propaganda,” 1.12.38, p. 3, PRO – FO 371/21869..

witnesses, wild firing that killed eight inhabitants.¹⁹⁴ Villages in the Jaffa subdistrict were searched alongside the search of the city at the start of the month.¹⁹⁵ Silat al-Harithiyya in the Jenin subdistrict suffered 600 detentions, two home demolitions, a collective fine, and some number of residents shot during an operation there at about the same time.¹⁹⁶ In the Hebron area on 5 November, with air support maintaining a cordon on the village (referred to as an “airpin”), the authorities drove 800 men from Halhul to an external cage, of whom 81 were later arrested as “bandits.” Mid-month a half a dozen villages in the Nabi Samwil area (Ramallah subdistrict) were searched, netting over 200 detentions. On 13 November rebels eluded capture at Jericho, where three people were shot breaking the cordon as the entire town was subjected to mass detention and screening.¹⁹⁷ In the Galilee a sweep of nine villages produced 40 arrests and 700 temporary detentions while one person was killed trying to escape a cordon.¹⁹⁸ A week or so later the entire male population of ‘Atil (Tulkarm subdistrict) was arrested or detained.¹⁹⁹ Another major operation searched all villages along the Jerusalem-Lyddā rail line late in the month, with an unknown number detained.²⁰⁰

In a report at the outset of December 1938 GOC Haining depicts “the identification and interrogation” of all male villagers as standard procedure during any

¹⁹⁴ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 75, PRO – CO 935/21; Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 509. Zu‘aytir says the killings occurred prior to the search while HC MacMichael’s report says six band members were killed.

¹⁹⁵ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 509; Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 75, PRO – CO 935/21.

¹⁹⁶ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 509.

¹⁹⁷ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.12.38, resume of operations (Nov), PRO – Air 5/1248.

¹⁹⁸ HC to Colonial Secretary, 16.11.38, #850, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

¹⁹⁹ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 522.

²⁰⁰ Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 86, PRO – CO 935/21.

search, “hundreds” of which had been conducted over the preceding six months.²⁰¹ For his part, the High Commissioner estimated that one-third of all Arab villages were searched in 1938.²⁰² This volume continued to accelerate. The weekly count of all searches from late November through mid-April 1939, from available figures, varied between 27 and 120 villages, with most weeks containing between 40 and 70 operations.²⁰³ In the first four weeks of January 1939 alone a total of 204 villages were searched. Mass detention on a temporary basis was supplemental to the existing prisons and “permanent” concentration camps, which were already cramped and operating over capacity.²⁰⁴ It allowed the carceral infrastructure to expand significantly with great flexibility and at little cost.²⁰⁵ According to military statistics – which may well be incomplete – weekly detentions for interrogation sometimes ranged in the thousands, and didn’t dip below 500 until March 1939, by which time the rebellion had lost a great deal of its force.²⁰⁶

While offering only a schematic portrait, these numbers strongly indicate that much of the country was searched on the carceral model, with some villages being visited multiple times. The extensive use of mass temporary incarceration helps explain the discrepancy between Arab estimates of 40-50,000 detained during the revolt (1936-39) – most of which occurred after the carceral regime was introduced – and radically

²⁰¹ GOC Haining, “Hostile Propaganda,” 1.12.38, p. 7, PRO – FO 371/21869.

²⁰² Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 85, PRO – CO 935/21; *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 18.

²⁰³ See various weekly reports from the GOC or GHQ in Palestine to the War Office at PRO – CO 733/379/3 and FO 371/23243.

²⁰⁴ GOC Haining, “Hostile Propaganda,” 1.12.38, p. 8, PRO – FO 371/21869; Laleh Khalili, “The Location of Palestine in Global Counterinsurgencies,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* v. 42, n. 3 (August 2010), p. 423.

²⁰⁵ GOC Haining, “Hostile Propaganda,” 1.12.38, p. 8, PRO – FO 371/21869.

²⁰⁶ Weekly reports from the military to the War Office at PRO – CO 733/379/3 and FO 371/23243.

lower government figures, such as its declaration that only 3628 persons were held (in all facilities) at the close of 1938.²⁰⁷ It is a notable feature of the new counterinsurgency landscape that cage enclosures (ad hoc and semi-permanent) where the vast majority of detentions and incarceration took place were not included in annual government reporting, though some became regularized (with names such as “Gaza Cage”)²⁰⁸ and were used repeatedly. The cage sites acted as a kind of shadow prison system, where, as some Arab protestors observed, the formal regulations and legal apparatus governing incarceration did not apply.²⁰⁹

The perennial conflation of the Arab public with the rebels in the hills and the absence of oversight at cage facilities invited further mistreatment of those subject to mass detention. Sometimes the caged men were stripped and blasted with fire hoses, adding to the humiliation and to their exposure to the elements.²¹⁰ They could also be transferred from one detention location to another without any review.²¹¹ In this way they were temporarily disappeared from their families and deprived of whatever supplies (food, clothing, blankets) that their relatives might be permitted to bring them. At their worst, the cage facilities became torture centers of the most obvious kind. Prisoners reported being boxed until their teeth were broken and eyes damaged, beaten with ropes, bayonets, and shoes, forced naked onto beds of cactus and trampled upon, and having

²⁰⁷ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 36; Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 201; Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 117. Government tally calculated from *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 115. The administration claimed that 2463 Arabs in total were detained under the Defence Regulations during the year (p. 114). This number rose to 5679 in 1939 (Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, appendix IV, p. 847).

²⁰⁸ Khalili, “The Location of Palestine,” p. 422-23.

²⁰⁹ ‘Abdullah al-Jazzar (mufti of Acre), et. al. to Secretary of the League of Nations, 22.9.38, enclosure to HC to Colonial Secretary, 4.11.38, PRO – CO 733/368/10.

²¹⁰ Norris, “Repression and Rebellion,” p. 35.

²¹¹ Khalili, “The Location of Palestine,” p. 422-23.

their clothes soaked in oil and lit on fire. There is no way to know how widespread such treatment was.²¹²

Like its predecessor, the new mode of searches caused Palestinians much consternation. The AWC and some *‘ulama* submitted written protests against mass detentions and arrests, the outdoor cages and the conditions of confinement in them, and the use of human shields both on the roads and in combat. They also continued to object to the looting of homes and spoiling of foodstuffs, to home demolitions, and the to dispersal of families and villages consequent on searches.²¹³ Strikes against searches, detentions, and the use of human shields were held repeatedly in Acre and Haifa in by fall 1938 and earlier at Safad.²¹⁴ Detainees themselves also occasionally resisted their confinement, as Tulkarm subdistrict prisoners did in late August when they launched a hunger strike at the Nur al-Shams concentration camp, which had swollen dramatically to hold the overflow of detainees from recent sweeps.²¹⁵ The military authorities did take steps to address the endemic plundering of villages, including issuing orders that searches were to be conducted humanely and that units carrying out searches were to be inspected themselves by commanding officers to prevent thefts, but little seems to have

²¹² Letter from Subhi al-Khadra, 20.9.38, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 506. This report pertained to the Iqrit camp but it seems unlikely that the abuses described there were limited to that location.

²¹³ AWC to HC, 25.7.38, PRO – CO 733/368/9; ‘Abdullah al-Jazzar, et. al. to Secretary of the League of Nations, 22.9.38, PRO – CO 733/368/10.

²¹⁴ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 407; HMS Malaya, report of proceedings, 24.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4; DC-Galilee to Chief Secretary, 3.10.38, report for Sept, p. 3, PRO – CO 733/372/18. On Safad see Letter from Safad, 19.7.38, by Sa’d al-Din [‘Id Sulayman], in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 484-85 and, for background, Protest from the patriotic organizations of Safad to the HC, 16.7.38, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 483-84.

²¹⁵ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 435. According to Zu‘aytir’s informants, Nur al-Shams held 1700 prisoners from villages recently subjected to carceral searches. The standard capacity of the facility was closer to 400 persons, as is evident from annual report figures showing end of year headcounts. See *Reports to the League of Nations, 1937*, p. 110 (where it is listed as Jail Co. No. 1) and *1938*, p. 115. Additional prisoners were almost certainly in outdoor cages.

come of it.²¹⁶ DC Keith-Roach illustrated both the normalization of the carceral search regime and the government's immunity to protests against it in his monthly report for December: "In the Jerusalem-Bethlehem-Jericho Sub-district there is not much to report. There is a good deal of resentment at the arrest and detention of many of the agriculturalist element."²¹⁷

Urban searches and spatial segregation

No less than the countryside, the urban counterinsurgency was impacted by the changing format of the search regime and the metastasizing doctrine of collective guilt. The rebel offensive in August brought dramatic responses from state security forces. After the rebel "occupation" of Hebron mid-month the military went on a two-day rampage throughout the city. The ADC, A.T.O. Lees, submitted a report that catalogued "acts of vandalism, arson, looting and murder" by the security forces. Four people were killed and several more injured, he recorded, in the display of "wanton and reckless barbarity perpetrated by English members of the military and/or police force against the local people." Townspeople and children were also punished – beaten and even shot – for violating the curfew that the government imposed, which many may not even have known of. When a strike was called in protest, Lees tried to get it cancelled, but the

²¹⁶ Seventh Division HQ, 6.11.68, circular on searches, enclosure to O'Connor to Tegart, 6.11.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 4. In a similar measure, the GOC claimed that *mukhtars* signed off after searches, certifying that nothing was pilfered (GOC Haining, "Hostile Propaganda," 1.12.38, p. 8, PRO – FO 371/21869).

²¹⁷ DC-Jerusalem to Chief Secretary, 5.1.38[39], report for Dec, PRO – CO 733/372/18.

city's notables, many of whom were opposed to the revolt, refused to comply, demanding compensation for the £P 10,000 of damage they claimed was done.²¹⁸

At Nablus the same month the search was less chaotic and the carceral search regime was introduced to an urban center for the first time. A massive troop deployment was sent inside the city to round up the male population while garrisons were posted on the surrounding hilltops. A 24-hour curfew was imposed and, according to the RAF, 6000 men and boys – the entire male population – were searched and processed through cage screenings at the military base. Their identities were logged in a database, perhaps the first of its kind for an urban population, and the soldiers scrawled upon their bodies to indicate that they had been searched. Witnesses say 300 of the group were removed to prisons, though the RAF claimed the figure was only 78. During the proceedings a woman and a child were run over by a military vehicle and killed, and stabbings and coarse treatment injured over 100. Warehouses throughout the city were also destroyed and a number of houses were occupied by the military, which ejected their owners. Like Hebron, residents reacted to this onslaught with a town strike.²¹⁹

After Jerusalem was retaken from the rebels in October, using an extended curfew instead of a cage detention, Acre and Gaza were the next cities to face the new searches. At Acre 100 men were imprisoned. The Gaza operation was larger, involving around 2000 soldiers and taking place over several days. As usual, little in the way of

²¹⁸ Details of the events in Hebron, 25.8.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 213. The first quote is Shepherd's and the second is taken from Lees's report, which she cites.

²¹⁹ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 431; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.9.38, resume of operations (Aug), PRO – Air 5/1248. Zu'aytir's account states that 12,000 males were searched and the RAF says 6000. Judging by population statistics the number is likely somewhere in between but closer to the lower figure, as the *Survey of Palestine* (p. 151) shows Nablus's 1931 population was counted at 17,498 persons (and at 23,250 and in 1944).

arms and materiel was recovered, but 300 men from the town were sent to detention at the Sarafand prison camp, which like Nur al-Shams, was operating at excess capacity.²²⁰

When the military began its reconquest of Jaffa in November, Akram Zu‘aytir’s contacts provided a vivid description of the events, which occurred during Ramadan. After encircling the city “in the early morning [the army] penetrated it and arrested 15,000 youth and adolescents, holding them in a narrow space under the rays of the sun all day long while they were fasting. While they entered [peoples’] homes the soldiers trampled upon children and terrified women to the point that some of them miscarried from fright.” Two people were killed, including an Arab employee of the Health Department, and four injured. Some 60 prisoners were captured. Coincident with the Jaffa operation Haifa was searched and a like number of individuals were imprisoned.²²¹

As in rural operations, whole neighborhoods and everything in them from streets to schools, as well as homes, were sometimes destroyed during urban searches. The worst case in this regard was Jenin. After the assassination of ADC Moffatt, the military tersely exclaimed that “a large portion of the town should be blown up.” The High Commissioner claimed that 96 homes were dynamited, but other accounts estimated that perhaps half of the modest town, which the 1931 census showed was home to 2,774 people, was razed as recompense for the life of the ADC. One British observer put the count at 150 homes destroyed while also noting that soldiers pillaged with abandon (not even sparing the office of Standard Oil) and shot several persons who were said to be

²²⁰ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 73-74, PRO – CO 935/21.

²²¹ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 509; Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 74-75, PRO – CO 935/21. The narrative dispatch says simply “A large number of Arabs were detained for interrogation.”

trying to flee the scene. At least one resident was killed. As in Jaffa in 1936, the colonial state hardly seemed to notice the hundreds of people it deprived of shelter or the losses they incurred as their homes, workplaces, and businesses were demolished.²²²

Though not the product of a search, Haifa's built environment was also the focus of forcible urban restructuring which became a model for other mixed cities. Rather remarkably, after the Irgun bombings in July, Arab neighborhoods were made to pay a further price as civilian and military officials implemented a "drastic" plan aimed at segregating Arab and Jewish areas of the city from each other. This was accomplished first by destroying the remainder of "tin town." Over the course of six weeks the slum was demolished and its population relocated while the military pushed, unsuccessfully, for the entire Arab produce market, adjacent dwellings included, to be demolished as well. Instead the area was sealed off with wire and checkpoints and certain alleyways within it were fenced off completely.²²³ Around the same time, the Jewish community of Safad was separated from the town's Arab majority neighborhoods with wire mesh barriers.²²⁴ Subsequently, by the turn of 1939, the Arab and Jewish quarters of Jerusalem and Haifa were segregated from one another with a series of internal concrete walls.²²⁵

²²² Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 201; HMS Malaya, report of proceedings, 28.8.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4; Norris, "Repression and Rebellion," p. 37; *Survey of Palestine*, p. 151; George Mansur for the Arab Centre, 1.10.38, with extracts from an anonymous letter, PRO – FO 371/21881. Quote from the HMS Malaya report.

²²³ HMS Repulse, report of proceedings, 30.7.38, HMS Repulse to Rear-Admiral Commanding, 27.8.38, HMS Malaya, reports of proceedings, 28.8.38 and 2.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

²²⁴ DC-Galilee to Chief Secretary, 3.10.38, report for Sept, p. 5, PRO – CO 733/372/18.

²²⁵ Narrative dispatch #1, HC to Colonial Secretary, 27.2.39, p. 7, PRO – CO 935/22.

Spectacles of punishment: house demolitions, incidental killings, and massacres

While the extent of the destruction at Jenin made it probably the most extreme case, home demolitions remained a staple of the counterinsurgency. During the second phase of the revolt they were increasingly common and, along with searches, one of the military's two most prized tools.²²⁶ This was all the more the case since, as the GOC noted, collective fines were no use because there was no cash to be had.²²⁷ House demolitions came under attack by the Foreign Office during preparations for the roundtable conference, but the War and Colonial Ministries successfully defended them, especially given that the GOC argued that halting them would prejudice the counterinsurgency.²²⁸ Months later HC MacMichael claimed that the government had destroyed 1024 homes in acts of punishment between May 1936 and the end of 1938.²²⁹ Bruce Hoffman, a historian of the counterinsurgency, has suggested that the actual number through the end of 1939 was closer to 2000.²³⁰ Arab sources have claimed even higher figures. Darwaza, for instance, estimates that 5000 homes and shops together were torn down or blown up during the revolt.²³¹

Both searches and house demolitions were used to ravage the countryside, where they were applied with liberal doses of violence. In most instances of house demolition the security forces blew up a dwelling or two at a time, and in this way probably most

²²⁶ HC to Colonial Secretary, 20.11.38, #874, PRO – FO 371/21866.

²²⁷ Pownall (WO) to Colonial Undersecretary, 22.11.38, PRO – FO 371/21867.

²²⁸ Ibid.; Cabinet Conclusion extract 57 (38), 30.11.38. For a sample of Foreign Office opposition to home demolitions, see the minute by MacKenzie, 30.11.38, commenting on Pownall (WO) to Colonial Undersecretary, 22.11.38, PRO – FO 371/21867.

²²⁹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 20.4.39, PRO – CO 733/398/2.

²³⁰ Cited in Norris, "Repression and Rebellion," p. 33.

²³¹ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 201.

cities and villages in the country experienced such deliberate destruction. Proximity to military engagements or attacks on state personnel sometimes increased the punishment meted out, particularly as the revolt progressed. After two soldiers were shot in Gaza in mid-November 1938, for example, eight homes in the city were razed.²³² At ‘Alma in the Safad hinterlands the authorities demolished 10 houses in January 1939 after a raid nearby.²³³ On rarer occasions villages were partially or totally destroyed. In late November 72 homes and a mosque at Furaydis in the Haifa subdistrict were demolished, leading its women to evacuate for lack of shelter.²³⁴ Earlier in the month a search of Irtah near Tulkarm led to an engagement with a band in which one British soldier and 19 rebels lost their lives. The dead included triangle subcommander Ibrahim al-‘Amuri. Afterwards the army destroyed 40 homes in the village as “a punitive measure” since the band had been sheltering there. Unlike the official version of events, Zu‘aytir’s sources reported that “tens” of residents were killed during the encounter or in the aftermath.²³⁵ The village of al-Sha‘b offers a portrait of a village all but destroyed by the troops, and of the rebels attempts to defend rural communities from mass repression and assault.

The area around al-Sha‘b had been the scene of repeated combat between colonial security forces and insurgents. In mid-August, a nearby mine attack off of the Safad-Acre road killed a number of British soldiers. The military declared internally that it would begin its retaliation by “blowing up” the village, but its first actual move

²³² HC to Colonial Secretary, 14.11.38, #839, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

²³³ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 552.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 522.

²³⁵ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 75, PRO – CO 935/21; Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 522. Danin insinuates that the discovery of al-‘Amuri was the result of an informant but does not clarify further (*Te‘udot*, ft. 28, p. 17).

was to beat villagers, both men and women, at al-Sha‘b, al-Damun, and al-Birwe and arrest 350 men. While being marched to lock-up at al-Rama the rebels attacked the arrest party and, according to their account, managed to free some number of the prisoners, who then joined the rebels or dispersed.²³⁶ Human shields were gathered from coffeehouses and markets, and after more random beatings, a party under one of the ADCs headed back to al-Sha‘b the following day.²³⁷ The rebels had laid another ambush, this time near al-Liyat, in an effort to derail the collective punishment expected at al-Sha‘b. This triggered a major encounter that cost the British three men while the rebels lost 39. At al-Sha‘b 75 homes were dynamited and an equal number were damaged or destroyed in the process. Newly homeless residents departed to Acre.²³⁸ The resistance they faced redoubled the British forces’ intentions of punishing the local Arab population, which they did through successive assaults over at least a week on al-Sha‘b, al-Damun, al-Birwe, and al-Jadideh. Fearing for their safety, many of the villagers decamped to Acre, but it too faced reprisals.²³⁹ Over the subsequent months the army attacked the villages in the area repeatedly.²⁴⁰ The climax was reached in January 1939 after another successful mine attack near al-Birwe. The military returned

²³⁶ HMS Repulse, report of proceedings, 27.8.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4; Report on operations of the *mujahidin* in the northern district, 13-16.8.38, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 492 and Letter from Acre, 17.8.38, in *ibid.*, p. 496. According to the first report only 80 men, all from al-Sha‘b, were arrested and half were freed; the second gives the larger figure noted above and the larger area of arrest while claiming that all of the prisoners escaped in the ambush.

²³⁷ Letters from Acre, 17.8.38 and 27.8.38, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 496, 499-500.

²³⁸ Letter from Acre, 27.8.38, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 499-500; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.9.38, resume of operations (Aug), PRO – Air 5/1248.

²³⁹ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 435-36. Rebel reports wildly exaggerated the casualties they inflicted on the British, inverting the actual events to depict themselves as the victors. Zu‘aytir seems to have believed their account, as he offers no comment. See also Letter from Acre, 27.8.38, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 499-500.

²⁴⁰ For example, in September residents of al-Birwe were subjected to torture using cacti (Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 456), on which see the al-Bassa incident below for a description.

to demolish another 75 homes in al-Sha‘b in response, and as in August, damaged an equal number in the process. Rebels again tried to intercede to protect the village, but under heavy air power they were forced to retreat after taking at least eight casualties.²⁴¹

Apart from the destruction done to the built environment of many villages, villagers were killed with increasing frequency during searches as the rebellion wore on. Some of these were revenge attacks. Most were either claimed to be “accidents” or cordon breakers by the military. Lax rules of engagement for searches also promoted the use of violence. The RAF’s monthly reports record numerous instances of planes participating in searches (through airpines) that fired on persons simply because they took cover when aircraft arrived overhead. Such episodes, if accurately reported, often presented the Arabs with a death trap. For instance, at Ramle in early October RAF action was described as follows: “Seeing the Arabs running from the scene he [the pilot] fired short bursts in front of them as a warning: as however they persisted in running away the pilot took action and inflicted three casualties.”²⁴² If they ran for cover after what they could hardly know for sure were “warning shots,” then they were targets, whereas if they remained in the open they could only presume they were liable to be hit.

In yet other cases, Arabs reported that fighter planes bombed civilian centers, typically in revenge incidents. One example was a series of wanton attacks after the Tiberias massacre. On 5 October rebel units under Mahmud Khadir attempting to march on Safad were engaged by land and air forces. The authorities claimed to score a crushing victory at Jurn Halawa outside Tiberias: an estimated 50 rebels and reserves fell

²⁴¹ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 547-48.

