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Contested Land, Contested Representations:
Re-visiting the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939 in Palestine

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Spring/2016

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Acknowledgements

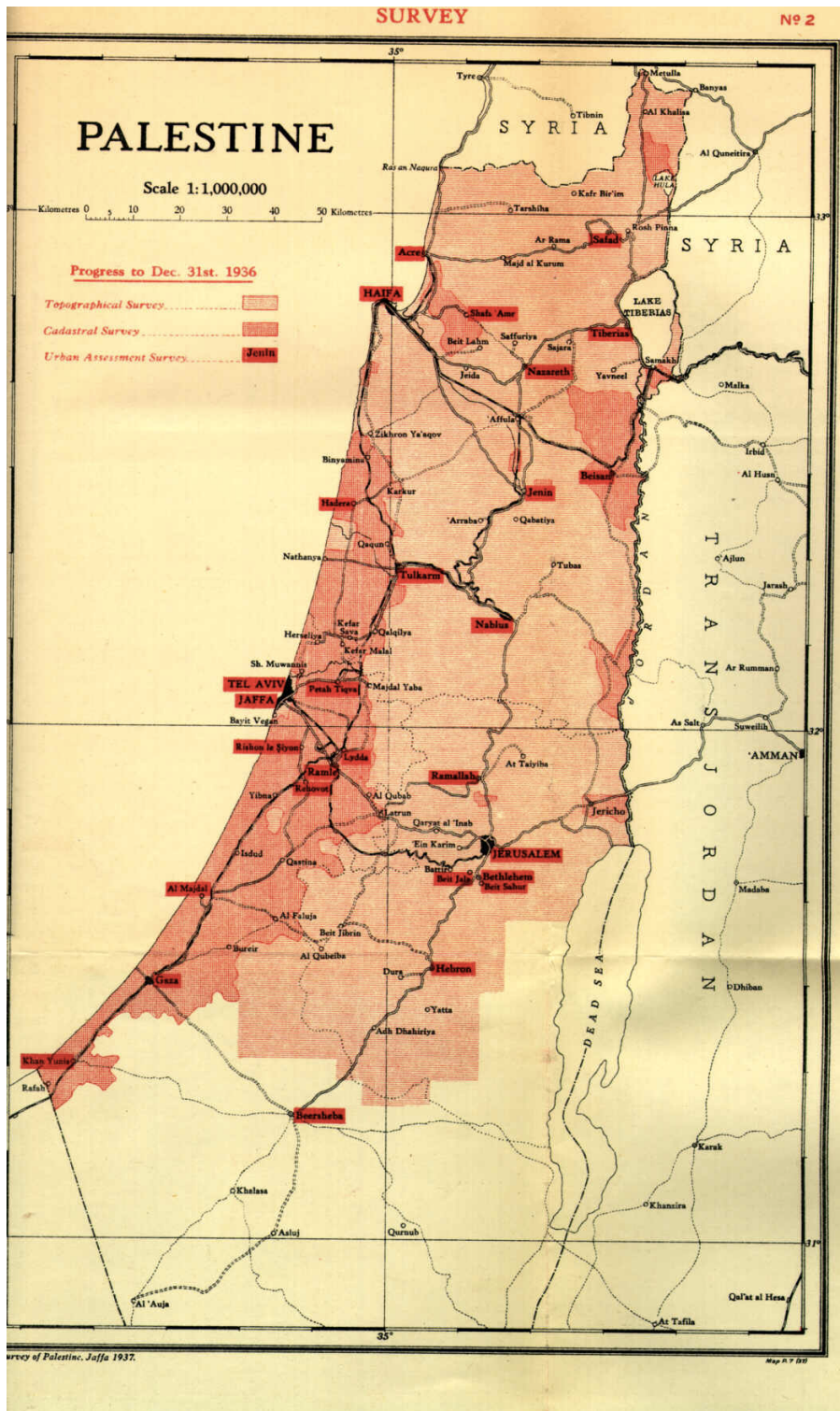
Large research endeavors like this one are never undertaken alone, and I would be remiss if I didn't thank the many people who have helped me along the way. I owe a huge debt to Shelley Lee, Jesse Gamoran, Gavin Ratcliffe, Meghan Mette, and Daniel Hautzinger, whose kind feedback throughout the year sharpened my ideas and improved the coherence of my work more times than I can count. A special thank you to Sam Coates-Finke and Leo Harrington, who were always ready to listen as I worked through the writing process.

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Map of Palestine, 1936



Source: <http://unispal.un.org>

Glossary

Falastin – Palestine

Fallâhîn – rural peasants or villagers

Istiqlal – independence

Jihad – the act of struggling or striving; can refer to personal or public struggles

Kûfiya – a traditional headdress commonly worn by Arab peasants

Mujâhidîn – fighters engaged in guerrilla warfare

Nahda – a rebirth or renaissance

Tarbush – also called a fez; a felt or cloth brimless cap, usually red and with a silk tassel, popularly worn by men during the Ottoman era

Wataniya – a sense of nationalism or patriotism

Yishuv – Hebraic term for the body of Jewish residents in Palestine prior to the establishment of the State of Israel

Introduction

In November of 1935, an impassioned preacher named Shaykh ‘Izz al-Dîn al-Qassâm took to the hills in northern Palestine with the intention of raising a rebellion against the government of the British Mandate, installed in Palestine since 1920. With the help of a few followers, he engaged in a fierce fire fight against British police forces before being killed in Ya’bad Forest on the 20th. While viewed as a terrorist by the British government, the enigmatic shaykh had been a popular figure among Arab Palestinians. In exile from French Syria since the early 1920s, he had proselytized among the working classes of Haifa, speaking out against a British colonial project that he viewed as too favorable to Zionists.¹ His death electrified a Palestinian populace primed for rebellion. Within a few months, Palestinians launched a national strike and boycott that erupted into a full-scale armed revolt by the end of 1936.

The different ways in which al-Qassâm was portrayed by Palestinians, British colonial officials, and Zionists parallels the competing interpretations of the rebellion that followed him. The British were quick to condemn the rebel as an extremist whose actions had imperiled law and order in Mandatory Palestine. Government records and newspapers referred to “Qassâmite” groups that were engaging in clandestine attacks on colonial officials and Zionist areas. Commenting on the significance of al-Qassâm’s death, the Yishuv leader Moïshe Beilinson remarked that not “a gang of thieves but a body of political terrorists has lately confronted the authorities in Palestine.”² Zionists worried that the martyrdom of al-Qassâm by Arab Palestinians would lead to a rebellion that could dismantle their hard-fought gains in Palestine. These gains

¹ Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 2.

² Moïshe Beilinson, as quoted in Shai Lachman, “Arab Rebellion and Terrorism in Palestine 1929–39: The Case of Sheikh ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam and his Movement,” in Matthew Kraig Kelly, “Crime in the Mandate” (PhD diss., UCLA, 2013), 100.

had begun with the Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which Britain declared that it viewed “with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object.”³ This document had established a close relationship between the British government and the Zionist movement, which now sought to limit the dangers wrought by al-Qassâm’s actions. For Arabs, al-Qassâm’s death became a defining moment in the development of Palestinian nationalism. Palestinians rallied around him as a figure of patriotic sacrifice who had willingly taken up arms against a repressive British colonial government. His gravesite at Haifa emerged as a popular place of pilgrimage for villagers and townspeople who wished to honor their fallen hero.⁴ This populist embrace of al-Qassâm contradicted a British and Zionist narrative that cast him as a violent extremist.

As the Arab Revolt unfolded in late 1936, differences in the representation of the conflict only became more pronounced. The British were quick to paint the uprising as a series of violent criminal attacks that threatened to sow chaos across Palestine. While colonial officials were struggling with how to suppress the rebellion, *The Egyptian Gazette*, a British-controlled newspaper in Cairo, published information pertaining to attacks on Jewish civilians and British police forces.⁵ These reports often came from *The Palestine Post*, a leading Zionist newspaper in Palestine that had a vested interest in highlighting violence committed against Jewish civilians. Hoping to arouse international sympathy for the Zionist cause, the *Post* argued that the violence of the Revolt was the product of Palestinian extremists with whom negotiation was impossible. This characterization extended to Arab political leaders who resisted British colonial policy. *Falastin*, the most prominent Palestinian newspaper, refuted these portrayals of the Revolt. In an

³ “Balfour Declaration: Text of the Declaration,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/balfour.html>.

⁴ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 7.

⁵ *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 1, 1937.

article from its June 19, 1936 issue, it described how the primary reason for “the eruption of the current Arab revolution...is fear...Arabs were hoping Jewish migration would stop, but hopes died...and now they fear national conflict.”⁶ *Falastin*’s editors hoped to give voice to a Palestinian population that was resisting encroachment upon their land. This sympathetic interpretation of the Revolt contrasted sharply with British and Zionist accounts that stressed its criminal, violent nature.

Coming on the heels of a boycott in spring against Jewish and British goods, the 1936 rebellion gathered strength in the countryside as peasants took up arms. Bands of villagers collectively undertook guerrilla attacks against British forces patrolling the eastern and northern areas of Palestine. Using their intimate knowledge of the local landscape, rebels attacked British patrols and then disappeared into the mountains. Their ability to transform quickly from fighters into farmers frustrated British efforts to unmask the guerrillas.⁷ The British responded with an escalation of home raids that had already begun in early 1936. The raids increased in urgency and severity as the Mandatory government saw its power weakened in western Palestine.⁸ The government communicated its alarm in newspapers throughout the region. The January 4, 1937 issue of *The Egyptian Gazette* announced that British authorities were offering £50,000 for information related to “71 murders of British constables, soldiers, Jews and Arabs between August and October last year.”⁹ The high reward reflected the government’s desire to quell the rising tide of violence that was sweeping the country.

⁶ “The Land of Peace,” *Falastin*, June 19, 1936, <http://awraq.birzeit.edu/sites/default/files/19%20June%201936%20checked.pdf>.

⁷ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 126.

⁸ Matthew Kraig Kelly, “The Revolt of 1936: A Revision,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. 44, No. 2 (2015): 34.

⁹ *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 4, 1937.

Despite the efforts of the British, the rebellion gained strength in late 1937. Some of its strength came from the support of Arabs in other countries. Supplemented by an influx of arms and commanders from Syria and Transjordan, the rural *mujâhidîn* made inroads in central Palestine. Jaffa and Beersheba briefly fell into rebel hands, and Palestinian commanders began instituting alternative state apparatuses meant as a rebuke against British colonial policy.¹⁰ Rebels achieved their most tangible gain in 1938 with the capture of the Old City of Jerusalem. Long revered as a holy site by Muslims, the triumph added religious significance to the independence struggle. Urban elites in Palestine as well as Syria and Iraq reinforced these gains with financial and political support.¹¹ For a brief moment in early 1938, the rebellion seemed capable of forcing the British to cede independence to the Palestinians.