²⁴² RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 19.11.38, resume of operations (Oct), PRO – Air 5/1248.

in battle, including the commander, a disciple of al-Qassam. In the aftermath of this and another battle in the area the same day,²⁴³ and following on the heels of several other encounters immediately after the Tiberias massacre, Arab witnesses say British forces went on a bombing spree. Three Bedouin encampments in the area (‘Arab al-Mawasi, ‘Arab al-Ghuwayr and ‘Arab Abu Shusha) were hit and torched; the villages of Adita and al-Sifsaf were struck, with eight civilians slain in the latter; and three other Bedouin were also killed in further reprisals.²⁴⁴

At its most ghastly, the atmosphere of ambient violence that characterized the carceral era of searches was punctuated by massacres, free-fire incidents, and executions. A mine near Iqrit that claimed four British servicemen’s lives and badly injured two others on 6 September prompted one of the most infamous scenes in the counterinsurgency’s history. On learning of the incident, two British companies, one armored, sped to al-Bassa, the closest village. There the armored cars sprayed machine gun fire for some 20 minutes before soldiers entered to loot, beat its inhabitants, and set homes and buildings ablaze. Four Arabs were shot and one hundred others were taken to a nearby military camp where four of their number were stripped, forced to kneel on a bed of cacti, and either whipped until their skin flayed off or beat senseless until they lost consciousness. The next day, troops returned for a macabre exercise. Fifty or so

²⁴³ The official account (referenced in the next footnote) mentions a second encounter the same day north of Lake Tiberias in which another 36 rebels are said to have been struck down.

²⁴⁴ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 68, PRO – CO 935/21; Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 507. The official account and that provided by Zu‘aytir’s informants are radically different. The rebels hid the extent of their beating, broadcasting instead that serious casualties had been inflicted on the British. But the security forces’ attacks are omitted from the High Commissioner’s version except to say that the Bedouin lost 40 tents as a punitive measure for their suspected involvement in the Tiberias massacre. Ground forces, according to Zu‘aytir, also assaulted the ‘Arab al-Sibana, and when the latter resisted, arrested 90 of their number.

men were taken from the village out to the nearby road. About twenty were then made to board a bus and drive a stretch where they hit a mine laid by the troops that incinerated the bus and killed and maimed the men onboard. The remaining villagers were then, by one British eyewitness account, made to dig a mass grave for their slain fellow villagers. An estimated 20 Palestinians were killed in all at al-Bassa. As DC Keith-Roach relates, the Anglican Bishop G.F. Graham-Brown paid a call to General Bernard Montgomery, commander of the northern division of HMG's forces, after visiting the village. When queried about the incidents Montgomery only replied again and again "I shall shoot them," exemplifying the coarsening if not pathological tenor of the suppression campaign.²⁴⁵

A litany of grim incidents spans the later period of the insurgency. In the fall after an attack on a nearby supply convoy, three of "the best youth" were taken from Silat al-Dhahr and executed.²⁴⁶ At 'Atil, known as a base for subcommander 'Abdullah As'ad, residents said a December visit from the troops resulted in one woman being killed for refusing British sexual advances and three people being burned alive when a community woodshed was set ablaze. Seven homes and 25 businesses were also destroyed, along with every food storage container and piece of bedding in the village.²⁴⁷ That month two people were killed in an official reprisal on Majdal Sadiq (east of Jaffa)

²⁴⁵ My account here is derived from Hughes, "The Banality of Brutality," p. 336-38; A. 'Afifi to A. Zu'aytir, 8.9.38, in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 503-04; and Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 194. Tellingly, most British reports of the time make little or no mention of the al-Bassa episode.

²⁴⁶ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 508.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 542.

following attacks on Jewish colonies in the area.²⁴⁸ Such incidents could doubtless be multiplied many times over.

Kafr Yasif and Kwaykat in the Acre subdistrict were sites of some of the worst counterinsurgency atrocities. A chain of events beginning with the killing of two Jews in an adjacent community led the military to attack Kafr Yasif and shoot four people who were presumed to be rebels because they were on horseback. When a mine killed two soldiers from the same unit immediately afterwards, it returned and burnt the village to the ground. According to widely discrepant British witnesses' accounts, between 70-150 houses were destroyed. The troops went berserk and murdered anywhere from nine to 25 people, before turning to the neighboring village Kwaykat, where another nine people were publicly executed and the village set alight. The rampage was only stopped by the order of the DC-Galilee, who arrived on the scene.²⁴⁹

The deconstruction of everyday life and the diminution of the counter-state

In his memoirs DC-Galilee Kirkbride expresses ambivalence about the idea that the Great Revolt was broken militarily. Where the battlefield continuously drew young Arab men to perish in the name of national glory, he posits that the constriction of “everyday life,” and in particular a set of controls on the movement of goods and persons implemented in fall 1938, ultimately proved most effective in choking rebel activity and organization.²⁵⁰ In place of raw military might or the rolling incarceration

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ This account is a composite of those given in Norris, “Repression and Rebellion,” p. 35-36; Hughes, “The Banality of Brutality,” p. 342; and Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 569.

²⁵⁰ Kirkbride, *A Crackle of Thorns*, p. 106.

of entire villages, the imposition of movement controls brought the counterinsurgency campaign into every Arab home in an indisputable fashion, threatening the daily bread of all and sundry and disrupting the daily routines of peoples' lives by impinging on the most mundane of freedoms. In reality the pass law regulations of November built on previous interventions in the domain of everyday life, but their totalizing scope brought about an unavoidable and debilitating dilemma for the uprising and the embattled counter-state. Rebel resistance to the pass law and the regime of universal male identification that accompanied it was arguably both a major demonstration of the counter-state's power and its final moment. Heeding the rebels' call, most of the Arab public kept up a boycott of the identity cards mandated by the new regulations for a month and a half. When the insurgents were forced to capitulate, the colonial state not only greatly advanced its surveillance and penetration of Arab society, but by forcefully threatening the fundamentals of daily life, commerce, and sustenance, it took crucial ground back from the counter-state, the socio-political standing and powers of social regulation of which never recovered.

Everyday life had long been a terrain of contest between the colonial state and the national movement. As the preceding chapters have shown, the forefront of the movement, youth, peasants, and workers, strove to autonomously regulate aspects of social life (trade, economic development, land tenure) that configured and composed the everyday. During the revolt the colonial state took the fight deep into the domain of the everyday: it converted schools into military bases, seized crops and livestock, occupied buildings and property, invaded, assaulted, and demolished homes and neighborhoods,

jailed activists and whole communities, and forced the Arab public to pay not only in blood and treasure but in the regular if not systematic disruption of life as it was known prior to the uprising. Quotidian and ritual activities like praying at a mosque or going to school were made contingent on docile behavior or random circumstance.²⁵¹ Even holding funerals was at times prohibited, for fear that they would become a “disturbance.”²⁵²

Prior to the pass laws, curfews were used to control or limit movement. With some notable exceptions they were typically brief in duration and restricted in scope to a specific town, area, or road. As the rebellion grew in force they were used more frequently and sometimes extensively. The Arab quarters of Safad were notoriously subjected to 140 days of curfew, at some points for 22 hours per day.²⁵³ Residents tell a harrowing tale of “imprisonment,” forced labor, arbitrary shootings, hunger, and the starvation of infants and children.²⁵⁴ By early fall 1938 Nablus, Nazareth, Haifa, Jenin, and the Old City of Jerusalem were all under a standing order evening curfew which also applied to “all roads and tracks throughout Palestine outside municipal and built up areas.”²⁵⁵

The pass laws issued by the military authorities represented something of a tactical breakthrough for the colonial state. The military asserted control over virtually all movement in Palestine. As of 1 November all travel by road, including intra-urban

²⁵¹ E.g. Protest from the patriotic organizations of Safad to the HC, 16.7.38, in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 483-84; ‘Abdullah al-Jazzar, et. al. to Secretary of the League of Nations, 22.9.38, PRO – CO 733/368/10.

²⁵² Letter from Safad, 19.7.38, by Sa’d al-Din [‘Id Sulayman], in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 484-85.

²⁵³ Khalili, “The Location of Palestine,” p. 422; Letter from Safad, 19.7.38, by Sa’d al-Din [‘Id Sulayman], in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 484-85.

²⁵⁴ Protest from the patriotic organizations of Safad to the HC, 16.7.38, in *Watha'iq al-haraka*, p. 483-84.

²⁵⁵ HC to Colonial Secretary, 9.9.38, #557, PRO – CO 733/366/4.

transit, was prohibited without a military-issued permit. The point of the exercise was rendered clear a week later when it was proclaimed that permits would only be given to those carrying identification papers.²⁵⁶ The idea of creating a “national” ID card system for Palestine was first advocated by Gilbert MacKereth in early 1938. MacKereth thought that the Palestine government should try to emulate the French authorities’ experience in Syria, where he believed identity cards issued in 1926 had considerably aided the suppression of the Great Syrian Revolt.²⁵⁷ The idea was provisionally approved by Tegart and military authorities for some time but stumbled on the issue of Jewish resistance on account of the thousands of illegal immigrants in the country.²⁵⁸ During the urban reoccupations the authorities began moving again in the direction of an ID system. Databases of men searched were created during the Nablus and Jerusalem operations, and in Jaffa a log tracking entries and exits to the city (like the village registers) was opened in October.²⁵⁹ Similar identity logs began to be kept at other searches.

Zu‘aytir translates Arab perceptions well when he stated that anyone without an ID card would be presumed by the military to be a rebel, and that the regulations were intended to remove the rebels’ ability to camouflage themselves among the public.²⁶⁰ Already in Jaffa before the pass laws the local registry had given rise to fears

²⁵⁶ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 74, PRO – CO 935/21.

²⁵⁷ Memo on MacKereth talks with Tegart and Petrie, 11 and 12.1.37, enclosure to Damascus (MacKereth) to Foreign Secretary (Eden), 13.1.37, E 406/10/31, PRO – FO 371/21872.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.; Note of conference at Force HQ, 10.5.38, MEC – Tegart papers, box 2: 3.

²⁵⁹ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 431; Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 111; On events in Jaffa, 3.10.38, CZA S/25 –22191.

²⁶⁰ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 508-09.

that the tracking of insurgents' movements posed a grave risk to the rebellion.²⁶¹ Weeks later, the rebels got wind of the new regulation before its imposition and called a three-day general strike to coincide with the initial order. The strike was well-observed and was accompanied by a ban on obtaining identification papers and travel permits.²⁶² Arab traffic first ground to a halt and, over the next weeks, shifted to non-motorized forms: donkeys, camels, horses, animal-drawn carriages and carts, and bicycles. A fierce contest over the regulations' fate ensued. Whispers threatened violators of the ban with death, and the government attributed one killing to this cause although hundreds of Arabs did procure identification papers before the boycott was dissolved. On the other hand, as HC MacMichael bloodlessly reported, the colonial state threatened the public with "ruin and starvation."²⁶³

The use of food insecurity as a weapon was long latent in the search regime, which from its outset was characterized by the destruction of home pantries. But the pass laws threatened generalized hunger and further economic havoc. Its effects were uneven. Prices rose and the poor in some locations (like Haifa) were unable to afford foodstuffs, while in others (Jerusalem) the majority had "barely enough to eat." Trade, agriculture and industry underwent "almost complete dislocation," as DC Bailey put it, shriveling further beyond their already emaciated condition. The best face DC-Southern

²⁶¹ On events in Jaffa, 3.10.38, CZA S/25 –22191.

²⁶² HC to Colonial Secretary, 30.10.38, #763, PRO – CO 733/366/4; Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 74-75, PRO – CO 935/21.

²⁶³ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 74-76, PRO – CO 935/21; DC-Samaria to Chief Secretary, n.d., extracts from report for Nov (1938), p. 17, PRO – CO 733/372/18. Quote from narrative dispatch.

Crosbie could put on things was to declare that he anticipated winter would pass “with difficulty, but without starvation.”²⁶⁴

As the boycott endured, the rebels and the military command traded communiqués. Roughly two weeks in, the *Diwan* issued a statement reminding the public of the ban’s necessity and declaring that anyone “cooperating with [the nation’s] enemies was subject to severe punishment without leniency or weakness.”²⁶⁵ In late November, only days after being appointed military governor of the Haifa and Samaria district, General Montgomery issued a mirror-image directive to the public, warning that those who refused to cooperate with government would face harsh consequences. The High Commissioner derisively commented that the Arabs had adapted to the transportation freeze: “A change of this kind [using pack animals rather than cars] is not difficult for the Palestinian Arab; it merely means that the clock is put back twenty years.” Yet in reality pressure grew with the onset of citrus season, and before the end of November the rebel leadership altered its stance, providing an exemption from the ban for persons involved in the trade.²⁶⁶ Moreover, the boycott caused strains in the rebel camp and was described by one captain as “nothing but a calamity to the Arabs.” Merchants were engaging in price gouging and buying from Jewish peers while the public suffered shortages in vegetables and foodstuffs.²⁶⁷ Sensing that the ban was causing friction and strain, the state’s southern military command issued an order

²⁶⁴ Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 83, PRO – CO 935/21; Reports from DCs for November (1938), PRO – CO 733/372/18.

²⁶⁵ Rebel statement quoted in Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 513; Montgomery’s is reproduced (in Arabic) in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 519.

²⁶⁶ Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 81, 83, PRO – CO 935/21.

²⁶⁷ Abu ‘Adnan to Abu Mansur, 17.11.38, Sanur cache, CZA S/25 – 22591.

rejecting the exemption for the citrus trade, declaring that there would be ‘free movement or none at all.’²⁶⁸ The rebels buckled and the boycott was cancelled a week later in mid-December. The Arab public reportedly celebrated its end, which the High Commissioner interpreted as a sign that the rebels had overstepped themselves, and a rush to apply for identity papers followed.²⁶⁹

The defeat of the bans on ID papers and transit permits did not end the Arabs’ travail or curb the military authorities’ increasing investment in measures that sacrificed Arab trade, incomes, and economic activity in the name of security. In January 1939 the military cancelled all of the travel documents that they had issued to Arabs and effectively banned inter-urban motor transport for Arabs on the pretext that taxis had been used in offensive operations by insurgents. Most reapplications for permits were refused, with the only categorical exemption granted, again, to citrus-related business. Merchants and landowners outside that sector were hit hard. In effect, Arab transport returned to a state similar to that under the pass laws boycott. Military orders made in February 1939 expanded the use of movement controls further, closing down commercial traffic as punishment for sabotage. On 5 February, for example, the entry and exit of commercial vehicles was prevented from Jaffa until damage to the railroad line near Rehovot was repaired. Though used infrequently, the resort to movement

²⁶⁸ Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 81, PRO – CO 935/21; Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 539. The text is paraphrased from Zu‘aytir’s rendition.

²⁶⁹ Narrative dispatch #13, HC to Colonial Secretary, 16.1.39, p. 92-93, PRO – CO 935/21; DC-Southern to Chief Secretary, 4.1.39, report for Dec, p. 2, PRO – CO 733/372/18.

restrictions to deter sabotage illustrates the constant proliferation of novel collective punishments during the rebellion's final stages.²⁷⁰

Adding to the disruptions caused by the tightening of the pass laws, the military authorities imposed "very frequent 24-hour curfews" after urban assassinations or attempts in early 1939. Meanwhile, identification papers were issued during all searches, advancing the project of rendering the male population, and rebels among it, more visible and more easily tracked. As of March 1939, 90,000 identity cards had been issued to adult Arab men.²⁷¹

The transit boycott was probably the last great show of strength by the counter-state. Merchants and businessmen were predictably irritated at the losses they took on account of the rebel order, yet it was largely upheld. Pushed sharply onto the defensive by the movement controls and the expanding legibility of the population, the counter-state apparatus grew increasingly compromised and endangered as the military's counteroffensive progressed. In October British forces captured a rebel court, consisting of the judge and five members, in the first of a string of such incidents.²⁷² Three more courts were broken up in December, one during an operation in the Tulkarm subdistrict that led to the capture of 35 rebels along with the court officers.²⁷³ Further captures of courts and their officials continued in 1939, increasing in frequency particularly in the spring.

²⁷⁰ Narrative dispatch #1, HC to Colonial Secretary, 27.2.39, p. 7, 12, and Narrative dispatch #2, 24.3.39, p. 18-19, PRO – CO 935/22.

²⁷¹ Narrative dispatch #1, HC to Colonial Secretary, 27.2.39, p. 7, PRO – CO 935/22; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 259.

²⁷² *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 16.

²⁷³ Narrative dispatches #12 and 13, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 89, 94, PRO – CO 935/21.

Already by late 1938 the integrity of the courts system was diminishing. In the chaotic conditions of the time, a growing number of unscrupulous or ambitious captains were reported to withdraw from the battlefield and set themselves up as judges, promoting judicial redundancy and military weakness. In response, ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq issued a directive against platoon heads convening courts and ordering them to restrict their activities to the military realm.²⁷⁴ This followed the appointment in October by the CCJ of educated youth advisors as aides to the chief commanders.²⁷⁵ The aides, whose numbers were limited, were supposed to help impose order within the rebel camp and to curb excesses.²⁷⁶ In the event, it appears that little served to rescue the slow devolution of the revolutionary justice system, once the flagship of the counter-state, under both internal and external pressures.

Rebels on the run

The British counteroffensive, and especially the carceral search regime, did much to alleviate the intelligence gap that had allowed the insurgents to evade capture during searches and surprise on the battlefield. In combination with the pass laws, which considerably complicated their movement and logistics, the rebels were no longer as invisible as they had been. Where actionable intelligence had been “seriously lacking” only so recently, it began to pour in more readily and frequently from November

²⁷⁴ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 529.

²⁷⁵ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 76, PRO – CO 935/21.

²⁷⁶ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 441-42; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 258. Some accounts (e.g. Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 262) greatly exaggerate the effects the advisors had on the revolt.

onwards.²⁷⁷ This pivotal development contributed greatly to the weakening of the rebel movement and allowed colonial security forces to go on the offensive. Making matters worse, rebel influence in the countryside was “progressively decreasing” by the end of 1938, a trend undoubtedly tied to the relentless search operations and the doubling of manpower behind them.²⁷⁸ The result was a precipitous decline in the position of the insurgents, whose ability to steer clear of costly encounters and find shelter from the post-Munich onslaught became increasingly precarious.

One of the first defeats suffered by rebel cadres owing to the colonial state’s improving intelligence flow occurred at Bayt Furik. Part of the Mashariq Nablus *nahiya*, Bayt Furik was one of several villages east of the city that became troublesome to the rebellion. In October fighters from the *nahiya* went on strike, declaiming their lack of ammunition, while villagers accepted the posting of local supernumeraries. Abu Kamal was enraged by the situation, calling for strikers and collaborating villagers to be punished and blaming the low morale of the area on Opposition elements.²⁷⁹ Abu Khalid’s successor, shaykh ‘Abd al-Fatah Muhammad al-Hajj Mustafa, known as Abu ‘Abdullah, took charge of efforts to return the area to the rebel fold. By Subhi Yasin’s account he resuscitated its rebel ranks and preached against the “traitors” urging

²⁷⁷ GOC Haining, “Hostile Propaganda,” 1.12.38, p. 6, PRO – FO 371/21869; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.12.38, resume of operations (Nov), PRO – Air 5/1248; Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 82, PRO – CO 935/21; DC-Galilee to Chief Secretary, 4.1.39, report for Dec., p. 8, and DC-Gaza and Beersheba to Chief Secretary, 7.1.39, fortnightly report #1, p. 3, PRO – CO 733/372/18; On the security situation, 26.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

²⁷⁸ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.12.38, resume of operations (Nov), PRO – Air 5/1248.

²⁷⁹ ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad to ‘Abdullah al-Bayruti, 19.10.38, *Te‘udot*, p. 46-47. Danin implies that part of the tumult lay in the fact that ex-fighters were sometimes inducted into the supernumeraries, hence the disgruntled rebels may have been potential turncoats. The area’s disobedience caused Abu Kamal to fulminate that “those who refuse [rebel orders] are truly worse than infidels.”

collaboration.²⁸⁰ At the time of his death Abu ‘Abdullah was reputedly traveling with a small party and establishing conciliation committees in the Mashariq.²⁸¹ After being informed on he and his men were surrounded at Bayt Furik on 10 November. The rebels were able to shoot down one plane, but combined air and ground attacks claimed 35 lives, some of whom were likely villagers, and included subcommander ‘Abdullah al-Bayruti as well as Abu ‘Abdullah.²⁸²

Just days later at Jamma‘in, southwest of Nablus, 13 of ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq’s men were captured, including one of his messengers. Two small groups of insurgents were caught off guard and took casualties at ‘Asira al-Shamaliyya (Nablus) and Bayt Iba (Tulkarm) later in November.²⁸³ The string of tips received by government continued on 22 November when ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni and a comrade only escaped capture during a search at ‘Ayn Karim by hiding in a local convent.²⁸⁴ These incidents were followed by the late November thrashing of Abu Durra’s men at Umm al-Zaynat, discussed above.

The counteroffensive gained momentum in December, during which the military managed to put a string of top commanders out of commission, wounding them or inducing their retreat across Palestine’s borders. On the first of the month the RAF surprised ‘Abd al-Halim al-Jawlani’s forces at Khirbat Hakura near Hebron. Word had reached al-Jawlani’s camp not long before the encounter, and most of his men, save a

²⁸⁰ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 155.

²⁸¹ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 517.

²⁸² Ibid., p. 516; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.12.38, resume of operations (Nov), PRO – Air 5/1248; Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 83-84, PRO – CO 935/21.

²⁸³ Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 84, PRO – CO 935/21.