An enormous British offensive against the Palestinian rebels hindered national unity and led to the downfall of the Revolt. Despite a commission headed by Sir John Woodhead concluding in November 1938 that the British plan for partition was unfeasible, the Mandatory government brought in military reinforcements to crush the rebellion. The British replaced civilian administrators with military commanders, who promptly used tanks and a huge amount of soldiers to overwhelm the Palestinians. Walid Khalidi reports that fifty-five “Palestinians were executed by hanging, at least twelve hundred Palestinians were killed in action by the British, more than twice as many Palestinians were detained as in the previous year (1938).”¹² The military offensive proved too much for the rebels to handle and was accompanied by an unraveling of national unity. Wealthy urbanites lost faith in a rebellion that they deemed

¹⁰ Sonia Fathi El-Nimr, “The Arab Revolt of 1936-1939 in Palestine: A Study Based on Oral Sources” (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 1990), 166-167.

¹¹ Walid Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876-1948* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2010), 190.

¹² Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, 190.

threatening to their interests, and rival political families jockeyed for influence in what would continue to be a British colony.¹³ British military power defeated the Revolt and disrupted the cause of Palestinian nationalism.

Because of the British military victory, British and Zionist characterizations evolved into the hegemonic historical narrative of the rebellion. Instead of contributing to the historiography, popular Arab Palestinian memories were rarely translated for British and American readers. Western historians glossed over discussions of economic dislocation and landlessness as drivers of revolt in favor of illustrating the Palestinians as irrational actors. While Zionist historiography intimately captured Jewish politics and diplomatic decision-making in the 1930s, it tended to treat defiant Palestinians as extremists. Only recently has scholarship closely examining the motivations and tactics of Palestinian actors reached English-speaking audiences. My thesis aligns with this new trend in historical scholarship. It challenges representations of the Revolt as an outburst of extremism and argues that it was a multifaceted struggle for unity.

The Egyptian Gazette and *The Palestine Post* presented one-sided depictions of the Revolt that would inform future historiography on the conflict. The January 1, 1937 issue of *The Egyptian Gazette* described an attack on a British military trolley traveling between Tulkarm and Kalkilieh. After being attacked, the military responded by engaging with the rebels.¹⁴ While they may have been accurate, reports like this one neglected to recognize the structural violence imposed by the British Mandate that was fueling the attacks by Palestinians. As early as 1920, the government established police forces that regularly patrolled the Palestinian countryside. Raids on Palestinian villages began within weeks of the 1936 strike and only grew more severe

¹³ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 85-86.

¹⁴ *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 1, 1937.

as the armed revolt progressed.¹⁵ While *The Egyptian Gazette* did report on the harsh criminal sentences imposed on Palestinians, it relied heavily on British Mandatory sources. Its reporting methods resulted in journalism that lacked Palestinian perspectives on the deteriorating situation.

The Palestine Post suffered from similar problems as *The Egyptian Gazette*. As the leading Zionist newspaper in Palestine, it carefully reported on the worsening plight of Jews in Nazi Germany and highlighted the violence against Jews that did occur at the hands of Arab Palestinians. Yet its belief in the beneficial impacts of a Jewish state in Palestine often caused the newspaper to appear incredulous at Palestinians who refused to cooperate with British authorities. The *Post* frequently reported on the workings of the Arab Higher Committee, a coalition of prominent Palestinian political figures. While reporting on the Committee's deliberations over whether to appear before a Royal Commission in 1937, it described how "the majority of Committee members, with the notable exception of the president, Haj Amin el Husseini...were in favour of cooperation."¹⁶ This portrait of Hajj Amin al-Husaynî, the political leader of the Revolt, as an outlier obscures the strong support that he held among Palestinian nationalists. It demonstrated the *Post*'s method of turning vocal opponents of British colonial policy into unreasonable actors.

Much of the Zionist scholarship continued these newspapers' trends of painting Palestinian nationalists as extremists. Writing in 1993, Israeli historian Zvi Elpeleg marginalized 'Izz al-Din al-Qassâm and his followers as radical and violent actors. "From the beginning of the 1930s, the Qassamites and other armed gangs carried out a series of violent operations in various

¹⁵ Kelly, "Revolt," 34.

¹⁶ "Arab Higher Committee Deadlocked Again," *The Palestine Post*, January 4, 1937, <http://www.jpress.nli.org.il/Olive/APA/NLI/?action=search&text=The%20Palestine%20Post#panel=document>.

parts of the country,” writes Elpeleg in his description of the actions of al-Qassâm’s followers.¹⁷ The lumping of these Palestinians under the moniker of “armed gangs” denigrates the burgeoning national movement, which was responding to what Elpeleg himself describes as the rapid land acquisition by Zionists in the 1930s. Since many Palestinian peasants lived on the land of large Arab landowners, they would often be dispossessed by these purchases.¹⁸ The added presence of British police patrols created a climate of fear that drove Palestinians to see armed rebellion as their only possible means of resistance. Monty Noam Penkower relies on the same language as Elpeleg to describe Palestinians like al-Qassâm. He describes how “Jewish Agency sources heard that a few Qassâm gang leaders...had planned the killing” of Galilee District Commissioner Lewis Andrews, an ally of Zionist expansion, on September 26, 1937.¹⁹ This portrait of isolated gang leaders working against the British government ignores the popular uprising that was occurring in eastern Palestine. Zionist scholarship tended to marginalize a national rebellion that was growing in the mid-1930s.

Recent scholarship has begun to provide a more holistic view of the Arab Revolt. Sherene Seikaly demonstrates how Arabs suffered in an economic arena that was skewed in favor of Zionists. Article 11 of the British Mandate allowed for cooperation with the Jewish Agency to develop public utilities and natural resources in Palestine. Colonial officials cited this article when they “granted three major monopoly concessions to Zionist interests in the 1920s: the electricity concession to the Palestine Electricity Corporation Limited (established in 1923), the Dead Sea salt concessions to the Palestine Potash Company (established in 1929), and the

¹⁷ Zvi Elepeleg, *The Grand Mufti: Hajj Amin Al-Hussaini, Founder of the Palestinian National Movement* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1993), 37.