²⁸⁴ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.12.38, resume of operations (Nov), PRO – Air 5/1248.

small group acting as a rear guard, were engaged while fleeing into the rugged countryside. Throughout the day over 20 aircraft were used in combination with army units on the ground. Al-Jawlani's party was hard hit, losing some 37 cadres. The southern commander's coat was found the next day in a pool of blood, but he escaped for the time being, resurfacing two weeks later in an even deadlier battle.²⁸⁵

Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir was the next commander to suffer defeat and the first to be removed from the battlefield. Rebel activity in the Galilee district over which his command extended was reported by the government to have dampened in November owing in part to its operations in the Nazareth subdistrict. On 4 December a concentration of approximately 130 men under Abu Ibrahim was detected by the RAF near Tarshiha in the upper Galilee. During the encounter most of the northern commander's men were able to disperse, though seven were slain. Abu Ibrahim himself was "severely injured," as British intelligence learned, and was either evacuated or found his own way to Lebanon to recuperate.²⁸⁶

'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad experienced the straitening condition as a succession of raids intent on his capture or neutralization. At Bal'a in early November his forces fought off one such attempt, downing an airplane as they dispersed into the rough surrounding hill country. According to Sirhan and Kabha's history of Abu Kamal, his men were prevented from serious action afterwards by the intensifying pressure of both the military and the peace bands in his principal areas of operation in the southern

²⁸⁵ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.1.39, resume of operations (Dec), PRO – Air 5/1248. *The Report to the League of Nations, 1938* gives the casualty count as 27 (p. 18).

²⁸⁶ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 17; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.1.39, resume of operations (Dec), PRO – Air 5/1248.

triangle.²⁸⁷ In early December he again eluded his pursuers during a multi-day sweep in the Nablus region that netted the authorities documents showing who his personal bodyguards were.²⁸⁸ At the end of the month ‘Abd al-Rahim and many of his men evaded capture for a third time during a search of Bayt Umrin, this time reportedly by dressing in drag.²⁸⁹ After this encounter Abu Kamal headed to Damascus and Lebanon to secure badly needed ammunition and materiel.²⁹⁰ Ahmad al-Shuqayri met with ‘Abd al-Rahim while he was in Syria and found him gloomy and full of complaints. Indeed, within days of decamping Zionist intelligence filed a report saying that ‘Abd al-Rahim was convinced that the bands were riddled with spies.²⁹¹ Even if somewhat exaggeratedly put, Abu Kamal’s statements certainly reflected the narrowing space of insurgent sanctuary, the deepening distrust within the rebellion’s ranks, and the erosion of its vital intelligence capacities. Abu Kamal spent close to three months abroad at this critical juncture, during which the revolt continued to slide deeper into crisis. The colonial state believed that his extended absence from the field owed to differences of opinion with “co-commander” Abu Faysal, although his doubts about the adequacy of

²⁸⁷ Sirhan and Nimr, *‘Abd al-Rahim*, p. 66; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.12.38, resume of operations (Nov), PRO – Air 5/1248.

²⁸⁸ Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 82, PRO – CO 935/21.

²⁸⁹ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 547; ‘Abd al-Rahman M. Irshayd to [Qasim?] ‘Abd al-Rahim, 18.1.39, Sanur cache, CZA S/25 – 22591. These two sources offer rather different accounts of the events, though given the absence of coverage of the Bayt Umrin operation in official sources (and from Subhi Yasin’s chronicle), it appears more likely that Irshayd’s description of Abu Kamal’s escape and his men’s withdrawal or concealment appears most accurate, if coming from an intensely partisan source that was invested in soiling the commander’s name.

²⁹⁰ Sirhan and Nimr, *‘Abd al-Rahim*, p. 66.

²⁹¹ Al-Shuqayri, *Arba ‘un ‘aman*, p. 185; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 152.

lines of support, including from the CCJ, may well have played a part in the long sojourn.²⁹²

Before Abu Kamal's departure to Syria the authorities chanced upon another opportunity to strike at the rebel command. On 18 December, the same day that Fakhri al-Nashashibi was hosting his public meeting with the military at Yatta, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni met, or attempted to meet with al-Jawlani at Bani Na'im, in the environs of Hebron. Fakhri Effendi got wind of the happening and informed the military, which dispatched a fleet of RAF planes to engage the rebels. The commanders' men split up attempting to escape the barrage but the RAF used 21 aircraft to bomb the area for hours while hunting down the rebels, some of whom became pinned down in their retreat by the absence of foliage east of the village.²⁹³ The insurgents were dealt a crippling blow, with at least 30 killed, though the RAF claimed over twice that number. Fifteen more were captured, including 'Abd al-Qadir's secretary, and five crates of rebel documents were seized.²⁹⁴ Three subcommanders, Ibrahim Khalaf (Bethlehem), 'Isa Abu Qadum ('Arab al-Ta'amara), and 'Abdullah Mish'al (Shurafat), were killed while 'Abd al-Qadir himself was knocked unconscious and suffered a puncture wound that almost collapsed one of his lungs. He was found the day after the battle by rebels who took him to the hospital in Hebron, from whence he was surreptitiously sent on to Damascus.²⁹⁵ After

²⁹² Narrative dispatch #3, HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.7.39, p. 24, PRO – CO 935/22.

²⁹³ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 123; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.1.39, resume of operations (Dec), PRO – Air 5/1248; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 148.

²⁹⁴ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.1.39, resume of operations (Dec), PRO – Air 5/1248; Narrative dispatch #13, HC to Colonial Secretary, 16.1.39, p. 94.

²⁹⁵ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 552; Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 123-24; Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 226. Emblematic of the inadequate and poor information sometimes reaching Zu'aytir and the exiles, he didn't record Bani Na'im in his diaries until mid-January and did so without any notation of the

the encounter at Bani Na'im al-Jawlani exited the country for Damascus, where he remained for a month before returning and reassembling a smaller fighting force than his previous units. According to Danin, the defeat meted out to the insurgents in this final major encounter of 1938 also had the effect of spoiling a planned rebel offensive.²⁹⁶

The rebels ended 1938, the year of their greatest triumphs, in disarray. The search regime and doubling of colonial forces pushed them decidedly onto the defensive. The morale of the fighters, which had so recently been stalwart, flagged in major zones of the country, including the Galilee and the central highlands. In the former the pass laws, materiel shortages, and infighting diminished their activity while defeats weighed heavily on cadres in the mountain country.²⁹⁷ November marked the beginning of a downtrend in rebel operations which deepened in December.²⁹⁸ The High Commissioner crowed at the turn of events, declaring: "the leaders are now hunted rather than hunting."²⁹⁹ Estimates of rebel numbers fell sharply, from the peak of 5000 put forward by the War Office in September to 1-2000 roughly two months later.³⁰⁰ One defector from the rebels in the north described an apparent shift towards a system based

devastation or human costs to the insurgents. This might suggest that the scale of the loss, as in prior incidents, was concealed by the fighters on the ground.

²⁹⁶ *Te'udot*, p. 115, ft. 240.

²⁹⁷ DC-Galilee [to Chief Secretary], n.d., extracts of report for Nov, p. 15, and DC-Samaria [to Chief Secretary], n.d., extracts of report for Nov, p. 21, PRO – CO 733/372/18; RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.12.38, resume of operations (Nov), PRO – Air 5/1248. Subsequent losses disheartened the rebels further: RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.2.39, resume of operations (Jan), PRO – Air 5/1248.

²⁹⁸ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 20.12.38 and 16.1.39, resumes of operations (Nov and Dec), PRO – Air 5/1248.

²⁹⁹ Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 82, PRO – CO 935/21.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.; GOC Haining, "Hostile Propaganda," 1.12.38, p. 2, PRO – FO 371/21869; and Todd (WO) to Downie (CO), 9.9.38, PRO – CO 733/366/4 (for the prior estimate). Abu Durra's command was the only one to buck the trend, at least before the Umm al-Zaynat battle. After the death of one subcommander (Abu Khadr?) and the departure of another for Damascus, his forces grew to 4-500 men, according to Arab Bureau estimates (Survey, 27.10.38-3.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437).

more extensively in reserve fighters, with small core forces as few as 20 men capable of mobilizing and demobilizing auxiliaries from their surroundings.³⁰¹ Whether such measures were in operation widely or not, the RAF concluded by the end of the year that the rebellion was dimming: “the rebel forces continue to suffer severe depletion of men, arms and ammunition as a consequence of the extensive search operations that have continued unremittingly throughout the country.”³⁰² This trend accelerated in early 1939, when it was believed that searches and village occupations had succeeded in apprehending many of the full-time fighters.³⁰³ Insurgent areas were plagued with extortion, thieves and pretenders, some even producing fake rebel notices to add to the chaos, and the inability of the rebel forces and their institutions to cope with these menaces took a toll, at least in some regions, on the credibility of the insurgency as an alternative regime.³⁰⁴ This was only reinforced by the grasping rebel overreactions to the changing conditions of the revolt, represented in the massive urban tax imposts and the downward spiral of the revolutionary courts. The ebbing of public confidence, perhaps more than the battlefield losses and the military turnabout, posed a grave threat to the revolt, and provided the imperial government with the entrée for a diplomatic complement to the counterinsurgency that helped to finally unravel the Great Revolt.

³⁰¹ Survey, 27.10.38-3.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437. This figure – 20 – corresponds exactly with a subsequent RAF report for January 1939 recording that the bands had reverted to smaller, lighter units (RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.2.39, resume of operations (Jan), PRO – Air 5/1248).

³⁰² RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 16.1.39, resume of operations (Dec), PRO – Air 5/1248.

³⁰³ RAF headquarters (Jeru.), 17.2.39, resume of operations (Jan), PRO – Air 5/1248.

³⁰⁴ For a note of the fake propaganda, see Narrative dispatch #13, HC to Colonial Secretary, 16.1.38, p. 92, PRO – CO 935/21. The DC-Southern’s report for November (DC-Southern [to Chief Secretary], n.d., extracts of report for Nov, p. 8, PRO – CO 733/372/18) seems to distill the effect that the current of instability could have on the rebel dynamic with the public: “The people of Jaffa feel now that they have given in to the rebels far more than they ought to have done. They feel that the rebel movement is taking a course of robbery and lawlessness which is affecting their economic life to a great extent.”

False dawn: the 1939 White Paper and the artifice of diplomacy

The crisis that the endorsement of partition had sparked in Arab Palestine in 1937 set off a new round of intra-imperial contestation over policy. Backpedaling was not long in coming. The January 1938 announcement of the Woodhead Commission made it plain that the London government would not seek to implement partition by force, clearing the way for a strategic reset.³⁰⁵ The question of future policy became the subject of heated wrangling and was slow to be resolved. When partition was abandoned and a new diplomatic initiative announced in late 1938, the rebel victory over the hated policy was short-lived and quickly followed by crisis.

The fight over partition inside the administration was a fight over imperial priorities and the place of Zionism within them. Colonial Secretary Ormsby-Gore, a supporter and associate of Zionism from before Britain ruled Palestine, defended partition until he was swept from office in May 1938. He argued that the empire's regional and global interests made pan-Islamic solidarity its greatest bugbear, which a Jewish state in Palestine would act against, serving as a kind of "Ulster" implanted in the sea of religious intolerance that he imagined the Middle East to be.³⁰⁶ This conception of the Jewish National Home policy, shared more or less by many of its original authors and contemporaries, came under increasing fire. George Rendel of the Foreign Office turned the argument on its head, asserting that a Jewish state would bring about the very type of regional solidarity (which Rendel insisted would be secular and pan-Arab rather

³⁰⁵ Cohen, "Secret Diplomacy," p. 399.

³⁰⁶ Colonial Secretary (Ormsby-Gore) to Prime Minister (Chamberlain), 9.1.38, PRO – FO 371/21862. See also the discussion in Gabriel Sheffer, "Appeasement and the Problem of Palestine," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* v. 11, n. 3 (May 1980), p. 390.

than pan-Islamic) that its backers strove to ward off.³⁰⁷ Both the Imperial Chiefs of Staff and the Foreign Office were convinced that the Peel Commission had revealed that partition would damage British interests in the Middle East.³⁰⁸ Ambassador Miles Lampson of Egypt echoed this assessment, emphasizing the security costs and strains caused by Arab unrest and nationalist agitation as Britain prepared for the expected European war.³⁰⁹ Within the Colonial Office several high officials, including Permanent Undersecretary John Maffey and his successor, Cosmo Parkinson (former head of the Middle East division), had argued since 1936 for allaying Palestinian fears through some measure of political concessions, and in 1938, they were joined by Deputy Undersecretary and Middle East section chief, John Shuckburgh, an old ally of Zionism.³¹⁰

Ormsby-Gore's replacement, Malcolm MacDonald, gradually established a different course for the Colonial Office, moving it away from its previous position and towards a new policy designed to serve imperial interests above all. The new Colonial Secretary "regarded the Palestine question as the most urgent and important" matter before him and eagerly sought a means to extinguish the revolt.³¹¹ His addition to the ongoing suppression campaign was to reengage the Arabs diplomatically, not so much in order to obtain a settlement as for purposes of stagecraft. He surmised that if it could be shown that the government was doing its utmost to reconcile Arabs and Jews then the din surrounding Palestine might be quieted, both at home in Britain and in other

³⁰⁷ Rendel, comment on Ormsby-Gore's 9.1.38 letter to the PM, PRO – FO 371/21862.

³⁰⁸ Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 71.

³⁰⁹ Sheffer, "Appeasement," p. 389; Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 73.

³¹⁰ Sheffer, "Appeasement," p. 380-81; Cohen, *Palestine to Israel*, p. 58-59.

³¹¹ Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 24.8.38, CP 193 (38), p. 2, PRO – CAB 24/278.

countries (viz. the Arab states and the United States), allowing HMG to proceed as it saw fit.³¹² The resulting public relations ploy, which birthed the 1939 roundtable talks (known as the St. James Palace conference) and led to the subsequent White Paper, was too simplistic to work as he had hoped. Instead, it disastrously backfired when Zionists vehemently rejected the new statement of policy. Still, with respect to the Palestinians and the revolt the launch of a new diplomatic initiative proved a well-timed diversion, tapping into latent fissures over the uprising and whether it should continue as it was or change form to a civic, peaceful struggle.

At least in some corners of the rebel movement the desire to reengage diplomatically was evident long before the roundtable talks. Jamal al-Husayni sent Colonial Secretary MacDonald, who he had met in 1930, a personal letter upon his taking office. At the time rumors were swirling in Arab Palestine about the Woodhead Commission, the most optimistic of which held that it might herald not only the end of partition, but of the Mandate.³¹³ Writing in an unofficial capacity Jamal Effendi insisted that the Palestine problem was fundamentally bound up with the denial of the equal humanity of the Palestinians, who were consistently seen as lesser beings, steeped in primordialism, prone to incitement, and lacking the capacity for independent judgment and agency. He chided the government for deporting what he called “the moderate opinion” within the AHC and declared – with careless disregard for the rebels inside Palestine – that “the public was left without any responsible representation” after the crackdown following Andrews’s killing. Yet he closed his missive by advancing a

³¹² Ibid., p. 7.

³¹³ Conversation w/ G. ‘A. on 16.5.38, CZA S/25 – 22191.

proposal for resolving the conflict and terminating the rebellion that revised and softened the official national lines as embodied in the AHC's testimony before the Peel Commission. The proposal, offered schematically, dropped the nativist tone and anti-Jewish stance that had so put off the commissioners and their masters in London.³¹⁴ It called for a unitary independent Palestine in which Jews would be equal citizens, sit in a common government with Arabs according to proportional representation, and enjoy "Municipal and communal autonomy." The Colonial Office discussed replying to the letter but declined to on account of the fact that the AHC was deemed "morally responsible" for the uprising.³¹⁵

Far from heeding al-Husayni's anguished plea, MacDonald's views of the Palestinians and their uprising were not dissimilar from Ormsby-Gore's. Before throwing his full weight behind jettisoning partition, MacDonald took a secret trip to Palestine in early August 1938 during which he found himself persuaded, like HC MacMichael and GOC Haining, that the rebellion was a "terrorist movement" of "no genuine political significance." The insurgency was not popular or rooted in popular aspirations. Rather, mischievous leaders (the exiles) conducted "strenuous agitation" and worked in league with "banditti who... were delighted at the chance to fish in troubled waters." Echoing the line repeatedly argued by Zionist leaders and the Hebrew press, the Colonial Secretary saw no "spontaneous national movement" at work in Arab Palestine – only "intimidation" on a terrific scale. Given this assessment, shared by the

³¹⁴ For instance, a number of witnesses had refused to guarantee the residency and other rights of post-1917 immigrants in a hypothetical Arab state. See chapter 8.

³¹⁵ Jamal al-Husayni to Colonial Secretary, 27.5.38, and minutes by CO officers, PRO – CO 733/370/13. One Colonial Office minute notes that the proposal was essentially a cantonization plan, versions of which had been batted around since 1936.

High Commissioner and the GOC, he also agreed with the former that the AHC should be excluded from the roundtable talks.³¹⁶

The rebellion's crescendo in August and September and the prospect of a war in Europe temporarily shook up British officials' acid view of events and caused them to consider making serious concessions to Palestinian demands. While pressing for reinforcements the High Commissioner uncharacteristically opined in a cable on 7 September that the Arabs had strong cases on immigration, land sales, and partition which were being sullied by the violence of the revolt.³¹⁷ Stressing the necessity of bringing about the Arab states' acquiescence to HMG rule in Palestine, the Colonial Secretary soon proposed that immigration be halted entirely in the event of a European war, to which HC MacMichael and the GOC assented. But the revolt remained the principal stumbling block to establishing any new policy, and was even making it difficult to announce changes to the direction of policy. On 23 September HC MacMichael informed London that without severe restrictions on immigration he could only anticipate that the release of the Woodhead Commission findings would intensify the uprising.³¹⁸ Two days later, MacMichael again warned that "immediate wholesale appeasement" (i.e. the abandonment of partition) was no guarantee of an end to the rebellion and related that the GOC shared in this evaluation, in part because the exiles did not have control over the rebels in the field. He cautioned that the resumption of

³¹⁶ Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 24.8.38, CP 193 (38), p. 4, 8, PRO – CAB 24/278. According to Haim the Colonial Secretary began to float the idea of a summit with Arab and Jewish parties in June (*Abandonment*, p. 134).

³¹⁷ HC to Colonial Secretary, 7.9.38, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

³¹⁸ Colonial Secretary to HC, 20.9.38, #440, PRO – FO 371/21864; HC to Colonial Secretary, 23.9.38, #450 [errata: out of numerical sequence], PRO – CO 733/367/1.

effective British governance over the territory would take time and that it could only be accomplished after the rebellion had been quashed militarily.³¹⁹ In his monthly report for September DC-Galilee Kirkbride said much the same thing, emphasizing that the insurgency had hit such a pitch that in order for any political process to be viable, the Arab fighters must first be thoroughly routed.³²⁰ Henceforth this became the position of the British government in London and in Palestine, as was agreed to by the principal parties, including the Colonial Secretary, in mid-October.³²¹

The Munich agreement of 29 September 1938 was pivotal to determining both the shape of future policy and the fate of the revolt. As noted above, troop strength was quickly brought to two divisions (double the mid-summer level) and the non-Arab sections of the police were simultaneously doubled. Freed of the perceived necessity of immediate substantive concessions (such as an immigration freeze), and with the Palestine government effectively in the military's hands, the generals redoubled the counterinsurgency campaign. As Khalaf, Norris and others have underscored, the diplomatic track would neither be allowed to dilute the military effort nor would it be permitted to force Britain's hand.³²² This calculus was kept secret, though certainly some Palestinians suspected that the renewed interest in diplomacy was a ruse.

Palestinian morale was high in September as the British fretted over their options. Rumors circulating boasted that victory was at hand and exaggerated colonial

³¹⁹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 25.9.38, #621, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

³²⁰ DC-Galilee to Chief Secretary, 3.10.38, report for September, p. 4, PRO – CO 733/372/18.

³²¹ Norris, "Repression and Rebellion," p. 30. The consensus on a military solution reversed the Colonial Secretary's position in August, when he cautioned that such could destroy the credibility of the civilian administration and create undesirable difficulties for post-conflict governance (Memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, 24.8.38, CP 193 (38), p. 2, PRO – CAB 24/278).

³²² Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 71; Norris, "Repression and Rebellion," p. 30.

losses and defeats on the battlefield. Anticipation also surrounded the war clouds in Europe, which some expected to compel the termination of the Mandate.³²³ The British privately made it known to Zionist representatives mid-month that partition was dead, and in October the idea of convening an Arab-Jewish conference was floated to Chaim Weizmann.³²⁴ In September, before any word on partition or the roundtable talks was made public, the exiles geared up to amplify their presence in London and simultaneously prepared for a major conference in Cairo in October, the Inter-Parliamentary Congress of Arab and Muslim Countries for the Defense of Palestine, which was partially organized by ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi.³²⁵

The Inter-Parliamentary Congress drew 2500 attendees from twelve countries but comparatively few of the statesmen it was hoped to attract: only 60 actual parliamentarians joined the group, and Saudi Arabia and the Wafd boycotted it.³²⁶ More important than the familiar positions it evinced (which largely recapitulated the AHC’s position before the Peel Commission), the congress brought out into the open the existence of a split among the exiles. The mufti had worried beforehand that a resolution would be advanced to wind up the revolt, and in the event it was ‘Awni Bey who mooted it.³²⁷ ‘Awni believed that the revolt had already demonstrated the depth of Arab sentiment and that it should be demilitarized before the commencement of

³²³ DC-Galilee to Chief Secretary, 3.10.38, report for Sept, p. 3-4, DC-Southern to Chief Secretary, 5.10.38, report for Sept, p. 13, DC-Jerusalem, 5.10.38, report for Sept, p. 7-8, DC-Samaria to Chief Secretary, 10.10.38, report for Sept, p. 2, PRO – CO 733/372/18.