¹⁸ Elpeleg, *The Grand Mufti*, 36.

¹⁹ Monty Noam Penkower, *Palestine in Turmoil: The Struggle for Sovereignty, 1933-1939 (Vol. II)* (New York: Touro College Press, 2014), 435.

salt concession in 1922 to the Palestine Salt Company,” writes Seikaly.²⁰ These concessions would greatly benefit the growth of Zionist industry, as Jewish industrialists now had access to valuable resources in Palestine. Yet the Jewish economy did not exist in a vacuum, and Seikaly demonstrates the important contributions that Arab workers and businessmen made to the regional economy. “By 1927, there were 3,505 industrial establishments in Palestine. By 1935, Arab capital investment was mostly in tobacco, cardboard, soap, and milling factories, and a growing textile industry, but Arabs also made industrial advances in metals, chemicals, leather, beverages, and quarrying.”²¹ Seikaly attributes the variance of industry to a new middle class of merchants that were particularly active in the coastal cities of Gaza, Jaffa, and Haifa. These businessmen existed alongside Jewish merchants but did not enjoy the same subsidies and concessions offered by the Mandatory government. Palestinians experienced fewer opportunities for economic growth because of the preferential treatment provided to Zionists by the Mandate.

Matthew Kelly describes how the rebellion also responded to British repression that was more severe than is usually recognized. While scholars have traditionally argued that British measures were restrained from April through October of 1936, Kelly illustrates how “the British adopted harsh repressive measures within weeks of the declaration of an Arab strike in April 1936, and they continued to employ them for months afterward.”²² These measures took the form of raids on Palestinian villages and the destruction of volatile neighborhoods in Jaffa and Haifa in the name of urban renewal.²³ Rashid Khalidi expands on the brutal actions of the British.

“Hundreds of homes were blown up (perhaps as many as two thousand), crops were destroyed,

²⁰ Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 7.

²¹ Seikaly, 14.

²² Kelly, “Revolt,” 28.

²³ *Ibid.*, 34.

and over one hundred rebels were summarily executed simply for the possession of firearms, or even ammunition,” writes Khalidi, demonstrating the heavy-handed response to the Revolt in 1937-39.²⁴ By late 1939, over 10 percent of the adult male population was killed, wounded, imprisoned, or in exile.²⁵ Kelly and Khalidi demonstrate the structural violence imposed by the British both before and during the Revolt.

Through oral interviews conducted in the West Bank in the 1980s, Ted Swedenburg reveals how representations of the Revolt differed among Palestinians involved in it. He argues that the rebellion was primarily a lower class movement that forced urban elites to act more decisively against British colonialism and Zionist expansion. By prioritizing rural voices, he also reveals tensions between classes that continue to plague Palestinian nationalism to this day. Muhammad Kîlanî, an elderly veteran of the Revolt, bemoaned that the rebellion “would have succeeded if wealthy Palestinians had only sacrificed for it one-tenth as much as poor people did.”²⁶ Memories like these were often accompanied by complaints that prominent political families like the Husaynîs and the Nashâshîbîs were insufficiently aggressive against the British. Wealthy Palestinians usually responded with claims that they sacrificed much of their fortunes in order to support the rebellion. Aside from class differences, Swedenburg also delves into the unpopular memories of collaboration with the British that complicate the official nationalist narrative of complete unity.²⁷ Evidence of collaboration demonstrates the difficulties that Palestinians faced in maintaining unity in the later stages of the rebellion.

²⁴ Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 107.

²⁵ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 108.

²⁶ Muhammad Kîlanî as qtd. in Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 28.

²⁷ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 108-112.

The representations of the Revolt by ‘Issa al-‘Issa, the editor of *Falastin*, further complicate the notion of Palestinian nationalism. In a book containing ‘Issa al-‘Issa’s memoirs, Noha Tadros Khalaf delineates how the Jaffa-born newspaper editor was an early champion of Palestinian rights. While using his newspaper as a platform for Palestinian voices, he became active politically as one of the thirty-three founding members of the Arab Higher Committee.²⁸ But a falling-out with Hajj Amin al-Husaynî led al-‘Issa to become increasingly critical of the leader’s decisions. Although initially supportive of the Revolt, he later remembered it as devolving into chaos that turned Palestinians against one another. “All those who had grievances profited from the situation to take vengeance on their enemies in the name of the revolution to the point that the whole country was enveloped by confusion and distress,” he wrote in the late 1940s from Lebanon, to which he had fled in 1937.²⁹ His opinion of the Revolt changed as he saw himself and others targeted for their supposed lack of commitment to the revolutionary cause. While al-‘Issa remained nationalist, his critical view of the rebellion exposed the competing interpretations of the conflict among Palestinians.

In order to demonstrate the contested nature of the Revolt, I have focused my thesis on how each side represented the conflict, both in popular media and official discourse. This approach yields a sociopolitical history of the rebellion that I believe is more useful than one prioritizing its military aspects. While British and Zionist authorities portrayed the Revolt as an outburst of crime, I argue that Palestinians acted in a myriad of ways in their attempt to achieve independence.

²⁸ Noha Tadros Khalaf, *Les Mémoires de ‘Issa al-‘Issa: Journaliste et intellectuel palestinien (1878-1950)* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2009), 27.

²⁹ ‘Issa al-‘Issa, as qtd. in Khalaf, *‘Issa al-‘Issa*, 226.

Chapter One explores the goals and tactics of the lower classes during the Revolt. It provides an overview of the rebellion's progression while highlighting the tensions that arose between rural rebels and urban elites as elites found their privileges threatened. Chapter Two uses 'Issa al-'Issa as a case study of upper class representations of the Revolt. I argue that while supporting the Revolt wholeheartedly in *Falastin*, al-'Issa grew personally disillusioned because of the demands placed on him by rebels. His memoir demonstrates that upper class characterizations could differ widely from those of the lower classes. In Chapter Three, I transition into British and Zionist characterizations of the rebellion. Newspapers and official records demonstrate how the British government and Zionist authorities used the language of criminology to describe the Revolt. The Revolt's defeat cemented this language as the hegemonic narrative surrounding the rebellion. In my conclusion, I align my work with newer historiography that challenges pre-existing narratives in order to reveal the complexities behind Palestinian actions during the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939.

Chapter One

“All Must Wear the *Kūfiya*:” Palestinian Tensions during the Arab Revolt

On August 26, 1938, at the height of the Revolt, the rebel leadership commanded all Palestinian townsmen to discard the Ottoman *tarbush* in favor of the *kūfiya*, the traditional rural headdress. According to rebel headquarters in Damascus, this move was adopted to “demonstrate the complete solidarity of the residents of the country with the struggle, and as a sign that everyone in the country is a rebel.”³⁰ While promoted as creating a national symbol that would also help fighters blend into urban areas, the order exposed the tensions between a newly empowered rural peasantry and an urban upper class. Because many upper class notables preferred the *tarbush*, mandating the *kūfiya* represented a symbolic inversion of traditional hierarchies through the medium of clothing. Many urbanites were reluctant to abandon an article of clothing that they associated with modernity. The prominent Nashashībî family continued to wear the *tarbush* as a statement of opposition against the Revolt, with the political leader Fakhrî Nashashībî claiming that there “is no national significance in [the *kūfiya*] at all.”³¹ The *kūfiya* issue encapsulated the larger regional and class tensions that were disrupting the unity of the Revolt.

While the rebellion began as a unified national movement, it developed tensions over the course of three years that hampered its effectiveness. Nearly all Palestinians adhered to the national boycott and strike that started in spring 1936 and supported the armed uprising that occurred simultaneously in the countryside. While rural peasants did most of the fighting, wealthy urbanites lent much needed financial support to the cause. Yet the rebels’ gains in 1937-38 and the consequent disruption of traditional hierarchies caused tensions to emerge along

³⁰ Quoted in Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 32.

³¹ Fakhrî Nashashībî, as qtd. in Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 33.

regional and class lines. As rural rebels made surprising inroads into towns like Jerusalem and Tulkarm, urban elites found their influence threatened. Fearing the loss of traditional class privileges, many formerly sympathetic businessmen and political leaders turned against the Revolt. While the British military inflicted losses on the rebels in 1938-39, upper class notables gradually withdrew financial and political support.³² Palestinian national unity lay in disarray by the Revolt's conclusion.

Palestinian society preceding the rebellion was characterized by stark socioeconomic inequality. By 1936 the population had reached 1,336,578, up from 752,048 in 1922. The majority of Palestinians still lived in the countryside of northern and central Palestine as opposed to the coastal cities of Jaffa and Haifa. However, the late Ottoman era saw a shift in control "over local administration and tax collection from rural Shaykhs to an emerging class of urban notables," writes Sonia El-Nimr.³³ Land laws allowed urban notables and a rising commercial bourgeoisie to acquire vast amounts of land, and many peasants became share-croppers for these large landowners, both local and absentee. Urban elites thus assumed an increasing degree of control over the lives of rural residents, even as the two sectors of society usually lived far apart from one another.³⁴ Social and political power was rooted in families, and no two families were more powerful than the Husaynîs and Nashâshîbîs. Aside from being extraordinarily wealthy, these two clans held administrative positions during the British Mandate that were often inherited from the Ottoman era. They competed bitterly for political influence both in the lead-up to and throughout the Revolt.³⁵ The regional, class, and familial differences characterizing 1930s Palestine revealed a country that would face enormous difficulties in sustaining national unity.

³² Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 34.

³³ El-Nimr, "The Arab Revolt," 176.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

Palestinian actions during the Revolt varied according to region and class. The failed uprising of Shaykh al-Qassâm in 1935 ignited a general strike and armed revolt that spread across the countryside and dismantled the British hold on Palestine. While nominally headed by a wealthy urban leadership, the rural peasantry emerged as the main force behind the Revolt. *Mujâhidîn* spearheaded guerrilla attacks on British security forces that resulted in the Palestinian takeover of key cities by late 1937.³⁶ Emboldened by their success, these rural fighters envisioned an independent Palestine that would be free of both British imperialism and Zionist expansion. Despite these achievements, urban elites felt threatened by the rebels' quick gains and incursions into towns like Jerusalem and Nablus. While the upper class leaders desired an independent Palestine, they hoped for one that would maintain class hierarchies.³⁷ The rapid changes caused by the national movement led some to collaborate with a British military that had regained its footing by the middle of that year. The divergent visions of post-colonial Palestine hindered national unity in the later stages of the Revolt.

Al-Qassâm's actions preceding the rebellion led to him being viewed as a martyr for the Palestinian national cause. Arriving in the coastal city of Haifa in 1921, al-Qassâm emerged as both a popular Islamic preacher who proselytized among the lower classes and a political activist responsible for founding a branch of the Young Men's Muslim Association. Convinced of the need for militancy against the British, he became involved with clandestine armed groups responsible for several attacks during the early 1930s. While al-Qassâm's own uprising in Ya'bad Forest in 1935 was quickly crushed by the British and led to his death, it sealed his reputation as a national hero for Palestinians. As Matthew Kelly explains, rural Palestinians were

³⁶ Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, 190.