³²⁴ Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 135.

³²⁵ Political information on Arab activities, 20.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Surveys, 23.9.38-28.9.38 and 29.9.38-6.10.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

³²⁶ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 149-50.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*; Survey, 23.9.38-28.9.38, CZA S/25 – 22437; CID, 18.10.38, intelligence summary 73/38, PRO – CO 733/359/10. Muhammad Alluba Pasha, the other convener, was also party to ‘Awni’s motion.

negotiations with Britain. Jamal al-Husayni batted the issue down and afterwards the *majlisis* assailed ‘Awni, bringing up the Wadi al-Hawarith affair to tarnish his name anew. Seizing on the opportunity, a relative of ‘Awni’s from the Opposition then claimed to ‘Izzat Darwaza and others from the CCJ circle in Syria that if the factionalist warfare and threats weren’t ended, ‘Awni would join forces with Fakhri al-Nashashibi and organize peace band units.³²⁸ Fanciful as this idea was, the disagreement that reared its head among the exiles soon spread.

On 9 November the Woodhead Commission’s findings were unveiled along with a statement of policy. The commissioners unanimously rejected its predecessors’ partition plan, and while *pro forma* proposing several alternate versions to it, concluded that they were “unable to recommend boundaries... which will afford a reasonable prospect of the eventual establishment of self-supporting Arab and Jewish States.” The government’s statement paired the abandonment of partition with the announcement of the roundtable conference, to which the Arab states would also be invited to send representatives. The AHC was originally debarred from attending as the government publicly wouldn’t countenance sitting with those with whom they attributed the “campaign of assassination and violence,” but it was quickly forced to relent, since although their influence with the insurgents was tenuous, the exiles were still thought to be the only hope of putting a representative face on the conference.³²⁹

³²⁸ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 150; CID, 18.10.38, intelligence summary 73/38, PRO – CO 733/359/10.

³²⁹ Statement of HMG, 9.11.38, *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, appendix C, p. 48-50; Colonial Secretary to HC, 23.11.38, #583, PRO – FO 371/21866.

The news of partition's death was greeted with a measure of elation, but quickly exacerbated the declining conditions of the revolt. Akram Zu'aytir jubilantly recorded in his diaries that "the bullets of rebel Palestine have torn up the Royal Commission's [partition] decision."³³⁰ The Arab public was relieved at the turn of events, but discontented that immigration and land sales continued and that the mufti was excluded from the official parlays.³³¹ Anticipating what was to follow, the rebels warned against premature celebration and excessive optimism regarding the coming negotiations.³³² As they feared, however, support for the insurgency slackened in some parts of the country, such as the Galilee, where DC Kirkbride observed that rebel exactions (of food and money) were increasingly unpopular after the region was no longer slated to become part of a Jewish state.³³³ Rebel morale softened, as previously noted, and disorder prevailed in some areas. The JA's Arab Bureau reported that the mufti's own followers and family members were divided as to how to proceed, with some echoing 'Awni's call to dissolve the armed struggle and strike a conciliatory posture.³³⁴ The view in Damascus grew bleaker, and according to Consul MacKereth, the exiles worried that the rebellion might implode.³³⁵

The Colonial Secretary pushed the public relations wedge further during an appearance at the House of Commons on 24 November. After broadcasting that the government had retaken Jerusalem, Jericho, Beersheba, and Gaza, as well as returned to

³³⁰ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 511.

³³¹ Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 79, PRO – CO 935/21.

³³² Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 513.

³³³ DC-Galilee [to Chief Secretary], n.d., extracts of report for Nov 1938, p. 15, PRO – CO 733/372/18.

³³⁴ Response of the Arabs to the partition commission report and government announcement, 10.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22191; Survey, 3.11.38-16.11.38, CZA S/25 – 22437.

³³⁵ Damascus (MacKereth) to FO, 28.11.38, PRO – FO 371/21867.

Jaffa, he intoned that Palestine begged a political, not military resolution. Although he heaped praise on the *yishuv* in much the same respect as the Peel Commission had, counting it as the sole modern force in Palestine and arguing that it had brought many benefits to the Arabs (including longer lifespans from improved health services), he acknowledged that the Arabs had never consented to the Balfour policy or the Mandate and declared that the Arabs must be understood for a lasting solution to be devised. Demonstrating some sensitivity to their fears he stated that he would be “alarmed” if he were a Palestinian Arab watching the “peaceful invasion by an alien people” progress, especially in the 1930s. He described the rebel ranks as full of “cut-throats of the worst type” but, contra his private estimation, went on to affirm the “genuine patriotism” animating the Arab struggle.

Like its predecessor, this new statement garnered some appreciation among Palestinians, particularly for the comments on the immigration issue.³³⁶ Before the close of the month it was ascertained that the mufti would not insist on coming to London. With this complication out of the way, the Seychelles detainees were released in early December with the proviso that they could not reenter Palestine so long as the rebellion continued.³³⁷

From the outset the mufti’s camp and the rebels were quite skeptical of the roundtable initiative. The draft AHC statement on the Woodhead announcement made clear that Darwaza and the mufti, who were chiefly responsible for its contents,

³³⁶ Speech by the Colonial Secretary in the House of Commons, 24.11.38, *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, appendix D, p. 50-55; Narrative dispatch #12, HC to Colonial Secretary, 29.12.38, p. 80, PRO – CO 935/21.

³³⁷ Correspondence between Colonial Office and High Commissioner, late November: PRO – FO 371/21867; *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 30; Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 304.

predicted correctly that the negotiations were being rigged to fail.³³⁸ The final version staked out a maximalist position calling for the Zionist policy to be fully rescinded and rejecting any recognition of “Jewish rights” in Palestine.³³⁹ The rebel command desultorily responded with its own communiqué weeks later on 2 December in which it dismissed the statement of policy and the Colonial Secretary’s speech as “honeyed words” covering over a plan to maintain the Mandate and deny the Arabs their independence. It decried the London government’s stated intent of balancing its commitments to Arabs and Jews, calling it a bad-faith retread of the dual obligation formula that the Peel Commission had declared bankrupt. Moreover it derided the call for a mutual agreement with the Zionists as an exercise in futility since they insisted that the Balfour policy and the Mandate be the basis for any discussions. It placed sole confidence in the AHC, with the mufti as its head, as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinians and insisted that the uprising would continue, with rebels risking death until the day that the “Arab nation [*umma*] in Palestine won its rights completely and without deficiency.”³⁴⁰

Despite the public displays of militancy and unity, support for the revolt continued to slide. Its social revolutionary tendencies were held by HC MacMichael to be diminishing the standing of the wealthy families and the notability and encouraging

³³⁸ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 515.

³³⁹ AHC, 16.11.38, PRO – FO 371/21866.

³⁴⁰ Communiqué from the *Diwan* of the revolution on the British government’s announcement after the Woodhead Commission, 2.12.38, in *Watha’iq al-haraka*, p. 524. The rebel leaders explained the delay in pronouncing their position by stating that they didn’t want to be perceived as preempting public opinion, which they claimed to be backing.

them to seek an exit from the revolt that would preserve their property and status.³⁴¹ As preparations advanced in late January 1939 for the roundtable conference, military intelligence believed that the major rebel commanders were in sharp disagreement over whether to maintain armed operations and perhaps over whether the revolt should continue.³⁴² This central dispute was reflected among the exilic leaders as well.

After difficulties obtaining entry permits to Lebanon, the AHC met in the town of Juniyeh in mid-January in extraordinary session for the first time since before Andrews's assassination. Although Darwaza's memoirs occlude the friction of the reunion, MacKereth reported that the session was anything but harmonious. The Seychelles internees backed 'Awni Bey's suggestion to terminate the revolt and sharply criticized its devolution into inter-factional warfare and what they called banditry.³⁴³ Only the mufti, Jamal al-Husayni, 'Izzat Darwaza, and Alfred Rok backed the revolt unreservedly. Other non-AHC members included in the deliberations, 'Izzat Tannus (head of the Arab Centre in London), Musa al-'Alami, and George Antonius, were undecided. Consequently the British took the meeting's communiqué, restating the AHC's Peel lines and couching them in the Arab national charter, with a grain of salt. The High Commissioner thought that a good quotient of the delegation to the roundtable

³⁴¹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 2.1.39, PRO – CO 733/398/1.

³⁴² HC to Colonial Secretary, 23.1.39, #71, PRO – CO 733/398/1. The GOC noted an abundance of conflicting reports and rumors circulated about the state of the rebel camp, but asserted with confidence that disagreement was serious over whether to "pipe down." The presence of several field commanders in Damascus at the time was given as evidence of the uncertainty of the position, though this coincidence also owes to their varied close calls in December.

³⁴³ It is unclear, but given their affluent backgrounds, the deprecation of brigandage may have been a reference to the social turn in the uprising.

talks named at the meeting³⁴⁴ was prepared to accept quite a bit less than this, including limited Jewish immigration (estimated at 10,000 per year) so long as Arabs remained the majority.³⁴⁵

The roundtable talks opened in February 1939. As Issa Khalaf points out, the rebellion offered the Palestinians little leverage at this point since it had lost much of its vitality.³⁴⁶ The discussions were broken into two tracks since the Palestinians and the Zionist representatives refused to sit together, and that between HMG and the Arabs covered familiar territory. Picking up on Jamal al-Husayni's efforts months previous, the Palestinians found themselves trying to convince Colonial Secretary MacDonald, who presided for the government, that the Mandate must terminate in an Arab state that would guarantee full rights to the Jewish minority.³⁴⁷ Meanwhile the Zionists, who had deep misgivings about the conference and suspected that the Jewish National Home policy was in serious jeopardy, had been promised beforehand, as a condition of their participation, that Britain would not agree to any new dispensation that would render

³⁴⁴ The mufti was named head of the delegation, with Jamal al-Husayni acting in his stead. Its members were: Husayn F. al-Khalidi, Alfred Rok, Ya'qub al-Ghusayn, Fuad Saba, and 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi from the AHC, Raghib al-Nashashibi and Ya'qub al-Farraj from the DP, and George Antonius, Musa al-'Alami, and Amin al-Tamimi as associates of the mufti's camp and the exiles. Ya'qub al-Ghusayn and Fuad Saba acted as secretaries (Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 174-75). Antonius acted as coordinator of the collected Arab delegations (including the Arab states) and chief liaison officer with British officials and the media (Susan Silsby, "George Antonius: The Formative Years," *Journal of Palestine Studies* v. 15, n. 4 (summer 1986), p. 93). Ahmad Hilmi 'Abd al-Baqi and 'Abd al-Latif Salah of the AHC both declined to participate, the former because of his rejection of the mufti's assassination policy and his opposition to armed action during the talks (Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 282-83). The DP's inclusion in the delegation was agreed to by the mufti after weeks of hedging and pressure.

³⁴⁵ Narrative dispatch #1, HC to Colonial Secretary, 27.2.39, p. 1-2, PRO – CO 935/22; Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 74; Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism*, p. 304-05.

³⁴⁶ Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 73-74.

³⁴⁷ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 175.

them a permanent minority.³⁴⁸ Over weeks of negotiations the Palestinians succeeded in wearing down the government's adamancy on this commitment, until it put forward a draft of the White Paper in mid-March that proposed, for the first time ever, to grant the Arabs control of immigration – after a period of five years for which the quota was fixed at 75,000 total immigrants.³⁴⁹ The talks broke down, however, over the issue of Palestine's independence, which the government refused to concede.³⁵⁰

After the conference broke off two days later on 17 March, the British government quickly resumed discussions with the representatives of the Arab states, who acted as informal mediators with the Palestinian representatives. As the Chamberlain government refused to budge on the issue of independence, the Palestinians made further adjustments to their position, intended to help bridge the gap. They accepted the immigration proposal from the draft White Paper so long as the Jewish population was kept under 33 percent of the total population and they called for the establishment of a national government upon conclusion of the revolt, in which the British would have advisory capacity but the staff and officers of which would be drawn from the population. Again, British obduracy prevented any agreement.³⁵¹

The White Paper published in May 1939 was fashioned to provide both the Arabs and the Jews of Palestine with a veto over the concerns of the opposite party. For the

³⁴⁸ Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 136. The Zionist position, set out by Ben-Gurion, was to propose that Palestine enjoy unlimited Jewish immigration and development within the framework of its membership in a larger Arab federation (ibid., p. 138), a policy position that he had advanced for a number of years (Sela, "The Wailing Wall Riots," p. 87). The British Cabinet's subcommittee on Palestine put forward essentially the same proposal. See records of discussions at: PRO – FO 371/21865.

³⁴⁹ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 177.

³⁵⁰ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 284-85.

³⁵¹ Ibid., p. 287-88; Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 142.

Arabs it put forward the five-year immigration proposal as well as imposing new controls on land purchases, effectively restricting them to limited areas of the country. For the Zionists it stipulated that Palestine's future independence, after a 10-year transitional period, would only be realized with their concurrence. The concessions which the Arabs wrung from HMG were intended in the short term to palliate them and stem the risk of "grave disorder" spreading throughout the region, the specter of which continued to be unsettling given the events in Europe. Yet the policy was ultimately, like the talks that preceded it, intent on using the deadlock of irreconcilable Arab and Jewish aspirations to preserve and prolong British rule over the territory.³⁵² With it, the British succeeded in trading the final sputtering months of the Arab insurgency for a new, heated Jewish campaign against the government. It was the Arabs, however, that first felt the sting of Zionist anger.

On 27 February 1939, long before the close of the London conference, a series of bombs went off in Haifa and elsewhere, killing 38 Arabs and wounding 44. The previous day, the Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram* had reported that the conference would yield a treaty along lines of the Anglo-Iraqi agreement that would make Palestine independent. Celebrations broke out in urban centers and rumors circulated that independence and a permanent Arab majority had been secured at the roundtable talks. Bonfires were started, British police were cheered, and in the Nazareth area the rebels yielded to popular pressure and declared a halt to armed activities as a "holiday." As HC

³⁵² Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 290; Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 142; Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 73-74. The analysis here is most informed by Haim's observations on the informal talks after the conference. Not without some cause, M.J. Cohen points to the failed Hyamson-Newcombe third-party scheme for an Arab-Jewish agreement (first rejected by Zionists in 1937, then by the mufti's camp in early 1938) as the progenitor of the terms of the White Paper. See "Secret Diplomacy," p. 379-404.

MacMichael correctly interpreted, coming rapidly on the heels of these festivities the bombings were a manifestation of Jewish rage at the “possibility of the liquidation of the National Home.” The mood in the *yishuv* was as dark as the Arabs were ecstatic, and opinion had shifted rightward, with Labor movement leaders and the Histadrut’s newspaper, *Davar*, sounding decidedly Revisionist notes. The National Council called a two-day general strike and initiated measures to prepare for “emergency” conditions, clearly preparing for a resistance to the expected departure from the Balfour policy.³⁵³

The security forces used the confusion to strike at the rebels, some of whom were led to believe, by rumors it appears, that the hostilities were at an end. Recourse to such a ploy led to one ambush on the Acre-Safad road that Arabs described as a massacre in which 11 fighters were killed.³⁵⁴ As some accounts have noted, the period of the roundtable initiative and talks actually coincided with many of the most brutal episodes of the counterinsurgency, such as the attacks on Kafr Yasif and Kwaykat discussed previously.³⁵⁵ The dissonance between the difficult realities both on the ground in Palestine and at the talks in London, on one hand, and the public mood on the other, could scarcely have been greater. More celebrations followed only days after the 27 February bombings.³⁵⁶ After the Acre road incident rebel field commanders tried to square the circle, issuing a notice declaring that the rebellion would only be considered

³⁵³ Narrative dispatch #2, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.3.39, p. 14, 16, 20-21, PRO – CO 935/22. The Jewish National Council authorized monetary collections for the Defense Fund (*kofer ha-yishuv*) and compilation of a log of Jewish citizens.

³⁵⁴ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 577.

³⁵⁵ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 129.

³⁵⁶ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 580.

ended after express proclamation and after an Arab government had been established and seated.³⁵⁷

Try as the core of the insurgents and their exilic backers did to soldier on, by spring the uprising reached its final decisive hour. After months in Damascus, ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad returned to Palestine in late March to resume his place as eminent field commander. Less than 10 ten days after leaving Syria he was killed with fellow subcommander Sulayman Abu Khalifa in an ambush at Sanur in the triangle. The 27 March operation came about after information was passed to the military by Farid Irshayd, erstwhile member of the Haifa underground turned peace band operative.³⁵⁸ The same day at a different location a rebel court was captured for the third straight day in a row, with a fourth following it during a sweep northwest of Ramallah immediately after Abu Kamal’s demise.³⁵⁹ The death of the most respected of the rebel commanders was announced on Radio Jerusalem and commemorated with days of shop closures throughout the urban centers of Palestine.³⁶⁰ Two weeks later on 13 April, in a testament to the effectiveness of the suppression campaign in the triangle, ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq, seeking to cross the Syrian frontier with a platoon of 12 men, surrendered to the authorities in a “state of complete physical collapse.”³⁶¹

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 578. The *bayān* further enumerated several intermediate steps expected to precede termination of the revolt, including: 1) the freeing of prisoners; 2) amnesty for fighters and exiles; 3) the exit of military forces from their fortified bases; and 4) the collection of weapons possessed by the *yishuv*.

³⁵⁸ Narrative dispatch #3, HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.7.39, p. 24, PRO – CO 935/22; Yasin, *al-Thawra al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 157-58; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 152.

³⁵⁹ HC to Colonial Secretary, 25-27.3.39 and 29.3.39, #340, 346, 348, 355, PRO – CO 733/398/2.

³⁶⁰ HC to Colonial Secretary, 28-29.3.39, #352 and 355

³⁶¹ Narrative dispatch #3, HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.7.39, p. 24, PRO – CO 935/22.

Only days before Abu Faysal's dispiriting capitulation, rebel leaders had met at Muhammad al-Ashmar's residence in Damascus and again debated whether to call off the revolt. They complained as they had for many months of the absence of ammunition and of its shoddy quality. The public was weary and, they said, unwilling to bear the costs of the insurgency and the state's countermeasures. Although the opinion was reportedly sour on continuing the fight, Abu Durra emphasized that he would return to the field if others did and that Fakhri 'Abd al-Hadi and Farid Irshayd needed to be conciliated or killed. Sidestepping the acknowledgement of the growing salience of the counterrevolutionary forces, Darwaza promised the necessary supplies and urged that the gains rebels had made not be given away. Darwaza and Abu Durra prevailed and a kill squad was agreed upon to handle the "traitors."³⁶² Abu Durra, who had barely escaped capture late in 1938, was injured thereafter and, like his fellow chief commanders, had been temporarily put out of action. He had become unpopular to some extent and collections under his watch were not given, according to the state's intelligence, with much enthusiasm.³⁶³ As 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni had left Palestine (and may not have returned after the Bani Na'im battle) and Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir had already gone to Baghdad (after recovering from his close call in December 1938), for all intents and purposes Abu Durra became the top commander for a brief few months until he too was

³⁶² Survey, 20.4.39-27.4.39, CZA S/25 – 22558.

³⁶³ Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 543; Narrative dispatch #2, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.3.39, p. 17, PRO – CO 935/22.

captured in July trying to take refuge in Transjordan, from whence he was extradited to Palestine, tried and executed.³⁶⁴

Although the CCJ and its allies pushed strenuously for the continuation of the revolt during the roundtable and after, their own sanctuary began to simultaneously erode and the gaze of some of the exiled activists began to turn from Palestine to Iraq as the next platform from which to continue the anti-colonial struggle. In a foretaste of what was to come, ‘Izzat Darwaza was arrested for the first time in Damascus in February.³⁶⁵ In April the Iraqi Ministry of Education solicited Akram Zu‘aytir to join its staff and help spread Arab nationalism from within its offices, rather than in his capacity as an associate of the CCJ. Zu‘aytir writes in his diaries that he was first dismissive of the opportunity, but after the mufti and other exiles encouraged him, the former suggesting that Iraq would soon be central to the greater Arab cause, he accepted and left for Baghdad.³⁶⁶ Other exiles and demobilized fighters and captains followed him, or had already left for Iraq. Two months after Akram’s departure, in mid-June, he received a plaintive letter from Wasif Kamal. French authorities had conducted a raid at Muhammad ‘Ali Darwaza’s house in Damascus, rounding up he, his brother, and a group of other exiles while in the midst of a meeting with visiting Palestinian commanders. Most were released quickly but the brothers Darwaza remained imprisoned. More arrests then followed along the same pattern, with some kept in jail

³⁶⁴ Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 128; Survey, 20.4.39-27.4.39, CZA S/25 – 22558; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 259-60. After losing Abu Faysal the CCJ did anoint an official successor as titular head of the revolt, Ahmad Muhammad Hasan, a.k.a. Abu Bakr, but he was unable to impose himself, and after losing 20 men in battle, withdrew from Palestine shortly after receiving his credentials (Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 589, 601; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 247).

³⁶⁵ Zu‘aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 572.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 589-90.

and others released, and with yet others expelled from the country. “We are in a mortal crisis,” Kamal declared, which he suspected had been caused by a recent visit of the GOC-Palestine to his French equivalent in Syria. Reading the news, Akram concluded that the presence of the Palestinian captains abroad was only a further index of the revolt’s frailty.³⁶⁷

As the once vigorous movement crumbled, the issue of the White Paper in May came almost as an epitaph for the dying uprising. The failure of the roundtable talks to procure independence under an Arab majority was a “severe disappointment” for the Arab public, and by the close of the informal talks that followed, the Palestinians were left in “a state of complete bewilderment” at the turn of events.³⁶⁸ The question of whether to accept the White Paper divided the AHC and the elites again into much the same camps that had appeared at the Juniyeh meeting in January. Backed or pressured by the remaining rebel leaders,³⁶⁹ the mufti pushed the AHC into rejecting the new policy on the grounds that it failed to meet Arab demands: immigration was to continue for five years (at a rate above that since 1937), its land controls were not absolute, and the independence of Palestine, postponed for ten years, was conditioned on the agreement of Zionists. The row over the White Paper further fragmented the exiles and isolated the mufti’s camp within them. Several of those who knuckled under to al-Hajj

³⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 600-01.