³⁷ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 32.

elated that someone “was finally *fighting* the British.”³⁸ His actions inspired Palestinians who were exasperated with the slow, non-confrontational approach practiced by traditional leaders up until this point. While no tombstone was erected at his place of death in northern Palestine, Palestinians built a memorial to al-Qassâm in Haifa. “The mausoleum quickly became a popular site of pilgrimage for Palestinians, who regarded Qassâm as a kind of national saint,” writes Ted Swedenburg.³⁹ Al-Qassâm’s willingness to die for the national cause electrified Palestinians and proved a catalyst for the general strike of 1936 and the ensuing armed revolt.

These rural Palestinians who were inspired by al-Qassâm’s example executed decentralized, grassroots-organized attacks on British forces in the beginning of the Revolt. Many villagers remembered the rebellion as one of spontaneous guerrilla warfare. Veterans “related that the men in their hamlets set up bands spontaneously, in response to the general atmosphere of insurgency, rather than at the suggestion or order of rebel commanders,” explains Swedenburg, revealing the rural beginnings of the rebellion.⁴⁰ Many youth groups expressed their support for the actions of their rural countrymen. The June 19, 1936 issue of *Falastin* published a letter from a student committee in Tulkarm to the fighters and exiles, which stated: “The Arab Student Committee of Tulkarm salutes you and your manhood, friendship, and sacrifice on the path of God and motherland,” thereby displaying the nationalist fervor that had taken hold of the country.⁴¹ The peasants undertook armed ambushes against British patrols in 1936 and, after a pause following the end of the strike, again in late 1937. Villagers had a strong understanding of the mountainous areas and were often able to evade British countermeasures.

³⁸ Matthew Kraig Kelly, “Crime in the Mandate,” 101.

³⁹ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁴¹ “Arab Student Committee in Tulkarem,” *Falastin*, June 19, 1936 (<http://awraq.birzeit.edu/sites/default/files/19%20June%201936%20checked.pdf>).

One British colonial report from 1936 lamented that “British soldiers are no match in the hills for lightly clad natives who...can drop their weapons pro tem and become peaceful ploughmen and goatherds until the military have passed by.”⁴² These decentralized actions frustrated British efforts to quell the Revolt in the countryside.

While much of the initial uprising was organized in rural areas, the central command played a large role in recruitment and gradually increased its supervision of the Revolt. The Arab Higher Committee in Jerusalem and Jaffa in 1936 sent commanders into rural areas to collect arms and recruit men. While many of these commanders were Palestinian, some came from places like Damascus and Beirut to lead the Revolt. These commanders demanded that peasants contribute men and arms to the uprising. They were usually met with acceptance by villagers who were more than eager to inflict blows on the British. As the rebellion continued, the central command increased its coordination with local initiatives.⁴³ However, the exile of many of the political heads of the Revolt in 1936-37 left a gap in domestic leadership. This gap was filled by fighters from Syria and Lebanon who quickly assumed positions of command within the Revolt. Fawzi al-Qawuqji, a Syrian officer in the Iraqi army, established himself as a leading commander in Palestine. In his Second Communique as chief rebel commander, he announced the formation of a court that intended to “maintain security and order in the country, and to put an end to treachery, collaboration, and corruption.”⁴⁴ These courts attempted to reinforce the rebels’ gains against the British and preserve national unity. Al-Qawuqji led several battles against the British before leaving Palestine after the Arab Higher Committee called off the strike. The “first successful attempt to organize the rebels in a hierarchical structure under one leadership came

⁴² Qtd. in Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 126.

⁴³ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 123-124.

⁴⁴ “Communique No. 2 of the General Command of the Arab Revolt in Palestine,” as qtd. in A.W. Kayyali, ed., *Watha’iq al-Muqawama* (Beirut: 1968), in El-Nimr, “The Arab Revolt,” 166.

from al-Qawuqji,” explains Sonia El-Nimr, demonstrating how these experienced soldiers enhanced the rebellion’s organization.⁴⁵ The mixture of outside fighters and central command helped the Revolt move past its rural beginnings.

As the rebellion progressed, tensions emerged as rural fighters demanded more from wealthier urbanites. Villagers’ varied memories about these tensions differed from an elite nationalist narrative that tended to romanticize the *fallâhîn* and gloss over any evidence of disunity. Certain villagers bemoaned the seeming lack of effort among urban notables who would contribute financially but not partake in the fighting themselves. “The leadership should die before the people, not go into exile,” a former fighter complained in his characterization of the exile of elites to Lebanon and Syria as a cowardly act that left the population unprotected.⁴⁶ As the British forces retook key cities in 1938-39, the criticisms by rural fighters grew more intense, and many condemned urban elites that they deemed traitors to the national cause. Some *mujâhidîn* assassinated fellow countrymen. The ensuing chaos alienated wealthier supporters who had been initially supportive of the Revolt. Swedenburg quotes Abû Ja‘far, a wealthy urbanite and former patron of the rebellion, as saying, “Our problem was that our [military] leaders were ignorant. *Fallâhîn*. What was Abû Durra [a *mujâhidîn*]? A worker!”⁴⁷ The upper classes began to turn away from the Revolt and blame its chaotic nature on peasants’ vindictiveness and ignorance.

This sentiment exposed the fear among notables that the armed rebellion would upend traditional class hierarchies, which they hoped to maintain in a post-colonial Palestine. In certain areas, it did, as alternative state apparatuses appeared throughout the countryside in which newly

⁴⁵ El-Nimr, “The Arab Revolt,” 121.

⁴⁶ Qtd. in Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 114.