³⁶⁸ Narrative dispatch #3, HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.7.39, p. 24-25, PRO – CO 935/22.

³⁶⁹ In April some of the remaining rebels issued a communiqué to the effect that the revolt was not fought to secure jobs for the *effendiyya* or obtain perks for either the Husaynis or the Nashashibis, but for independence. They would heel to neither faction nor foreign Arab statesmen, and rejected the White Paper. Al-Hajj Amin understood their statement as a warning against returning to a policy of cooperation with the British. See Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 291 and Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 116. It remains unclear whether the mufti was boxed into his refusal of the White Paper (as Khalidi argues, p. 116-17) or whether the rebels gave added cover for a more hardline stance (Porath, p. 291-92).

Amin's position semi-publicly dissented from the AHC's stance ('Awni Bey) or subsequently recanted their position (Jamal Effendi), while a number of figures (Antonius, al-'Alami, and Tannus) attempted to reconcile the AHC with the British. Signaling the weakness of the Palestinian position, the mufti himself proposed to make a declaration of peace with the British in return for the release of 2000 Arab prisoners.³⁷⁰

In the short term, the White Paper was less significant for its contents than for the fact that it stimulated a wave of attacks by Zionist forces on the Arab public. Rowdy demonstrations were held in Tel Aviv, Haifa and particularly at Jerusalem (where a police officer was killed by gunfire from a Jewish crowd), but the Arabs received the brunt of Zionist anger. Five Arabs were murdered and five more injured by a party of Jewish attackers at Biyar 'Adas in the Jaffa subdistrict before the end of May, where the Zionist flag was planted as a calling card. A string of similar incidents followed in June, among them a bombing killing five in Jerusalem (2 June), the execution of five more Arabs at Balad al-Shaykh (12 June), and another five slain from Shwayka (n.d.), before yet larger attacks. On 19 June the vegetable market at Haifa was again bombed despite the countermeasures and spatial segregation prevailing in the area, killing 20 people and injuring 22. On 29 June coordinated shooting attacks in six (predominantly Jewish) locations killed 11. Numerous other lethal incidents, typically killing one to three persons each, occurred in the weeks after the White Paper's appearance.³⁷¹

³⁷⁰ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 292-93; Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 75-78; Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 116-18.

³⁷¹ Narrative dispatch #3, HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.7.39, p. 27-30, PRO – CO 935/22; Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyat*, p. 601. The Shwayka assault is noted by Zu'aytir; all others by the High Commissioner.

Amidst the burgeoning offensive Palestinian opinion began to wonder whether, in the High Commissioner's words, "Jewish terrorist outrages" posed more danger to the Arabs and their political aspirations than did the White Paper.³⁷² Indeed, the Haganah formed commando units (called the "special squads") that, under the guise of retaliation, waged an offensive against the Arabs as well as government targets, between June and September 1939. These commando units were, as Bauer observes, "a portent of future developments."³⁷³ A wider and more extensive campaign was only averted by the onset of war in Europe and the accompanying return of the authorities in the JA to a cooperative posture with the government.³⁷⁴ For the Palestinians, as the revolt straggled on in 1939 towards its demise, the mini-revolt of *yishuv*, conducted with impunity and followed by the mainstream Zionist movement's renewed alliance with Britain (if under strained political circumstances), offered an unnerving glimpse of the future.

Conclusion

Although insurgents continued to mount sporadic attacks late into 1939, the rebellion was already in deep crisis by the close of 1938. Despite the ceaseless military pressure and the steady loss of commanders, ground, and cadres, the insurgency still managed to cling to life and even on occasion to put on impressive displays of resistance or pull off successful attacks. Only days before Britain entered World War II, for instance, Arabs in the Gaza region tore up some 47 miles of railroad track in the single

³⁷² Narrative dispatch #3, HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.7.39, p. 31, PRO – CO 935/22.

³⁷³ Bauer, "From Cooperation," p. 190-91. These squads appear to have been responsible for the Balad al-Shaykh attack.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 191; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 290.

largest instance of sabotage, impairing service between Palestine and Egypt for half a year.³⁷⁵ There was no question, however, that the fires of the revolt had been reduced to embers. Official statistics (counting all types of incidents, sabotage included) show that 1939 witnessed less than a fifth of the total volume of rebel activity in 1938.³⁷⁶ For the most part the rebellion straggled on in 1939 as an ever-paler version of the vibrant power it had previously achieved.

The revolt took a terrible toll on Palestinian society, most immediately in human and economic terms. The government did not keep accurate and full statistics on the casualties caused during any of its stages, and couldn't have because of the fighters' often vigorous efforts to claim and hide their dead, sometimes burying them in mass unmarked graves.³⁷⁷ 'Izzat Darwaza estimated that 3000 Arabs perished and 7000 were injured in the years of the revolt. Abu Gharbiyya puts the number slightly lower at 8000 fatalities and injuries. Working from official figures compiled in the 1940s, adjusted by a factor of 20 percent for casualties not recovered by the state, Walid Khalidi, arrives at a total of 3720 deaths in the field, plus another 112 executed by the military courts. Using the ratio of deaths to injuries reported at hospitals for 1936 (1:4), he estimates that

³⁷⁵ Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 205. Keith-Roach connects this episode to ostensible German money. One of the most costly insurgent attacks in terms of British and Jewish lives was mounted on 2 June 1939 near Qalqilya, when rebels killed seven of their opponents (Narrative dispatch #3, HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.7.39, p. 31, PRO – CO 935/22).

³⁷⁶ Cited in Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 125-26. The government's figures for 1938 show a higher number of incidents than recorded by Abu Gharbiyya (5708 to 4969), but the former includes attacks on Arabs as well (numbering 257 on persons, properties, and places) and, confusingly, 375 assassinations and attempts on "the public" after already providing separate tallies for "attacks and sniping" on official targets, Arabs and Jews (*Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 19).

³⁷⁷ Abu Gharbiyya relates frantically searching for his brother after the battle of Bani Na'im and finding a mass grave containing 14 corpses, though luckily for him, his brother was not in it (*Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 124-25).

the injuries may have totaled some 15-20,000.³⁷⁸ Additionally the government counted 503 more Arabs (including 49 state personnel) killed in 1938 by “terrorist and gang activities” and almost as many in 1939.³⁷⁹ These totals include the Irgun bombings and related attacks. By contrast, during 1938 the rebels killed at least 255 Jews and 77 Britons.³⁸⁰ Another 9000 Palestinians languished in overcrowded prisons and detention camps by the revolt’s end in 1939, thousands of whom were held administratively, without charge.³⁸¹ The rebels themselves, the civilians who fought as reserves, and the average Palestinians in the zones of counterinsurgent operations clearly paid most dearly for the revolt.

Coming in the midst of an ongoing and prolonged depression, the Arabs were economically devastated by the uprising. The colonial state made sure that this was so. Some 500 collective fines were levied on Arab villages and cities. The public also footed the bill for around 150 police outposts and billets, which represented a steady drain on the locales to which they were attached, and was made to pay for damages to railroad equipment, telephone lines, and other infrastructure.³⁸² The hundreds of

³⁷⁸ Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 204; Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 128; Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, appendix IV, p. 846-48. Both the official figures and Khalidi’s calculations using them are open to questioning. For instance, the British estimate for 1938 of 1000 battlefield deaths is equal to the 1936 total, which as pointed out in chapter 7, was an undercount since it was produced over a month before the strike phase had ended. The events of 1936 only lasted half the year while 1938 was consumed in its entirety, so the equivalence between them is extremely unlikely and the 1938 figure is probably higher by at least several hundred. The government itself believed that the actual death toll was “considerably higher” than the minimum of 1000 it reported (*Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 20). Khalidi also extrapolates a figure for 1939 (1200 deaths) identical to that for 1938, which seems amiss since the revolt fell off steeply in 1939.

³⁷⁹ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 20; Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, appendix IV, p. 847.

³⁸⁰ *Report to the League of Nations, 1938*, p. 20. The rebels consistently believed that official statistics were massaged to show casualty totals lower than their actual sums (e.g. Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 219-20).

³⁸¹ Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 417.

³⁸² Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, 203-04.

searches conducted between 1937 and 1939 often wrecked the household assets of village communities while affording the troops with opportunities for looting. Each such visit could cost individual villages thousands of pounds in losses. Curfews and disruptions to transportation after the imposition of the pass laws choked off economic activity, as noted, causing large scale if not catastrophic damages to businesses, from the humblest of vendors to the most enterprising of capitalists. All told, the Mandatory regime willfully extracted and destroyed hundreds of thousands of pounds of assets and likely caused business and other losses at least equal in value. The sum of direct and indirect financial costs caused by the colonial regime's war of attrition probably ran into the millions of pounds. Of course the public also gave of its assets to the insurgents, freely and under duress. By all available measures these sums were considerable when aggregated, but were dwarfed by the costs incurred on account of the colonial state.³⁸³

The economic life of the country was greatly disrupted by the conditions of the revolt, as we have seen in previous chapters. This continued to be reflected in endemic and serious Arab unemployment. Year-on-year exports from Jaffa fell over 95 percent from September 1937 to 1938, and by the end of the revolt an estimated 20,000 of its residents were unemployed.³⁸⁴ Certain sectors were especially hard hit. Construction, for one, was devastated, with 75 percent of artisans and builders at Ramle out of work in

³⁸³ Darwaza estimates that the combined total of both collective fines and exactions by and subventions to rebel formations at upwards of £P 2,000,000, but his math doesn't make much sense, since the figures he adduces for fines (mostly between £P 50-200 per instance) would mean that the majority of this sum was collected by the rebels. Based on the figures shown in chapter 9, the idea that rebel taxes and ancillary support (food, clothing, etc.) claimed over £P 1,000,000, or anywhere near that sum, seems unfounded.

³⁸⁴ DC-Southern to Chief Secretary, 5.10.38, report for September, p. 3, PRO – CO 733/372/18; Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 207-08.

late 1938 and an even greater proportion than this in its sister city Lydda.³⁸⁵ By the eve of World War II, DC Keith-Roach relates that he was constantly beseeched for relief work (road construction), tax abatements, and agricultural loans.³⁸⁶ Large segments of the upper classes bolted from the country, and as had been the case since 1937, Arab capital investment appears to have come to a standstill. Land values remained depressed, off 33-50 percent from pre-revolt valuations, and widespread poverty created ripe opportunities for Jewish purchases. In 1939 the JNF added 53,500 dunams to its holdings, the most in a decade and far above the official registered purchases by Jews for the year.³⁸⁷ This rate of acquisition suggests that the revolt, or its later phase, occasioned a return to volumes of land transfer that approximated the go-go years of 1934-35.³⁸⁸

At the outset of the uprising's renewal, the downturn that had affected the *yishuv* since 1936 deepened. Jewish unemployment climbed and the recession contributed to rural business and farm failures. Tel Aviv's population declined for the first time.³⁸⁹ Settlement construction froze again for almost half a year between late 1937 and early 1938, but then with the erection of Hanita in March 1938, a frontier outpost par excellence, the expansion of new colonies doggedly continued, hitting a peak by the time of the White Paper's issue, with 12 settlements started in May 1939 alone.³⁹⁰ The negative economic repercussions experienced by the *yishuv* on account of the revolt

³⁸⁵ DC-Southern to Chief Secretary, 4.1.39, report for December, p. 10, PRO – CO 733/372/18.

³⁸⁶ Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 207.

³⁸⁷ Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory*, p. 119, 121; Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, appendix I, p. 843. Total registered purchases by all Jewish buyers came to 27,973 dunams. For more on off-the-books buying and purchasing activities during the revolt, see Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 202-11.

³⁸⁸ Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, appendix I, p. 842-43.

³⁸⁹ Hurewitz, *The Struggle*, p. 84; Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory*, p. 120.

³⁹⁰ Bein, *Return to the Soil*, p. 488-89.

were soon palliated by the state. The expansion of Jewish supernumerary police and other contracting work provided by the military (not least on Tegart's wall) helped to defray the dislocation, and by late 1938 Jewish unemployment was "liquidated."³⁹¹

The tightening relationship between the Zionist intelligence sector and the military appears to have critically aided the suppression campaign. With the advent of the carceral search regime the security forces found a means by which to puncture the protective shield under which the rebellion had grown. The wholesale scope of the operations, turning out entire villages and combing through each home and building, led to documents captures while informants and leads provided by Zionist intelligence and Fakhri al-Nashashibi and the counter-band network each played vital roles in chipping away at the rebels' defensive and evasive capabilities. The vetting of incarcerated subjects, in which Zionist intelligence operatives like Ezra Danin for certain and possibly Fakhri Effendi (and his allies) had a hand, turned out more informants, widening the colonial state's previously emaciated intelligence capacities. The result was an onslaught of a new sort that was advanced with escalating vigor in Arab villages, cities, and urban quarters across the country in the latter half of 1938.

This feature of the counterinsurgency has gone almost totally unrecognized and has not been well appreciated.³⁹² In light of the carceral regime, the judgment of Matthew Hughes that Palestine, while suffering commonplace brutalities at the hands of the security forces, did not witness the creation of a "police state" or a "gulag" must be

³⁹¹ Narrative dispatch #11, HC to Colonial Secretary, 3.12.38, p. 77, PRO – CO 935/21; Hurewitz, *The Struggle*, p. 84. Quote from the former.

³⁹² It is noted in several works, but they generally do not indicate its scale and none highlight its centrality: Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, p. 194; Norris, "Repression or Rebellion," p. 35; Laleh Khalili, "The Location," p. 422-23.

revised.³⁹³ If, as Palestinian sources have long attested, some 50,000 Arabs were detained during the revolt – a number equal to the rural breadwinning population in 1931 – picked up indiscriminately, *en masse*, and kept in outdoor cages like animals, then Palestine might more accurately be seen as a site for the development of the gentler way in concentration camps. What the Palestinians endured was not the same as the camps in Europe during World War II, but their wholesale targeting and the conditions under which they were kept, even if in brief stints, does very much make the comparison to gulag regimes a live one. Indeed, from the time that they became a general counterinsurgency mode, carceral searches did make Palestine into one such regime, if in some respects more liberal than others.

The military machine unleashed on Palestine required an enormous outlay of resources for which no expense was spared.³⁹⁴ The determination to crush the revolt by force was such that Chamberlain's cabinet was willing to risk the home government's ability to quickly put two more divisions of troops into the European theater, which was seen as integral to continental defense and war preparedness, in order to expedite the reinforcements to Palestine.³⁹⁵ The Chamberlain government's infamous policy of appeasement with Nazi Germany has sometimes been held to foreshadow another "appeasement": that of the Arabs in Palestine and the Middle East at the expense of Zionism and the Jewish community resident in Palestine. The immediate effect of the

³⁹³ Hughes, "The Banality of Brutality," p. 350, 354.

³⁹⁴ The surplus of some £P 7,000,000 (or £P 5,000,000 if planned expenses were deducted), was up in smoke already by March 1938. Atop this, an additional £P 1,500,000 in expenditure was absorbed by the British public before the second division of troops was deployed. See Amended note of meeting at the Treasury, 5.9.38, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

³⁹⁵ Colonial Secretary to Prime Minister, 7.9.38, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

Munich agreement was quite the opposite. The doubling of troops that it secured in Palestine allowed the colonial state to put the carceral search regime into overdrive and thus to turn the tables on the insurgents. European appeasement, far from correlating to a British break with Zionism, permitted the imperial government to smash the most serious challenge to the Zionist project in its history and to bring the Palestinian uprising to a conclusion.

While the carceral regime and the reinforcements pushed the rebels firmly onto the defensive, in combination with the pass laws it stimulated a second significant, and perhaps pivotal, development. The counter-state that the rebels had established became increasingly inoperable and dysfunctional. As military pressure increased, rebel institutions and their functioning became more erratic and problematic, dynamics which eventually contributed to growing popular unease with or alienation from the insurgency. The pass laws crippled the counter-state, and the dropping of the ban on identity papers and transit passes was met with popular relief. Although the military authorities made sure that was short-lived and further tightened the screws on the Arab public, the counter-state was marginalized in the episode and was seen as compromising the public's interests by placing it in an impossible position. The shrinking room for rebel maneuver stimulated further trouble with the courts system and the tax regime. Some local captains diverted themselves from military activity to acting as petty judiciary officers or busied themselves with financial extraction, causing competing jurisdictions and making chaos of the rebel courts' prior order. The devolution of the tax system by the end of 1938 further diminished the standing of the counter-state as a

whole. Given that the institutions of the counter-state were instrumental to the rebellion's ascent and brought it popular regard and support, the disaffection caused by the transit boycott and the growing disorder within rebel administrative institutions boded ill for the revolutionaries.

Of course the rebels themselves can hardly be said to be the sole cause of these developments. The colonial state, fueled by ever-wider applications of the doctrine of collective guilt and by the evaluation that the ends justified the means, was willing to brook the "ruin and starvation" of the Arab public in its bid to stamp out the rebellion. It effectively promoted lawlessness in rebel-friendly regions, to the detriment of both the population and the revolt, in order to demonstrate that only it could guarantee order. The epidemic of thieving that was unleashed had, in turn, as its root the long economic collapse that the Arab rural sphere had experienced throughout the decade. Even more than the civil authorities, the military officers that took charge in late 1938 made no bones about exploiting public vulnerabilities or using blanket sanctions that risked the livelihood and survival of entire communities. At length these harsh tactics bore fruit, and as the rebels failed to curb the state's powers of collective punishment and as insurgent institutions fractured, the public increasingly yielded under the threats and repression it suffered and grew more distant from the rebels.

The rift between parts of the public and the insurgency also followed from the profusion of political assassinations late in 1938, which tarnished the image of the revolt, reinserted factionalism into its midst, and spiraled out to strike some whom many felt were nationalist stalwarts, such as Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani and Anwar al-Shuqayri

(brother of Ahmad).³⁹⁶ To the extent that the mufti and the CCJ directed this sordid business through their most loyal commanders, like ‘Arif ‘Abd al-Raziq, which appears to be quite considerable, they too bear responsibility for the dilution of public support for the revolt, which it is worth underscoring, came as it entered its most acute hour.

Despite its unwinding beginning in late 1938, the second phase of the rebellion, like the strike, did lead to tangible results. The most obvious was the cancellation of partition. A host of scholars have tried to argue, after close readings of the diplomatic record, that partition wasn’t withdrawn because of the revolt, but on account of regional calculations given the prospect of war in Europe.³⁹⁷ Such contentions put the cart before the horse and mistake first and second order causes. Simply put, without the second phase of the revolt in Palestine there would have been no need for a redrawing of regional policy. In the eyes of British officials it was the revolt which threatened the empire’s position in the Middle East, and it was the revolt’s underlying causes which they sought to dissolve or ameliorate when the 1939 White Paper was drawn up.

Stormy as it was, the Palestinian debate over the White Paper in 1939 and in later years was in many respects moot. The wartime conditions beginning just months after its issue and the ascent of Winston Churchill, an arch-Zionist, to the premiership shortly thereafter rendered much of the White Paper a dead letter.³⁹⁸ Of the measures favorable

³⁹⁶ Al-Hajj Ibrahim, *al-Difa‘ ‘an Haifa*, p. 167-68.

³⁹⁷ Sheffer, “Appeasement,” p. 393; Haim, *Abandonment*, p. 132.

³⁹⁸ Segev relates that at a party hosted by the Liberal Party’s head, Archibald Sinclair, and attended by Weizmann, Churchill became sodden and promised to support Zionism even if Zionists did foolish things. At the same party he is said to have declared to future Prime Minister Clement Attlee that Weizmann was their teacher and that they must heed his advice (*One Palestine, Complete*, p. 397). More seriously, Churchill hated Malcolm MacDonald and the policy of appeasement, which he considered the 1939 White Paper to represent (Cohen, *Palestine to Israel*, p. 49). He famously opposed the White Paper, denouncing

to Palestinian interests only the land transfer controls ultimately had some significance, though like their predecessors, means were devised to circumvent them.³⁹⁹ The immigration strictures, hated by the Zionists and a major motive for the switch from British to American patronage, were nearly irrelevant during the war, given the difficulties in international transit that it occasioned in the Mediterranean. Only once in the five succeeding years was the annual quota of 15,000 immigrants met and between 1940 and 1942 rates hovered between 2-4500.⁴⁰⁰ The idea that in spurning the White Paper the Palestinians “ultimately rejected the last chance offered by the British to save Palestine” is wildly illogical and exaggerates the statement’s portents.⁴⁰¹ As ‘Izzat Darwaza, who counted the White Paper as a great but limited achievement, points out more accurately, the White Paper always aimed foremost, like the roundtable talks, at shoring up the British regional position. To do so, it strove to provide the public appearance of placating Palestinian demands rather than actually meeting them and recognizing the fervent claim of the Palestinians to their homeland, for which the revolt had been waged.⁴⁰²

it in the House of Commons during the debate over its promulgation and pronouncing its controls on immigration and settlement “a breach and repudiation of the Balfour Declaration.” This rebuke was later incorporated into the Biltmore program of 1942, when Zionist leaders openly declared their intentions of converting all of Palestine into a Jewish state (*The Israel-Arab Reader*, p. 78-79, clause six). Ben-Gurion became convinced by 1940 that a renewal of good relations (i.e. on terms favorable to Zionist interests) would come to pass under Churchill’s government, and indeed a significant thaw followed (Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat*, p. 129; Hurewitz, *The Struggle*, p. 142). Churchill, early in his tenure, repeatedly asserted to Weizmann that after the war the White Paper would be tossed over and “a solution favorable to the Zionists” would be implemented (Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat*, p. 129; quoting Cohen).