⁴⁷ Abû Ja‘far, as qtd. in *Ibid.*, 151.

appointed commanders, often young, lower class men, collected taxes and settled local disputes. Swedenburg notes that “rebels even possessed a written code of laws and regulations,” evidencing the new power structures meant to replace British colonialism.⁴⁸ While these structures were meant more as a rebuke against the British than the elites, the upper classes feared that they would decrease their authority in the future. Exasperation grew among urban elites when the order to don the *kūfiya* came in 1938. Many had no desire to replace the *tarbush* with this “backward” piece of clothing.⁴⁹ The increasing strength of rebel demands enhanced tensions among Palestinians of different classes.

The ongoing rivalry between the Husaynî and Nashâshîbî families exacerbated problems for the Revolt. Both families played important roles in the Ottoman administration and held lasting influence during the British Mandate. Hajj Amin al-Husaynî, appointed head of the Islamic Supreme Council in 1921 by the British, emerged as the political leader of the rebellion. Initially a powerful figure in Palestine, his exile to Lebanon in 1937 hindered his ability to control the Revolt. His family’s power and influence threatened that of the Nashashîbîs, the other most prominent family in Jerusalem. The Nashashîbîs and their followers, deemed the Opposition, advocated a more moderate stance toward the British and Zionists than did the Husaynîs and soon began working against the rebel movement.⁵⁰ “Peace bands” with connections to the Nashashîbîs contributed to the British counterinsurgency with attacks on rebel positions throughout Palestine. El-Nimr attributes the founding of these bands to Raghîb al-Nashashîbî, the Head of the Opposition. She characterizes them as Raghîb’s “own small war against the Husaynî faction, and in particular the Mufti [Hajj Amin].”⁵¹ While small in number,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 134.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 31-32.

⁵⁰ El Nimr, “The Arab Revolt,” 46.

⁵¹ Ibid., 210-211.

these groups demonstrated the fierce competition fostered by the ambition of rival political camps. The Husaynî-Nashashîbî rivalry developed into a problem for the Revolt as it appeared in the countryside and hindered national unity.

Hajj Amin al-Husayn's authority over the Revolt is disputed by historians. While Swedenburg asserts that the leader's importance to the rebellion diminished after his 1937 exile, others position him as a leading player through 1939. Zvi Elpeleg, an Israeli historian writing in the 1990s, argues that Hajj Amin directly controlled the Revolt from Lebanon. Once settled in the town of Dhauq Mika'il, he organized the Central Committee of the Jihad, which oversaw guerrilla attacks against British military installations and Zionist outposts. "All of this activity was carried out in accordance with orders that the local commanders received directly from Hajj Amin, by means of the central committee in Damascus," writes Elpeleg.⁵² While Hajj Amin certainly organized politically, Elpeleg may overstate his role as a military tactician. Few records indicate how the Damascus committee communicated across the border with Palestinian rebels. The rebels were sabotaging railroads and disrupting telegraph lines, while the British military was patrolling the Palestine-Lebanon border.⁵³ Communication between insurgents across national boundaries became exceedingly difficult in 1937-38. Elpeleg's portrait of Hajj Amin as a capable military leader is odd given his earlier depiction of the man as removed from the militancy of his countrymen. As late as 7 May 1936, Hajj Amin gave a speech before the Arab Higher Committee that sought assistance from Arabs for the national cause. "Although the address was characterized by anti-Jewish incitement, there was also a marked effort to prevent further confrontation with the British," explains Elpeleg.⁵⁴ While the leader privately supported

⁵² Elpeleg, *The Grand Mufti*, 49.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

the military cause, he seems to have delegated the responsibility of organizing guerrilla attacks to others. Elpeleg overstates the importance of Hajj Amin's military leadership to the Revolt post-1937.

Rural Palestinians countered claims of backwardness directed against them by pointing to the rivalries of the Husaynîs and Nashashîbîs as a factor in the downfall of the Revolt. In the years following the rebellion, they claimed that these leaders used the movement for their own ends, even going so far as to assassinate political opponents. Reflecting on the Revolt in the 1980s, some villagers attacked Hajj Amin, al-Hâjj Ibrâhîm, the mayor of Tûlkarm, and Oppositionist Sulaymân Tawqân, the mayor of Nablus "as being in cahoots with the British."⁵⁵ Swedenburg notes that some of his interviewees portrayed rebel commanders as trying to transcend rivalries by appealing to villagers' *watanîya*, or sense of nationalism. While some commanders may have acted in such a way, the breakdown of unity in 1938-39 complicates this narrative. Many rebel leaders targeted suspected traitors to the Palestinian national movement, whether they were wealthy urbanites or rural peasants. Punishments for collaborators included "putting the person in a dry well for the duration of his sentence, or keeping him in a locked room provided by the village," explains El-Nimr.⁵⁶ Rebel leaders instituted punishments for detractors that they hoped would quell dissent. The actions of Palestinians during the Revolt demonstrate that rivalries and dissension existed in both urban and rural areas.

Tensions across regional and class lines hurt the ability of Palestinians to maintain national unity in the face of British military superiority. Initially inspired by the fierce uprising of al-Qassâm, rural residents undertook decentralized attacks against British security forces. The guerrilla warfare proved effective, especially in the northern mountains where villagers had a

⁵⁵ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 112.