³⁹⁹ Stein, *The Land Question*, p. 221.

⁴⁰⁰ Walid Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, appendix I, p. 843; idem, “On Albert Hourani, the Arab Office, and the AAC,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* v. 35, n. 1 (autumn 2005), p. 62-63. See also Bauer, “From Cooperation,” p. 189-90.

⁴⁰¹ Pappé, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 301.

⁴⁰² Darwaza, *Hawla al-haraka*, p. 246. Like the roundtable talks, Darwaza saw the White Paper as a ruse and believed that the British never intended to implement it (ibid., p. 252, 256).

Conclusion

During the spring of 1938 the wild flowers of Galilee were most beautiful, and it was difficult to realize when driving between those fields of colour how near were bloodshed and death. There were asphodel; narcissi; red, white and mauve anemones; ranunculi; white and yellow daisies; cyclamen; anchusa; tulips; irises; campion; wild garlic; borage; yellow and white broom; fields of royal blue lupins with a pungent scent and numerous other small blooms. The flowers came and went in combinations and the last of these, before the hot weather, was one of the yellow daisies and blue borage, with the golden balls of the wattle trees edging the plantations.

(Kirkbride, *A Crackle of Thorns*, p. 103)

The natural beauty and ecological diversity of Palestine and have long enchanted visitors and local populations alike. From rolling hills bathed in orchards and forest in the Galilee to the fertile steppes and valleys, dotted with bogs and marshlands in the coastal plain, to the rugged scrublands speckled with cragged olive trees and rock-terraced folds in the interior highlands, to the austere expanses of the desert and semi-desert comprising Gaza, the Negev and the southern reaches, the splendor of its geography and varied ecosystems is manifest and captivating. For DC-Galilee Kirkbride and the other chief administrators during the Great Revolt the blushes of flowers that made such an impression hold a deeper symbolic resonance. The passages in their memoirs revering the land's natural wonders have a talismanic quality: they insist on preserving the memory of and calling forth verdant images of life in Palestine even as the authors became embroiled in a brutish and deadly campaign of unprecedented repression towards the land's indigenous Arab inhabitants.

Two District Commissioners from the time wrote memoirs – Kirkbride and Keith-Roach – and in each the evocations of springtime and blooming wildlife stand pointedly alongside scenes of death and destruction at British hands, particularly capital sentences under the military courts. For both men the business of repression and their direct hand in it provoked unease or ambivalence. Kirkbride devotes a short chapter to three executions that he officiated on the same day at Acre prison. The pages are suffused with discomfited resignation at the grisly task (which he had formerly assigned to his subordinates) and, after the events are recounted, he wears his bad conscience like a character in a Dostoyevsky novel: “As we went into the large communal cell which housed both convicts and those awaiting trial, silence fell amongst the inmates and their eyes all turned in my direction. They knew why I was there, and the feeling that I was doing something shameful, which had bothered me the whole morning, grew more intense.”¹ With more detachment Keith-Roach also laments the role of executioner:

One week, at hourly intervals, there were three executions one day, two the next and three on the third, and I wished that some of those more directly concerned with giving the sentences or approving them were in my shoes. The irony of the whole process was that not a single execution made the slightest difference to public security, to Arab opinion, to Arab fears, to Arab respect for law, or to Arab action. As I left the prison one day I reflected that, although I had seen scores of people die, I had never yet seen a man die a natural death.²

Each grimly accepted the ugliness of colonial justice and the verdict that British rule and British honor demanded that Palestinian blood be shed and the Palestinians be treated as outlaws in their own land until they yielded.

¹ Kirkbride, *A Crackle of Thorns*, p. 109-12; quote from 112.

² *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 198.

The suppression campaign wound down from its full throttle by the close of 1939, but the administration continued to pursue rebel activists near and far. Between November 1939 and mid-1940 almost 40 former fighters and insurgent organizers were handed death sentences by the Palestine administration.³ Others were passed in absentia.⁴ Arrests continued with some vigor into 1941, by which time considerable successes were scored in select areas over the remnants of the rebel movement. In Hebron, for example, all but 16 of 240 wanted men were captured.⁵ This was facilitated in part by the continued penetration of rebel ranks by British intelligence (in cooperation with its late revolt partners) and the recruitment of informers.⁶ Illustrating the turnabout of the revolt, some of the rebels' relatives and a group of *mukhtars* and village elders licensed, under unclear circumstances, the vigilante killing of wanted men and exempted them from the eye-for-an-eye norms of familial blood revenge.⁷ Although the peace bands were partially disarmed by the government in the aftermath, they too continued their hunt for ex-rebels as late as a year into World War II, although usually without official sanction.⁸

The harsh fate of the fighters was not entirely shared by the political class, which the British rather quickly made some moves to resuscitate as cooperative partners. The

³ Mattar, *The Mufti*, p. 91-92. Perhaps reflecting the perception of the insurgents, Subhi Yasin claims that 170 people were put to death in less than half a year after the revolt's demise (*al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 229).

⁴ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 229.

⁵ Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 212.

⁶ E.g. a member of the Abu Tbaykh family turned confidential informant, recounted by Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 176.

⁷ Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 212. This may be regarding Hebron, although it is ambiguous in the text. Keith-Roach claims that the government made serious efforts to avert an endless spiral of inter-*hamula* killings, arbitrating numerous peace settlements (*ibid.*, p. 209).

⁸ Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, p. 260; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 181 and ft. 39, p. 299.

Opposition was the only faction to accept the White Paper but its members' standing was so low with the public that even its luminaries like Sulyman Tuqan and 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Bitar kept their distance from it.⁹ The nationalist stalwarts of the AHC provided a more reputable group to coopt, and after offering many of its members a pardon in return for a pledge to stay out of politics, five men ('Awni 'Abd al-Hadi, Husayn F. al-Khalidi, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha, Fuad Saba, and Alfred Rok) along with their colleague Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim returned to Palestine.¹⁰ In this way the British strove to undermine the mufti's presence within Palestinian politics and to resurrect a credible but muzzled "moderate" camp. It also used the White Paper for the same purposes, allowing an informal negotiation through Colonel Newcombe to entice Jamal al-Husayni into approving it in 1940 (thereby retracting his consent in the AHC's rejection), much to the mufti's fury, though Jamal still remained a wanted man and was not allowed to return to Palestine.¹¹

From the rebel side, the tide of political assassinations that marked their loss of control in the country in late 1938 cascaded into 1939 and dribbled on thereafter.¹² Whether living in exile or on the lamb in Palestine ex-partisans still sought to kill their sworn enemies in the peace bands and the Opposition. One of their greatest successes in this respect was the assassination of Fakhri al-Nashashibi in late 1941 in Baghdad. The killing was carried out by a young member of the Nussaybe family on orders from 'Abd

⁹ Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 79-80; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 180. As Cohen relates, the party was also wracked by infighting, with Tuqan, for instance, regarding Fakhri al-Nashashibi and his bohemian or hedonistic ways an embarrassment (ibid., p. 182).

¹⁰ Hurewitz, *The Struggle*, p. 115-16.

¹¹ Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 77-78.

¹² See the conclusion of chapter 10 for figures.

al-Qadir al-Husayni, who had joined the mufti's entourage in Iraq.¹³ Fakhri 'Abd al-Hadi, the rebel turncoat and probably the other most sought-after foe of the revolutionaries, was slain by his nephew in 1943, allegedly as recompense for his "deviance" from the revolt.¹⁴ Other figures in the peace bands network, such as Farid Irshayd, lived at the point of a knife for several years, surviving assassination attempts and always expecting more.¹⁵ Informers were also targeted into the early 1940s, as were those who flouted the nationalist norms of the revolt era, although these quickly fell by the wayside.¹⁶

The growth of political murder and unprecedented internecine violence, which had contributed to souring the Arab public on the rebellion, was emblematic of the shambles that remained after the storms of insurrection passed. Although the national movement had arguably just achieved its most stupendous victory ever with the White Paper, it was itself at death's door. Rashid Khalidi has estimated that perhaps 10 percent of Palestine's adult male population was killed, injured, imprisoned, or exiled by the close of the revolt.¹⁷ With thousands dead and imprisoned, a sizeable number of activists and organizers in exile, and the administration's resolve to root out those in hiding inside Palestine and to extradite those abroad the national movement and its independence struggle entered a deep freeze. The government strove to perpetuate the quiet by maintaining the extraordinary legal regime created by the Defence Regulations

¹³ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 202-03.

¹⁴ Yasin, *al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 122. Danin claims that the killing was not political, but related to Fakhri's extortion of his own brother (*Te'udot*, ft. 56, p. 24).

¹⁵ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 180-81, 204.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 204-05. See p. 171-201 on the resumption of relations between Arab elements and Jews.

¹⁷ Khalidi, "The Palestinians and 1948," p. 27. Khalidi undercounts those in exile, if this number remained as high as the number of bench warrants in 1937 (see chapter 9).

into the wartime era and by enacting further prohibitions on political activity. What impulses to struggle remained were again driven underground¹⁸ or channeled into acceptably liberal forms of contestation, such as in the sphere of consumption and business.¹⁹

The wartime conversion of Palestine into a Mediterranean theater for Britain also dramatically reshaped the context of Arab politics. In a very short time the economic privations that Palestinians had suffered since at least the 1930s were ameliorated. Chronic unemployment and the hovering threat of famine and hunger were wiped away as the British hired tens of thousands of Palestinians (and Jews) to work on its military installations. The war pumped massive amounts of cash into the anemic economy, stimulating huge leaps in demand for Arab manufactured and agricultural goods and spurring a kind of Arab economic renaissance.²⁰ Year-on-year wage levels leapt up by as much as 350 percent in 1940 alone (and easily outpaced surging inflation), long before effective demand and the added injection of British war monies hit their full stride.²¹ In the countryside, although further study is necessary to vouch for the administration's claims given its record of deceit and wishful thinking in the past, the *Survey of Palestine* shows that peasant debt in four of eight subdistricts examined had

¹⁸ Thus Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim relates that upon his return to Palestine and his election to head the Arab Chambers of Commerce, a secret resolution was passed to maintain the boycotts on economic relations with Jews and Jewish goods (W. Khalidi, Introduction to Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, *al-Difa' 'an Haifa*, p. lxxi). The campaign's surreptitious quality marks a world of difference compared with the boisterous 1929 boycott a decade previous.

¹⁹ Sherene Seikaly's pioneering work revisiting the history of the Palestinians and the Mandate after the revolt excavates these developments. See "Meatless Days."

²⁰ Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 266-68; Seikaly, "Meatless Days."

²¹ Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 208, 217. Rates of British expenditure are noted in Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 267, which disputes Keith-Roach's claim about wages and holds that they dropped in real terms in the early period of the war (p. 268).

fallen sharply by 60-90 percent by the war's end.²² Nevertheless, the march of proletarianization turned into a gallop, with approximately 100,000 Arabs engaged in non-agrarian wage labor by 1944, providing tremendous impetus for the development of working class culture and politics.²³

With the growth of the labor movement and its proletarian base, the stage would appear to have been set for some kind of continuation of the power and influence garnered by the popularly-based, horizontalist currents of the 1930s. According to al-Hut's work surveying the political leadership during the Mandate this was not the case. Youth and labor continued to play roles in the early World War II period, but the "higher leadership" reconstituted after the war excluded them, not to mention peasants, from significant authority.²⁴ Although her specific conclusions are open to some debate, perhaps foremost regarding the scope and definition of political leadership, the general break she underscores is indisputable. Subhi Yasin, for instance, relates that youth did not become an arena of mobilization again until 1943, and even then only in the most fitful manner and under the dominance (and ineptitude) of the feuding Jerusalemite factions.²⁵ Demobilization and exhaustion was evident elsewhere in the popular ranks, save for the realm of organized labor, where the struggle took on new directions. This was exemplified in part by the National Labor League, a communist-inspired offshoot that revived the idea of Arab-Jewish working class cooperation and solidarity and strove

²² Khalaf, "The Effect of Socioeconomic Change," p. 101.

²³ Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 267. For a window into the workers' movement during the war see *ibid.*, 266-321.

²⁴ Al-Hout, "The Palestinian Political Elite," p. 89. In *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat* she does not consider the World War II era to have had a consolidated political leadership (p. x).

²⁵ *Al-thawra al-'Arabiyya*, p. 230-32.

for a peaceable, democratic settlement of the conflict over Palestine.²⁶ In the early 1940s the balance of forces that had swung in favor of popular anti-colonial mobilization had dissipated and the contours of the national struggle had shifted to new terrain.

The 1930s era – beginning in 1929 if not slightly earlier – was a unique moment in Palestinian history under the Mandate. It was one of the rare periods of upheaval in the life of a society in which popular social forces rose to preeminence and non-elites were able, if very briefly, to redefine their own destiny. As horizontal forces expanded and reshaped the political field, they pushed the national struggle in new and more radical directions. This complex development was the product of a confluence of factors. The constituency that perhaps more than any other brought on the shift towards horizontal politics was youth.

Generational difference, as Mannheim pointed out long ago, is “one of the indispensable guides to an understanding of the structure of social and intellectual movements.”²⁷ This is illustrated in the case of Mandate Palestine. Long accustomed to service in the name of political elites, youth in the late 1920s began to organize in novel, independent forums: student groups, scouting units, and the YMMA. These groups and the youth trend they forged were initially based in the educated classes, among which discontent was brewing both with the alienating Anglophone Christian culture of the Mandate and with the lassitude, paralysis and partisanship of elite politics. Youth found themselves taking up issues that had fallen below the radar of the AE, the national

²⁶ See Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 266-321.

²⁷ Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” p. 286-87.

movement's leading organ, seeking to address the plight of Arab workers amid Hebrew labor campaigning and to parry the growth of Zionist scouts. Such issues marked out a new focus for nationalist activism, away from the overarching diplomatic quandary of the Palestinians and grounded in the everyday experiences and perceptions of oppression, encroachment, and marginalization at the hands of Zionism and the British. The everyday formed a new grammar for political action as the new clubs and associations in which youth increasingly gathered comprised bases for autonomous action.

The events of 1929 catapulted youth to new prominence and accelerated the redrawing of the political map. Worker, peasant, and youth mobilization pushed the elites onto the defensive and the abrogation of the 1930 White Paper effectively discredited petition politics and notions of cooperation. Young men like Bahjat Abu Gharbiyya observed that the "aristocracy" wanted to continue to pursue this course but that they were checked by popular elements within the movement.²⁸ Youth in the 1929 boycott used pressure and force to advance the cause of economic autarky and delinking the Palestinians from Jewish settlers and foreign (non-Arab) commerce. The model of exerting pressure on those who refused to conform to the nationalist dicta came to inform the practices of indirect leadership that evolved over the first half of the 1930s. At the same time the assessment that the Palestinians needed to delink from the colonial state also began to spread within the youth trend. This did not go over easily with elite youth, much less with the older generation, but as youth tactical experimentation grew,

²⁸ *Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 31.

the place of the colonial regime in blocking immigration controls, underwriting the erosion of the rural order, and securing contentious land transfers became all the more indisputable.

The identification of the British as the primary obstacle to the national movement suggests a different approach to the question of “stateness” than that posed by R. Khalidi, who has located the Palestinians’ weakness in part in their lack of “any access to the levers of state power.”²⁹ From one angle this is no doubt true, yet Palestine was quite unlike the other Mandatory regimes in this respect. The terms of greater incorporation into the state were evident early on and required acquiescence to the Balfour declaration and the Jewish National Home policy. Accepting this baseline would have effectively invalidated the Palestinian national movement’s central claims to historic sovereign rights throughout the territory, and it is difficult to immediately see what greater access to the state could have actually accomplished for the Palestinians given that the Zionist policy was non-negotiable. The actual course of the national movement in the 1930s inverts Khalidi’s proposition: as youth and other horizontal social forces disidentified with the state apparatus, they tended to grow more active, restive, and organized. The movement’s gradual divorce from “stateness” initially made it stronger, helping to provide the conditions for the growth of a revolutionary movement which itself shook up the Jewish National Home policy far more than any role in the bureaucracy or diplomatic tack ever did.³⁰ It was moments like the 1933

²⁹ Khalidi, “The Palestinians and 1948,” p. 18. The argument is set forth most forcefully and eloquently in his work, *The Iron Cage*, p. 31-64.

³⁰ The 1922 House of Lords vote is the only exception to this rule in the first 20 years of the Mandate.

demonstrations, when popular forces advanced a confrontational program (and pulled the elite along), which forced the British to reevaluate their open-ended commitment to Zionism and to consider the resultant effects on the Palestinians.

The youth associations that spread throughout Palestine in the early 1930s became bases for the production of new subjectivities rooted in concepts of indigeneity and national belonging and imperatives to mutual aid, cultural preservation, and the protection of Palestine as a landed patrimony. The interpellation of a new nationalist youth was arguably best exemplified by the proliferation of independent scout troops, though the themes and ideals of the new youth culture permeated other types of associations as well. In some measure the rising militancy and the turn against the British that were characteristic of the age owed to the Istiqlal Party, and the same can be said of the Youth Congress. Each in its own fashion promoted the youth ideal and significantly advanced youth mobilization. Instrumental as they were, neither ultimately can be regarded as solely responsible for the dramatic expansion of the youth trend. Instead modular forms of organization, models of social activism, and norms of personal conduct became emblems of youth engagement and facilitated the trend's reach into Arab communities throughout Palestine. With the trend's deepening, it increasingly came to reflect the diversity of Arab society in class, confessional, and geographic terms, and otherwise.

As youth became the most organized constituency within Arab Palestine, they found themselves with new clout. Their repertoires of contention and their preference for action over back-room dealing earned respect from much of the public and gave

them leverage over political elites, who competed to bring youth associations under their wings but were unable to subordinate them. The strength of the youth trend has been somewhat obscured by its penchants for autonomism, local action, and what I have referred to as indirect leadership. Yet although instances of overt youth control of the movement and its course of action were comparatively few, the preponderance and relative autonomy of the trend lent it great weight. Its members' preference for direct action and its attention to sub-national and local issues resonated with the concerns of the public and provided avenues for widening involvement and resistance to the dual colonial order. The quietism and gentlemanly mold of elite politics, already in disrepute, was outmoded by youth tactics. This was the case even as youth endeavors failed to secure desired results (such as halting individual land transfers to Jews) and even without youth mounting direct challenges to putative leaders or organs like the AE.

The impulse animating the expansion of the youth field – to supercede the failed tactics and strategy of the 1920s – led to a winding road from street protests to novel forms of local campaigning. The kernel within many of their endeavors, whether oriented at national or local problems, was to push back against the colonial regime and colonial law and to make space for initiatives that subverted them while restoring decision-making powers to local Arab communities or palliating the unwanted effects of the colonial order. This drive towards embodied autonomy was later inscribed into the political infrastructure of the Great Revolt, first in the national committees and subsequently in the rebel judicial system and the wider counter-state structure. The interest in curbing and limiting the colonial state, whether working around it or overtly

challenging its priorities, laws, judicial rulings, or sovereign powers dovetailed with the national movement's episodic path towards greater confrontation and formed crucial ballast for the project of popular state formation upon which it embarked.

Paradoxically youth efforts to reconfigure state-society relations and to assert the primacy of Arab will and Arab rights foremost did not need to succeed to produce powerful results. The youth trend progressed regardless of the insufficiency of the tactics it strove to develop. Its momentum derived not only from increasing organization, but in conjunction with key contextual factors: namely the deteriorating conditions of Central Europe and the *yishuv*'s consequent immigration and developmental boom, and the mix of despondency, vexation and determination prompted by the MacDonald letter of 1931. Its aversion to factionalism and the increased respect accorded to youth within nationalist discourse aided this process and enterprising and zealous youth were attracted to the new youth culture, which promised to revive the national movement by cultivating an independent alternative to its malaise.

The youth trend and the horizontal politics of the 1930s were also powered by the crumbling social order of the countryside. The coalition that was forged between youth – an increasing number of whom were from the countryside as time went on – and the lower rungs of the peasantry and the peasantariat was in some respects an uneasy one. To the extent that youth land campaigns were based in nationalist moralizing against sales they occluded the fact that the restructuring of the social order by peripheral capitalism and usury since the nineteenth century had a great deal to do with the growth of dispossession. Youth and elites alike were remiss in neglecting the pre-

colonial socio-economic underpinnings of the crisis that mounted from the late 1920s, which in moments competed with the British and Zionism as the object of *fellah* animus. While not true everywhere, in general terms by the 1930s peasant alienation from elites grew as the social fabric of the old order in the countryside unwound.

Baruch Kimmerling and Gershon Shafir have noted that unlike other settler movements Zionism initially had to acquire territory through purchase rather than by conquest or imperial charter or concession.³¹ This is rightly understood to have slowed the growth of Zionist settlement for many decades. Yet at the same time it should be observed that the genesis of capitalism, the commodification of land, and imperial reform in late Ottoman Palestine weakened local Arab society's cohesion in such a way that made it peculiarly vulnerable to colonization by purchase. From the time of the Egyptian occupation Palestine entered an era of profound and growing social change. Notions of reciprocity binding merchants and peasants together were increasingly displaced by transformations that strengthened the power of money capital over social capital. Increasing exposure to the world market and the advance of bureaucratic reform, including the privatization of land, created a lopsided and polarized social order split broadly between subordinated, increasingly indebted rural producers and an urbanized elite deriving its power from an interlocking grip on commercial and credit markets, bureaucratic office and the amassing of landed estates.³² Absentee owners, many from outside what became Palestine, made up the bulk of early sales to the Zionist movement, and the ensuing tensions cast a permanent pall of suspicion over the elites,

³¹ Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory*; Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins*, p. 24.

³² This is not to occlude the growing middle classes, as suggested in chapter 4.

further complicating the emergence and maintenance of a broad cross-class anti-colonial front.

Unbeknownst to the British, beneath the ravages of World War I the society it conquered in Palestine in 1917-18 bore little resemblance to Orientalist caricatures of a timeless, dusty land besotted with stagnant, obscurantist, and illogical traditions and social structures. The witless exacerbation of social stratification and intensification of pressure on the peasantry under the Mandate – not least through a more rigid, regular and regressive tax system, but really the effective results of myriad policies, as surveyed in chapter 5 – compounded the woes of rural producers, sending greater numbers into the ranks of the landless.

The peasantry was not idle as its conditions of reproduction were imperiled, its standards of living declined and the village way of life, so prized for its autonomy and correspondence with rural values and traditions, steadily eroded. Neither did its members restrict themselves to taking orders from class superiors. As the rural order came unglued, peasants and semi-peasants became restive and active, often in highly autonomous manners. They analyzed and responded to the political dilemmas posed by the Mandate's commitment to the Jewish National Home and the inefficacy and weakness of the elite leadership of the national movement. Changes in land law and land tenure that disadvantaged embattled middle and lower peasants were probably especially likely to be understood as prompted by British fealty to Zionism. Peasants flouted these measures, breaking or bending the law and resisting Zionist encroachment, whether by (absentee) sale or state-awarded concession. As the instance of *musha*‘

illustrates, they were sometimes able to gum-up the administration's plans for what it construed as economic modernization, which like the broader Zionist policy of the Mandate, did not serve their aims. At points where peasants were not able to override the state's agenda, they sometimes availed themselves of agrarian crime – consisting generally of sabotage – to continue their struggle against dispossession by other means. Recourse to violence against settlers, colonies, and the state was the last line of rural defense. The events of 1929, the Green Hand Gang, and al-Qassam's network all represented moments in which peasant frustrations and longing for justice reached the same conclusion that youth and radical elites came to about the ineluctability of force as a resolution to the overarching conundrums shaping and constricting their lives. In none of these instances were peasants or semi-peasants under elite orders; rather, like youth, they took matters into their own hands.

The growth of dispossession transformed the peasantry and with it, the primary base of what would become the revolutionary movement in 1936-39. For those thrown off the land, new types of marginality and deprivation awaited. In the slums that grew around Jaffa and Haifa in particular they became casual wage laborers, petty vendors, and itinerant hired hands living in shacks. The government barely took notice as a new underclass took shape. Scorned by the wealthy city dwellers and targeted by the cause of Hebrew labor as a dangerous source of (wage-depressing) competition, some migrated between the countryside and the city in search of labor while others joined the budding unions and labor associations. Most fought just to subsist, enduring squalor, destitution, and anomie while perhaps nursing romantic dreams of returning to the old

ways of the countryside or revolutionary fantasies of ejecting the hated colonial forces and trampling upon the elites that had left them blowing in the wind. When the call to rebellion came, it is little wonder that al-Qassam's peasant cadres formed a permanent backbone within the rebel formations, which themselves swelled with the poor and the dispossessed.

The Great Revolt brought youth, the peasantry, and their allies into a symbiotic and generative alignment, especially in its first phase. Not without cause the general strike holds a place in national memory as a time of transcendental unity. Less observed is the fact that this unity owed greatly to the energies and diligence of the popular social forces and to discipline supplied first by youth and subsequently by the *Qassamiyun*, the Black Hand, and rural insurgents. The years of ferment and increasing mobilization prior to the general strike paid a dividend to the horizontal forces, whose ardor and organization drove the uprising and placed tremendous pressure on both the colonial regime and the Arab elite. Key pillars of indirect rule all but collapsed as the nationalist field collided with the state. Much of the Arab section of the police was immobilized or cooperated with the rebels and the mufti was compelled to stand as the putative head of the uprising. Sabotage and attacks on transportation arteries sundered the normalcy of the colonial order as much as engagements with government forces (or, less frequently, Zionist colonies), and the rebel offensive seemed to reveal a surprisingly brittle colonial order. Lacking adequate intelligence on the insurgents and often unable to effectively discern friend from foe, the government struck back primarily with punitive raids on village and other communities, the aim of which was to divide the public from the rebels

by raising the costs of supporting them. During this phase of the revolt the counterinsurgency failed almost totally. Collective punishments did little but accelerate the spread of alienation from the colonial state.

It is worth underscoring, particularly given the frequent scholarly concentration on middle class forces as leadership elements within the strike movement, that what unfolded in Arab Palestine in 1936 was not the first stage of a bourgeois colonial revolution. Led from below by increasingly radical popular pulses – which moved from civil demonstrations to a tax strike to the assassination of collaborators – elites within the AHC held their seats only by refusing to try to calm the masses, as they had so often done when resistance escalated into violence. They were only able to claw back a tenuous degree of leadership after over five months of exhausting and costly struggle, and by involving the Arab states, whose inability or disinterest in meaningfully backing the Palestinians was not then understood and whose trappings of sovereignty were generally admired. The national politicians may have fooled themselves into thinking that the clock had been turned back on popular power, and indeed they carried on in such fashion, returning to venomous internecine politics even before the Peel Commission report was issued while repudiating armed struggle (the Opposition) or refusing to prepare for its potential resurrection (the *majlisis*). Neither faction, however, forged an effective alternative for securing national aims, and both allowed the Royal Commission to dominate the political arena.

The appearance of a return to the *status quo ante* was illusory. While demobilization followed the strike, the absence of elite hegemony was marked. The

popular critique of what passed for elite strategy, and of elite solipsism, had not substantively changed. The revolutionary pulse of 1936 was not dead, but largely on hiatus. Some of the most militant elements, represented by the *Qassamiyun*, began to reorganize, building links to urban forces and returning to the offensive well before the plan to partition Palestine was announced. Moreover the uprising in 1936 had disquieted the class order. Forms of lower class assertiveness grew from their first manifestations in 1936, when the wealthy were subject to popular authority and faced demands that they finance the national struggle, to a revolutionary fervor in 1938, when these dynamics were augmented by radical prohibitions (“moratoriums”) on debt and rent and the dominance of rural elements was symbolically inscribed through the edict making the *kaffiya* standard headgear while banning the *tarbush*.

Etienne Balibar has suggested that successful bourgeois nationalist projects demonstrate strong capacities to deflect class conflicts via the nation-form and the adept manipulation of discourses of national identity.³³ In the context of the Mandates in the Middle East Walid Kazziha has argued that the notables *cum* nascent bourgeoisie generally played conservative roles supporting colonial rule, acting as political intermediaries while benefiting from the congruence of their own (changing) economic interests with industrialization.³⁴ As Kanafani and Tamari have each pointed out, the Arab bourgeoisie of Palestine, to the extent it even existed, was historically weak and

³³ Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx*, trans. James Swenson (London: Routledge, 1994), chapter 8: p. 191-204.

³⁴ Walid Kazziha, “Another Reading into al-Husari’s Concept of Arab Nationalism” in Marwan Buheiry, ed., *Intellectual Life in the Arab East, 1890-1939* (Beirut: Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies, AUB, 1981), p. 154-64, especially 157-58.

divided.³⁵ The elite was accepted by the Palestine government as an intermediary for the Arab public in times of crisis, but often denied recognition otherwise.³⁶ In large measure it was also denied the full benefits of acting as a comprador class. Deprived of its historic assets in both the political and economic domains (save for the ownership of land) and subordinated to the political and economic needs of the *yishuv* – which British policymakers consistently figured as the dynamic core of the conjoint social formation in colonial Palestine – the Arab notability was incapable of maintaining its socio-political preeminence, much less of sublimating class conflicts. The transformation of the countryside and the erosion of its social economy formed the capstone to these shortcomings, breaking the linkages that had bound the peasantry to the notability.

The structural weaknesses of the Palestinian elite left the political sphere open to the initiative and influence of popular social forces, but the divided character of the elite continued to have serious ramifications on the insurgent movement. The factional rift has been widely attributed with causing the downfall of the revolt and even with dooming the Palestinians a decade later in 1948. Al-Hut, for instance, came to regard factionalism as as destructive to the Palestinian national movement as the British Mandate itself.³⁷ No less pivotally, Tamari has concluded that the poisonous internecine

³⁵ Kanafani, *Thawrat 1936-1939*, p. 19, 75; Tamari, “Factionalism,” p. 179, 199.

³⁶ Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 81.

³⁷ Al-Hut, *al-Shaykh al-mujahid*, p. 12. This is a notable revision from the *majlisi*-boosting of her first work, and it is little wonder that given this reassessment, her search for a defining protagonist of the Palestinian struggle turned away from al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni towards the more austere and unmistakably militant al-Qassam. As noted in chapter 8’s conclusion, Abu Gharbiyya condemns factionalism in a manner somewhat akin to al-Hut’s judgment, though laying the blame on the DP for disaffiliating from the AHC (*Fi khidam al-nidal*, p. 97-98).

conflict kept the Palestinians from being able to overcome Zionism and did more to damage the Palestinians in 1948 than did the conquering Zionist militias.³⁸

These are very weighty, and not, to my thinking, entirely convincing claims. Setting aside the argument about 1948 (which is beyond the scope of formal inquiry here), what is missing is the central role of the British regime and HMG's policy in stoking factionalism to the deadly degrees it reached in 1938-39. As they had on numerous prior occasions throughout the Mandate, British officials stimulated the violent schism that underlay the veneer of elite unity attained in 1936. They did so by proposing partition and by floating the idea that Transjordan's Amir 'Abdullah should govern the Palestinians. While the mufti's faction surreptitiously considered partition before its terms were known, the open embrace of 'Abdullah led to murderous attacks on the Opposition. The government had little use for the *mu'arada* at the outset of the revolt's second phase, but the empire's military commanders were soon eager to make use of Opposition politicians for purposes of battlefield intelligence. In conjunction with Zionist intelligence operatives, the military was eventually able to pierce the formidable walls of secrecy and silence surrounding the rebel formations, thereby very much altering the terrain of the revolt and leaving its partisans increasingly open to surprise attacks. The so-called peace bands were an extension of the counterinsurgency. Although initially of little military consequence, with the exception of Fakhri 'Abd al-Hadi's men, the instrumentalization of the "loyalist" element of the elite by the government turned factionalism into state-sponsored counterrevolution. What is central

³⁸ Tamari, "Factionalism," p. 179-80. Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim comes close to making this argument in his memoirs: *al-Difa' 'an Haifa*, p. 167.

here is the role of the colonial authorities, which, through their policies, provided the conditions and the impetus for the escalation of internecine conflict to unparalleled heights.

In many ways the Great Revolt signified the popular forces' effort to surpass the endemic troubles of elite politics, tactically, strategically, and ideologically. In neither of its fully active phases did elites hold the reins. They retained influence by participating in the popular movement, acting during the strike as brokers and mouthpieces foremost, while during the second phase the exiles relied on arms procurement and monetary support as well as the mufti's symbolic status and the historical stature and associations of the *majlisis* to attempt to retain themselves as the national leadership. These levers did not give elites the power over the movement that has been ascribed to them in much of the scholarly literature. Their place was generally tenuous and their ability to exert themselves rather limited, although the fluidity of the situation and their status as the face of the movement did provide them with some opportunities. The incorporation of the elites into the grassroots movement in a structurally weak posture was part of the popular forces' bid to unify the movement, bury its factionalist tendencies, and build the broadest front of solidarity possible. At the same time the elites were not to be allowed to jeopardize the popular advance, hence they were not given the authority to terminate the revolt, which they feared to even attempt during most of the strike. By the time of the roundtable, their position had changed considerably. The exiles split between much of the AHC and the CCJ, though again those voices that sought an end to the uprising lacked the command over the forces

in the field while those around the mufti knew better than to try to put off the rebellion without adequate gains for the national cause, even as the rebel fighters were themselves divided and on the ropes by early 1939. By the revolt's end, the costs of the counterinsurgency, including to the winnowing rebel formations themselves, left the exilic core around the CCJ pushing to continue the rebellion while support in the field dwindled. Still, the exiles' hand in the tail end of the insurgency remained, in truth, limited.

Leadership within the revolt – the ability to control or modulate its tempo, tactics and strategic direction – was multiple and generally acephalous. During the strike it lay with the national and popular committees and with the insurgent bands and the Black Hand. During the insurgency phase it resided with the rebel formations and within the institutions of the counter-state, from the village committees upwards. Besides producing new institutional centers for the movement, the revolt gave rise to an ethos of revolutionary authority wherein the preexisting class and status hierarchies were interrupted by horizontal elements. The dynamics of revolutionary authority were uneven, shifting, and even inchoate. Nevertheless the new norms they temporarily created were the fruit of popular mobilization and illustrated the versatile capacities of the horizontal forces. They also suggested the outlines of a new social order that would revive the foreclosed place of the poor and begin to rebalance the world made by accelerating social stratification.

The new institutional basis of the movement took the shape of an incipient state-building project, one carried forward under tremendous conditions of stress. The

strength of the rebel order-in-the-making was represented by the subordination of the monied interests of society to the revolutionary cause and later by the stature of the revolutionary judiciary, which garnered wide recognition and assent, and the efficacy of the proto-administration(s) and the field commanders' orders. By advocating principles of social justice and a vision of raising the downtrodden, these institutions gained wider appeal in society among crucial constituencies in both the countryside and the cities. The growth of the proto-state in the second phase of the revolt advanced the integration of the public into its alternative institutional sphere. Fleeting a tentative new model for Palestinians Arab society came into being, existing most clearly where the colonial state had been forced to retreat. This new order was not utopian, however, even for the horizontal forces and poor and the oppressed. It comprised a *mélange* of contending directions: the authoritarian impulses of the field commanders *qua* governors and of ambitious subcommanders; the contrary drive towards an efficient, independent judiciary; shades of an Islamic reform project (with discomfort for those outside the orthodoxy, including minorities); social reform and uplift of the impoverished and disenfranchised; and a streak of opportunism by rogue rebels and by other predatory forces intent on profit, exploitation, and banditry.

The development of the rebel judiciary, which illustrated the fullest flower of popular state formation, held some promise for mediating this tangle of influences. Its effort at instituting a division of powers was intended to check the untrammelled will of the rebel fighters, including what passed for the officer corps. Its record in this department was mixed, as we have seen, but the universal scope of its jurisdiction

brought it acclaim by signaling that the rebel cadres were not “above the law” but accountable before the public. Its efficiency and relative probity made it a forum, if imperfect, for redressing other grievances, including social exploitation, and a vehicle for the effort to stamp out the undercurrents of disorder, including the marauding element within Arab society. Again, from what evidence we have its track record was mixed on all counts, and particularly as social disorder mounted and criminal and predatory activities spread, it dispensed deadly justice that frightened some and earned respect from others.

The social undertones of the revolt, which became increasingly prominent with time, stirred much fear and loathing among the well-to-do. Many fled the country and some, no doubt a small but vocal and active minority, lined up behind the counterrevolutionary forces. Their role in foiling or hobbling the rebellion was in some measures significant – denying it concentrations of “national wealth” or informing on the rebels – but should not be exaggerated. The state-formation project imploded foremost under the weight of the reinvigorated counterinsurgency in late 1938, which in turn occasioned poor decision-making and the loss of prior discipline within rebel institutions (viz. the off-kilter tax and conscription orders of the time and the decline of the judiciary). The escalation of contemporaneous factional bloodletting, pushed by the *majlisi* exiles and the mufti, also contributed to the diminishment of the national character of the counter-state and sullied its image by confusing it with the old toxic competition of self-interested elites. Although there is little means to chart the desires and motivations of the Arab public as the carceral search regime grew rapacious and the

movement controls constricted the lives and livelihoods of its collectivity, the crumbling of the revolt's institutions undoubtedly weakened and emaciated the insurgent movement, leaving the society poised between a straggling and shrinking paramilitary campaign and an increasingly leviathan-like colonial military government.

Throughout the Mandate the Palestinians were locked in an uncomfortable entanglement with the British empire and its vessel, the colonial state. The relationship between the indigenous Arab population and the state was mutually informing, although this dimension of the period's history has seldom been highlighted. On balance it might be concluded that the Mandate impacted the Palestinians more consequentially than vice versa, though their imbrication makes such an evaluation difficult. Still, the Palestinians did affect and alter the colonial regime and their the ability to do so has typically been underestimated.

The most common acknowledgement of these realities has come in the shape of lachrymose Zionist narratives of British betrayal of their cause and clandestine or overt championing of the Arabs. From disappointments under HC Samuel to Chancellor's 1930 recommendations for land transfer and immigration controls to the "appeasement" embodied in the 1939 White Paper, "perfidious Albion" has fancifully been depicted *post hoc* as decidedly hostile to Zionism, which by overcoming such treacheries, only proved its mettle and justness that much more.³⁹ In a less tendentious manner scholars have underscored that large-scale political violence like that of 1929 or 1936 led to

³⁹ For Revisionists and many other Zionists as well this tale of course begins earlier, with the separation of Transjordan from Palestine and its disqualification from the bounds of the Balfour pledge.

misgivings and debates in some quarters about the scale and soundness of HMG's Zionist policy. At the level of overarching policy this is certainly true. But the interchange between the Palestinians and the Mandatory regime was more supple, subtle, and variegated than a strict focus on the realm of diplomatic history permits. To grasp something more of its contours, we need to look at limitations to the Mandate's system of indirect rule, at the state's agenda for development prior to 1939, at its interventions in the countryside, and at its strategies for managing Palestinian resistance and for resolving the dilemma created by the failure of its "dual obligation" policy.

Outside the confines of "high" diplomacy the colonial state constructed a regime of indirect rule, key aspects of which, such as the invented religious institutions of the Grand Muftiship and the SMC, have been poignantly assayed and critiqued by R. Khalidi and Weldon Matthews. The incorporation of elite and middle class elements into the bureaucracy and the prohibition on state employees engaging in contentious political activity helped both to fog the national movement's direction in the 1920s and to allow, until the early 1930s, the state to sustain itself with only a small repressive apparatus. Nevertheless, the deep Arab antipathy to the Jewish National Home policy quickly led to popular unrest that was understood as a challenge to the colonial order and to the state's "prestige" among the colonized. The suppression of the 1921 rebellion originated a key means for quelling Arab "disorder," the importance of which is hard to overstate. Tactics of collective punishment familiar to the Northwest Frontier Province and other restive corners of the empire were introduced to Palestine. The ostensibly local pedigree of collective punishment, based on practices of corporate responsibility in

inter-clan conflict that were decontextualized, reformulated and metastasized, gave rise to a novel conceptual framework for managing the Palestinians, at the base of which was the notion of “collective guilt.” This invention provided an armature whose field of application expanded with time and came in the 1930s to increasingly mediate the government’s relationship with the Arab majority.

The lumpen treatment of the Palestinians as a lawbreaking or seditious population really took shape after the 1929 uprising. The dozen years prior to this were on the whole much more optimistic as far as the British were concerned. They conceived of their mission as modernizing Palestine economically, developing certain strategic assets within it for the benefit of the empire (such as the Haifa port and the oil pipeline), and building up a reliable Ulster-like constituency (the *yishuv*), the safeguarding of which would provide the pretext for long-term occupation. As noted above, Zionism and the *yishuv* were positioned as the motors of local economic activity and as the dynamic sector of the economy. The colonial version of trickle-down economics did not benefit the Palestinian Arabs, nor did their (limited) exposure to the more intensive growing techniques of the Jewish farming have much effect. The Mandate’s economic privileging of Zionism stood in sharp contrast with its attempt to conserve and limit change in Arab society. The results were disastrous and effectively completed the hollowing out of the rural Arab order that had begun under the Ottomans.

Long before the revolt, British policy accelerated the disintegrative dynamics with which Arab society had been wrestling, fomenting dispossession and bringing class contradictions to an explosive level. The Mandate’s unwillingness to deal with the

problems of debt, credit and usury, and the amalgam of policies that damaged the *fellahin* constituted a monumental social and economic body blow to the Palestinians. The profound negligence of the authorities in the face of the decay of the rural social system came back to bite the administration as rural resistance grew in the 1930s and finally congealed during the revolt into a peasant insurrection. In the bitterest of ironies the considerable surplus that the government accrued in the years before the revolt, which it stingily refused to use to defray peasant anguish or to buttress the countryside (for instance through emergency lending services), was soon consumed posthaste by the counterinsurgency, the steep price of which quickly also left British taxpayers on the hook, contrary to all designs of interwar imperial fiscal prudence.⁴⁰

The British treatment of the Palestinians as an afterthought or a residuum of the Balfour policy and the empire's refusal to accurately countenance the deleterious consequences of its endeavors in Palestine led (after the initial opposition to the Mandate from 1920-22) first to atomized forms of resistance (e.g. individual transgressions against land regulations), then to collective action (1929), and finally to the armed campaign for liberation from British rule (1936-39). By the time the colonial authorities were able to admit the failure of the fallacious "dual obligation" formula set down by Churchill's 1922 White Paper, the Palestinians had already risen in a ferocious rebellion in 1936. The recommendation of the Peel Commission to partition Palestine and to create a Jewish state and an expanded Transjordan was a calamity of the highest order, and acceptance of these recommendations tossed Mandatory rule from the proverbial

⁴⁰ Amended note of meeting at the Treasury, 5.9.38, PRO – CO 733/367/1.

frying pan deep into the fire. As Palestinian aspirations then belatedly became a political factor for HMG partition had to be abandoned. But this dawning acknowledgment of the indigenous population's independent will was apprehended as something to be finessed and placated *after* the insurrection had been duly smothered, which itself entailed the active dehumanization of much of the Arab public during the post-Munich era of carceral searches, movement controls, and what amounted to the modernization of siege warfare tactics, applied to the society writ large.

Although the 1939 White Paper came as a tremendous blow to the Zionist movement, the British commitment to the restrictions it inaugurated on the Jewish National Home was in reality highly uncertain, as Winston Churchill's government soon demonstrated. Moreover, the crushing of the Great Revolt removed the Palestinians as a political factor almost immediately after their victory against partition. This fact is evident in that by 1942 at the latest, partition began to be resurrected in official circles as a possible resolution to the Palestine problem, the search for which had only been delayed by World War II but would, it was certain, in no way resemble the terms of the 1939 White Paper.⁴¹ Among the legacies of British rule for the Palestinians, the advancement of partition, carried forth and finally put in motion in 1947 under the auspices of the United Nations with what can only be seen as colossal historical amnesia, is perhaps the most devastating.⁴²

⁴¹ Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat*, p. 129, 135-36, 154-55, 158-60, 164-79.

⁴² In this light the U.N. partition resolution is eerily reminiscent of the Balfour declaration and its incorporation into the Mandate, vetted by the League of Nations. Both policies were given international sanction against the will of the Palestinians and each had catastrophic consequences for them while benefiting the cause of political Zionism.

The effects of the Palestinians' rebellious decade were no less dramatic for Zionism as for the Palestinians and the Mandate. The most historic dimension of transformation was the unmistakable shift towards force as the means for securing the establishment of a Jewish state and the conclusion that further conflict with the Palestinians was ineluctable and should be prepared for to the utmost. This subject has received a considerable amount of attention. Anita Shapira has described the revolt as an inflection point for Zionism, which turned from its prior "defensive ethos" to an "offensive ethos."⁴³ The attitude of Jewish youth to Arab life hardened and they "took up the task of fighting as the special and distinctive mission of the generation."⁴⁴ In *The Making of Israeli Militarism* Uri Ben-Eliezer largely agrees with Shapira, arguing that the move beyond conceptions of "static defense" and the development of offensive military units (beginning with the FOSH) embodied and promoted what he calls "the military way": the emergent view that "organized violence" was the proper avenue for solving the *yishuv*'s political problems.⁴⁵ Avi Shlaim, writing against the consensus, posits a different explanation for the shift, locating it not in Labor Zionist discourse but in Ze'ev Jabotinsky's "iron wall" thesis. Fervently disagreeing with the utopian socialist currents within Labor Zionism, Jabotinsky, the founding patriarch of Revisionism, wrote

⁴³ Shapira, *Land and Power*. As Rebecca L. Stein has pointed out, Shapira's framework of considering Zionism's military aspect in isolation occludes the prior and longstanding structural violence done by the movement to the Palestinians (i.e. via settlement, displacement, economic competition, etc.), which prefigured and stimulated their later armed confrontation. See "The Limits of Revisionist Imagination," *Middle East Report* n. 198 (Jan-March 1996): 48-49.

⁴⁴ Shapira, *Land and Power*, p. 263-65, 270. In perhaps the most vivid and sensational depiction with which she illustrates the increasingly caustic regard for the Arabs by *sabra* youth, she relates the story of children dancing around the corpse of a dead Arab after one of the Revisionists' attacks in Jerusalem (p. 265).

⁴⁵ *The Making*, p. 1-33, especially p. 8. Ben-Eliezer emphasizes that youth militancy propelled these changes, while Shapira at points depicts them as top-down (e.g. *Land and Power*, p. 268-69).

in the early 1920s that Zionism faced a nationalist conflict with the Palestinian Arabs. Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish state would require the defeat of the Palestinians through the erection of an impregnable “iron wall” of military force. Only after the Palestinians had surrendered any hope of precluding the creation of a Jewish state (on terms set by the settlers) should, he believed, negotiations begin with the Arabs, and only then about their civil inclusion within the Jewish-dominated polity of the Jewish state. Confronted with the Palestinian revolt, Shlaim says, Labor Zionist leaders came without acknowledgement to concur in the iron wall thesis and to put its propositions into action.⁴⁶

It is something of a curiosity that in each of these arguments the Palestinians themselves feature only as an externality, if a large and exceedingly negative one. That is to say that none of them considers that the example of the Palestinians’ own mass armed insurrection to terminate the Zionist project and British rule, during which the colonial state hung on for bare life for a period, as consequential except insofar as it was a profound indication of the immanence of conflict over Palestine. This seems to be remiss. Already in 1937, when the Palestinian campaign had not yet attained its full scope but after the *yishuv*’s growth had been severely challenged, Haganah commanders began to draw up plans for the conquest of all of Palestine (in the Avner program).⁴⁷ In mid-1938 the JA’s Executive, looking ahead, anticipated that any forthcoming partition would be superceded by Zionist conquest, and stressed the need to procure the machine

⁴⁶ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), p. 11-22.

⁴⁷ Ben-Eliezer, *The Making*, p. 25.

guns that would be required.⁴⁸ The Palestinians weren't simply a foe to be vanquished, in other words, but an inspiration that had led the way in taking up arms for their independence and self-preservation. In the process they quickened the confrontation between the rival claimants on Palestine and unintentionally opened the gates to military models of Zionism's fulfillment.

Zionist mimesis of the Palestinians was manifest tactically as well as strategically. Compulsion was used in some collections for the "defense fund" (*kofer ha-yishuv*) established in the lead up to the roundtable aspects of the revolt. Fiery Jewish condemnations of British double-dealing in early 1939 and preparation for a campaign of resistance against the expected turn in policy left the High Commissioner concerned that the Zionists might resort to armed resistance against the government.⁴⁹ These fears were vividly materialized in an attempt to blow up the Immigration Department offices in Jerusalem on the day that the White Paper summary was released, which failed only because several of the bombs placed on site malfunctioned.⁵⁰ More bombings followed, including a spectacular assault on 13 June when 10 devices struck government targets in Tel Aviv "almost simultaneously."⁵¹ Underground operatives began to execute Jewish informers and Jewish employees of the government who were deemed traitors to the Zionist cause.⁵² British government officers and personnel were

⁴⁸ David Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), p. 55-56.

⁴⁹ Narrative dispatch #2, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.3.39, p. 16, PRO – CO 935/22.

⁵⁰ Narrative dispatch #3, HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.7.39, p. 26, PRO – CO 935/22.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵² Narrative dispatch #3, HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.7.39, p. 30, PRO – CO 935/22; Bauer, "From Cooperation," p. 190-91; Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 386-87.

also targeted.⁵³ The pipeline was hit in August and “plans for widespread sabotage activities in Jerusalem” were only curtailed, like the rest of the proto-revolt, by the advent of World War II.⁵⁴

Ben-Gurion railed in the midst of the incipient rebellion that the time for “talking Zionism” was over; what was called for was a “fighting Zionism.”⁵⁵ He had begun contemplating a retreat from Britain in late 1936 during the uncertain period following the strike, when it may be recalled even the staid Weizmann rattled off about raising an insurrection. But by the time Jewish action against the Mandate first arrived in 1939, pressure from below, and particularly from the younger generation written about by Shapira and Ben-Eliezer, had begun to overtake the JA and the National Council.⁵⁶ Indeed, Ben-Gurion was initially so concerned with the youth upsurge that he began planning to inaugurate a new youth movement, expressly intent on capturing and harnessing them, and thus restoring his leadership to paramouncy.⁵⁷

Although demographically the *yishuv*’s population was much younger than that of the Arabs, the parallel with the Arab rebellion’s youthful roots and the pressure they generated for a radical course, is striking. As are the many similarities between the tactics and dynamics of the proto-revolt and those of the Great Revolt, on the heels of which the former came. The British subsequently extended the comparison further, analogizing the “ruthless fanaticism” and “hysterical nationalism” of the Irgun, the

⁵³ Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem*, p. 203.

⁵⁴ Bauer, “From Cooperation,” p. 191.

⁵⁵ Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat*, p. 128.

⁵⁶ Bauer, “From Cooperation,” p. 185; Ben-Eliezer, *The Making*, p. 30. An official glimpse of this pressure is captured in Narrative dispatch #3, HC to Colonial Secretary, 21.7.39, p. 27, PRO – CO 935/22. On Weizmann, see chapter 8.

⁵⁷ Ben-Eliezer, *The Making*, p. 32.

underground Revisionist militia, and the Stern Gang (a smaller, even more right wing paramilitary) directly with the *Qassamiyun*.⁵⁸

Beyond the example of militant struggle it set, the Great Revolt was fateful for Zionist views of the Palestinians. The notion of coexistence was greatly imperiled and the native Arabs and Arabs in general were demonized. For it was during the revolt that Arab resistance to Zionism became synonymous with “terrorism” and that the Palestinians came with growing vigor to be equated within Zionist discourse with an array of horrors: terrorism, fascism, and Nazism.⁵⁹ Subsequently, by extension and by dint of the mufti’s wartime flight to Germany and embrace of the Nazis the Palestinians were tied to the Nazi holocaust, as tellingly suggested at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in modern-day Jerusalem, where photographs of al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Fuhrer together, placed alongside those of the death camps, Jewish displaced persons, and the story of Israel’s birth, make the array of actors and their moral roles as plain as day. As Shapira observes, the substance of such purported links was less important than their function in branding the Arabs as (Labor) Zionism’s enemies.⁶⁰

Convinced of the historical unassailability of their cause, armed struggle against the project of transforming Palestine into a Jewish state was apprehended as “terrorism,”

⁵⁸ *Survey of Palestine*, v. 2, p. 598.

⁵⁹ Hirst, *Beware of Small States*, p. 34; Shapira, *Land and Power*, p. 231-33, 249. Like many Zionist commentators, Shapira replicates these views: p. 231.

⁶⁰ Shapira, *Land and Power*, p. 249; Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 386. The Labor movement also called the Revisionists Nazis and fascists and for good measure Ben-Gurion referred to Jabotinsky as “satan” (Segev, *ibid.*, p. 386). The Revisionists countered that the Labor movement were appeasers and traitors (Shapira, p. 248).

which Labor movement thinkers deemed the product of “savages.”⁶¹ Recourse to the familiar colonial dichotomy between “civilized” and “savage” became commonplace.⁶² The growing ubiquity of this discourse, a hallmark of Revisionist discourse and certainly not unknown within Zionism otherwise, lends additional weight to Shlaim’s contention that the right wing, not the dominant Labor Zionist movement, set down most of the canonical discursive and strategic apparatus concerning the Palestinians.⁶³ Zionist popular culture reflected the shift. Tchernichovsky’s emblematic poem from the revolt, “On Guard,” depicts Arabs, whom it does not directly name, as “savages” and men of the desert “thirsty for blood.”⁶⁴ Zionist leaders distinguished themselves little, if at all, from these conceits. Although in varying respects they acknowledged Palestinian nationalism during the rebellion, Ben-Gurion believed that Islam was especially violent, that the Arabs harbored “a murderous mentality” and that they were intolerant of minorities; Moshe Shertok, head of the JA’s Political Department, opined that the Arabs were ruled by “filth.”⁶⁵ The model of colonizing a remote frontier (i.e. deep in Arab territory, with Hanita the symbol of this venture) and building the *yishuv* through “stockade and tower” settlements – militarized colonial outposts – spatially inscribed Labor Zionism’s embrace of the racialized mission of battling for “civilization” against the hordes.

⁶¹ Shapira, *Land and Power*, p. 230. Shapira herself collapses the Arab rejection of the Jewish statehood project with a putative Arab objection to Jewish presence in the land (p. 222). Yet even during the revolt the Arabs didn’t harbor any great illusion that the settlers could be removed; their quest aimed to halt the Zionist enterprise, to preserve and protect Palestine’s Arab majority, and to secure self-determination under an indigenous Arab sovereignty.

⁶² See *ibid.*, chapter 6: p. 219-76.

⁶³ On Revisionist views of the Levant see Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 12 and Shavit, “Revisionism’s View,” p. 76.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Shapira, *Land and Power*, p. 237.

⁶⁵ Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 376, 387.

The delegitimization of the Palestinians that was completed for Labor Zionism during the Great Revolt facilitated the transition to a militarized conception of the conflict. In this it is impossible to ignore the example of the British, whose suppression of the Palestinians made a profound impression and bequeathed a wealth of repressive techniques and principles, a good number of which are still in use today. Tactics used by the British counterinsurgency against the revolt, such as house demolitions, searches, mass arrests, village occupations, ransacking and destroying household and other civilian property, curfews, pass laws and movement controls, and the employment of human shields later became stock in trade for Zionism and the state of Israel.⁶⁶ The legal framework of liberal despotism has been equally enduring. Although the Jewish Bar Association condemned the Defence (or Emergency) Regulations during the Jewish uprising against the British in the 1940s as worse than Nazi legislation, they were retained after 1948 and used as the basis of the legal code for ruling over the Palestinians, first inside Israel regarding the Arab minority during the military regime period (1948-66) and subsequently regarding the Palestinians in the occupied territories after 1967.⁶⁷ Underlying the tactical and legal inheritance, the method of dealing with the Palestinians through forms of collective punishment under the rubric of collective responsibility and guilt was adopted by Zionism from its imperial predecessor.

⁶⁶ The use of human shields is something of an exception in this list, and to my knowledge was used less often – most recently in the second *intifada*.

⁶⁷ On the Jewish Bar Association, see Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 477. On the use of the Emergency Regulations against the Palestinians, see Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976 [1968]) and Shira Robinson, *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal Settler State* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013).

The Great Revolt afforded the Zionists with their first direct offensive and battlefield experiences against the Palestinians. From the beginning of the strike the JA pressed for Jewish units to be armed and employed in suppressing the Palestinians. This led first to the *notrim* (supernumerary guards) and, clandestinely, to the FOSH. The argument from Zionist quarters was virtually always that the government wasn't willing to display enough resolve to crush the insurgency and that *more* force employed more readily could have nipped the revolt in the bud.⁶⁸

This critique of the British effort appears to have informed the later career of the Haganah and the Israeli military far more than previous critical scholarship has revealed. In the second phase of the uprising Zionist leaders saw their wishes begin to become reality. This has much to do with Orde Wingate, whose "influence over the Jewish leaders cannot be overestimated."⁶⁹ Wingate's Special Night Squads took the cream of the Haganah's cadres into action, training them in guerilla techniques and instilling a discipline that Israel's future military commanders fondly extolled.⁷⁰ Wingate's racialized understanding of the Arabs as "ignorant and primitive" and the rebellion as "feeble" and cowardly suited the reigning conception within the *yishuv* and fed into its valorization of force.⁷¹ His units become infamous for their brutal and arbitrary treatment of the Palestinians. As observed in chapters 9 and 10, the SNS extended the principle of collective punishment to include summary executions of Arabs and their

⁶⁸ E.g. Narrative dispatch #2, HC to Colonial Secretary, 24.3.39, p. 15, PRO – CO 935/22.

⁶⁹ Bauer, "From Cooperation," p. 186.

⁷⁰ E.g. Yigal Allon, *The Making of Israel's Army* (New York: Universe Books, 1970), p. 9-11. Notably, such accounts omit Wingate's belief in racial hierarchy and the justice of the extrajudicial assassination and wanton assaults on noncombatants among subject peoples.

⁷¹ Quoted in Knight, "Securing Zion?," p. 534.

short history included at least one sizable massacre. According to Yigal Allon, Wingate's collaboration with Zionism was more extensive than commonly acknowledged, and included cooperation with clandestine striking units operating in parallel with the SNS.⁷² The Jewish Settlement Police, which absorbed some 14,400 men from the Haganah into legalized military formations, and the supernumeraries contributed to these "mobile squads."⁷³ Hence by the end of the revolt, the Haganah enjoyed a semi-legal status and had seeded its men into a variety of bodies where they had begun to fight their own war against the Palestinians, prefiguring the pivotal conflict to follow.⁷⁴

The Haganah "advanced steadily during this period [during the revolt] in quantity as well as in quality, in the standard of training and discipline, and in confidence drawn from its combat experience."⁷⁵ It established a unified countrywide command structure for the first time and founded its intelligence branch. In spring 1937 most of the Irgun joined the Haganah, which then counted 21,000 members.⁷⁶ Its size continued to increase quite substantially during World War II when, unlike previous Arab paramilitaries, it continued to mostly enjoy a semi-legal status and to further develop its capacities and grow to resemble a modern army.⁷⁷ The prospect of a renewed Arab rebellion and future conflict between the *yishuv* and the Arabs led to an important intelligence project conducted in the first half of the 1940s, the village files, which

⁷² Allon, *The Making*, p. 8-9.

⁷³ Bauer, "From Cooperation," p. 185-86.

⁷⁴ In late 1938 the High Commissioner estimated, exaggeratedly, that the Haganah had trained 50,000 men. This elicited no real concern (HC to Colonial Secretary, 17.9.38, PRO – FO 371/21881).

⁷⁵ Allon, *The Making*, p. 13.

⁷⁶ Bauer, "From Cooperation," p. 183, 185.

⁷⁷ See Bauer, "From Cooperation."

helped prepare the battlefield in 1947-49 through the systematic collection of “operational intelligence.”⁷⁸ First proposed in 1940, by 1945 some 600 villages had been covered by the program,⁷⁹ providing the Haganah with a repository of critical information on everything from access roads and wells within each community to inter-*hamula* conflicts, arms possession and stockpiles, and the villagers’ dispositions toward and participation in the Great Revolt.

While the *yishuv* prepared for a decisive confrontation with the Palestinians, the shape of that fateful encounter also began to emerge during the revolt. Nur Masalha has argued that the Peel Commission and its recommendation of partition fired the imagination of the Zionist leadership, who became quite interested in the prospect of “partition and compulsory [population] transfer as a solution to the Palestine problem.” Ben-Gurion recorded in his diaries immediately after the unveiling of the commission’s report that “the compulsory transfer of the Arabs from the valleys of the projected Jewish state... we have to stick to this conclusion the same way we grabbed the Balfour declaration, more than that, the same way we grabbed at Zionism itself.” Masalha’s study illustrates the profusion of plans for the eviction of the Palestinians, in whole or in part, that followed.⁸⁰ While it was Zionist militias that directly uprooted approximately half of the Palestinians who fled in the 1948 war (and otherwise stimulated much of the

⁷⁸ See Shimri Salomon, “Shirut-ha-yedi‘ot ha-‘Aravi shel ‘ha-Haganah’ ve-proyeqt sqirot ha-yishuvim ha-‘Araviyim be-Eretz Yisrael, 1940-1948,” *Daf me-ha-sliq* n. 9-10 (2001); Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: One World Books, 2006), p. 17-22; and Rona Sela, “Scouting Palestinian Territory, 1940-1948: Haganah Village Files, Aerial Photos, and Surveys” *Jerusalem Quarterly* n. 52 (winter 2013), p. 38-50. Quote from Salomon, deputy director of the Haganah Archive, in Sela, p. 45.

⁷⁹ Black and Morris, *Israel’s Secret Wars*, p. 28.

⁸⁰ Masalha’s *Expulsion of the Palestinians* is mostly dedicated to the Peel Commission (p. 49-91), its aftermath during the revolt (93-123) and what followed in the 1940s (125-205), cataloguing and discussing numerous plans and planning bodies within the JA and the *yishuv*. Quotes above are from p. 208 and 210, respectively.

remainder of the exodus), it was the British that first put forward the plan for expelling the Palestinians to make way for a Jewish state. Much more than the notion of partition itself, which on its own seldom encouraged great enthusiasm among most Zionists, the idea of population transfer and the removal of the native Palestinian Arabs, which Zionist politicians seriously advocated during the Peel Commission proceedings, proved to be of lasting and unmistakable salience.

The final legacy for Zionism from the revolt which also had a tremendous impact in the succeeding years was the Zionist movement's gradual repudiation of its former British patron and its turn towards the United States as a replacement. With the White Paper of 1939 the politicians of the *yishuv* and the Zionist Organization tired of their erstwhile sponsor. Although cooperative relations characterized a good deal of the war years, especially after Churchill's government replaced Chamberlain's, the Zionist leadership sought a great power backer that would endorse, without any equivocation, hesitation, or qualms, its growing ambitions to control Palestine. In the United States Zionism found just such an ally, one that was all the more unburdened in its advocacy of the Zionist cause by its total lack of formal responsibility for Palestine and its Arab majority. After the White Paper controversy and as the extent of the Nazi genocides in Europe came to light, the nascent alliance and partnership between the Zionist movement and the U.S. found increasingly firm footing. Near the end of the war, as victory over the Axis appeared on the horizon, U.S. political parties began attempting to outbid one another in their support of the Biltmore program's call, inaugurated at a Zionist convention in New York City in 1942, for the untrammelled immigration of Jews

to Palestine and for the land's conversion into a Jewish state.⁸¹ The U.S. subsequently proved instrumental to securing the U.N.'s approval of partition in 1947, which touched off the 1948 war. While the Zionists celebrated their dream come true, Palestine and the plight of the Palestinians became, in Rashid Khalidi's apt phrase, the Achilles' heel of U.S. Middle East policy, much as had been the case for the British.⁸²

With its many historic legacies, the tragedy that befell the Palestinians in 1948 owed in no small measure to the outcome of the Great Revolt a decade previous and to the end of the popular mobilization within the Palestinian national movement that its suppression spelled. The Mandate's tenure was nothing short of ruinous for the Palestinians, and a great deal of the catastrophe that enveloped them can be traced back to the fiery 1930s, when cold steel and collective punishments were deployed with abandon to outlaw, repress, and efface their national movement and to bury the Palestinian struggle for freedom and self-determination in the rubble that was left behind.

⁸¹ See, for instance, positions taken by the Republican and Democratic parties on the eve of the war's end: al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat*, p. 420. The Biltmore program is reproduced in *The Israel-Arab Reader*, p. 77-79.

⁸² Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. xix.

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