⁵⁶ El Nimr, "The Arab Revolt," 171.

greater knowledge of the terrain. These attacks were complemented by a central command operating in Jerusalem and Jaffa and an influx of outside fighters from the greater Levant. As the rebels made surprising gains, regional and class tensions began to become more pronounced. The strength of the rebel movement and its subversion of hierarchies startled wealthy urbanites who found their influence threatened. The placement of young rebel commanders into positions of power and the increasing demands for support alienated upper class residents who preferred a moderate approach toward the British. While nationalist in spirit, families like the Husaynîs and Nashashîbîs wanted a Palestinian state that allowed them to keep their wealth and political influence. These goals were increasingly imperiled by the rural movement. Although initially successful, the rural rebellion quickly revealed tensions in the face of British force and elite pushback.

‘Issa al-‘Issa was one of these elites who would turn against the Revolt. While his newspaper *Falastin* emerged as a strong nationalist voice for Palestinians in the 1920s and 30s, he grew increasingly doubtful about the viability of the national movement under the leadership of Hajj Amin. His political alliances drew the ire of the rebels, and he was forced to flee from Palestine in 1937.⁵⁷ Al-‘Issa’s disillusionment with the Revolt reflected the experiences of many initially supportive wealthy urbanites. In the next chapter, I use his story as a case study of upper class representations of the rebellion.

⁵⁷ ‘Issa al-‘Issa, as qtd. in Khalaf, *‘Issa al-‘Issa*, 227-228.

Chapter Two

“Chaos reigned...:” ‘Issa al-‘Issa’s Rupture with the Revolt

Writing from Lebanon in the late 1940s, a few years before his death, ‘Issa al-‘Issa had few kind words to say about the Revolt. “While the revolution had at first been directed against the English and the Jews, it transformed later into civil war; more Arabs died by Arab arms than by those of British or Jews. Chaos reigned and the fleeing and the pillages became a regular thing.”⁵⁸ His statement regarding the source of Arab deaths was inaccurate; the vast majority of Palestinian fatalities came at the hands of the British.⁵⁹ Al-‘Issa’s inaccuracy reflected his resentment toward the way in which the rebellion devolved. Remembering the Revolt that eventually forced him to flee his homeland was painful for the elderly man. While initially supportive of the revolution, he perceived it as devolving into chaos quickly in 1937. Al-‘Issa had been a strong proponent of Palestinian nationalism and political rights in his newspaper *Falastin*, which operated throughout the 20s and 30s. What caused this committed nationalist to later mourn over a Revolt that he arguably helped to bring about? How does his understanding of the rebellion disrupt narratives that stressed its total unity?

Answers to these questions lie in a thorough examination of his career as a newspaper editor and political figure in Palestine. He founded *Falastin* in Jaffa in 1911 and built the newspaper into the most popular Arabic-language news publication in Palestine by the late 20s. While the newspaper was initially focused on local issues, al-‘Issa developed a national reputation for the journal by covering British Mandatory policies and political events in surrounding Arab countries. Never one to shy away from controversial topics, he repeatedly antagonized colonial officials by publishing anti-Zionist editorials and pressing for Palestinian

⁵⁸ Ibid., 225.

⁵⁹ Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, 190.

political representation.⁶⁰ Al-‘Issa did not limit himself to the journalistic arena and became a founding member of several political parties and committees in the 20s and 30s that advocated for Palestinian self-determination. He saw himself as a developer of Palestinian nationalism, which he viewed as necessary to combat a British colonial project that was depriving Palestinians of their natural rights. Yet political rivalries led him to become increasingly critical of the national movement’s leadership, even as he used *Falastin* to defend Palestinians’ right to armed rebellion against the British.⁶¹ While al-‘Issa was careful to publicly support the rebellion, his memoir from the late 1940s depicts a man increasingly threatened by vengeful and opportunistic rebels. His decision to flee in 1937 or 1938 (historical records differ) after being individually targeted represented his final rupture with the Revolt. ‘Issa al-‘Issa emerged as a conflicted nationalist who fell victim to a rebellion that spread beyond his control.

Al-‘Issa’s characterization of the Revolt criticized the lower classes more so than did the accounts put forth by rural *mujāhidīn*. His memoirs were an upper class counterpoint to the oral histories of former rebels. While rebel accounts could differ, they tended to argue that the rebellion failed because upper class urbanites withdrew support as the British military regrouped in 1938. Both official and popular Palestinian narratives stressed the unity of the Revolt until this point. Writing in the late 40s, al-‘Issa disputed this narrative, claiming that members of his own political party, al-‘Difa, “which didn’t participate in the revolution, were victims of crimes of vengeance... certain people were assassinated” even before he was forced to flee in 1937 or 1938.⁶² His portrayal of the Revolt descending into chaos early on perhaps grew out of the trauma of being personally targeted in an assassination plot. It also reflected the need to justify

⁶⁰ Ibid., 78-79.

⁶¹ “The Spirit of the Devil,” *Falastin*, June 19, 1936.

⁶² ‘Issa al-‘Issa, as qtd. in Khalaf, *‘Issa al-‘Issa*, 225.

his alliance with the Nashashîbîs, who were vilified by most rebels following the Revolt because of their connection with “peace bands” that fought against the *mujâhidîn*.⁶³ By illustrating the Revolt as a civil war between Palestinians, al-‘Issa could portray himself as a moderate voice and thereby justify his ties with the Nashashîbîs. The newspaper editor attempted to contrast his reasonableness and foresight with the reckless leadership of Hajj Amin. His memoirs reflect a man who was still negotiating his relationship to the Palestinian national movement.

Despite his later foray into partisan politics, al-‘Issa began his career as a journalist. Born into an upper class Christian family in Jaffa in 1878, he managed to gain admittance to an American university at the turn of the century. “My penchant for journalism perhaps came earlier than when I founded *Falastin* in 1911, but when I was studying at an American university in 1897 and started publishing *Les Élités* with my friend,” al-‘Issa wrote in his memoir, revealing his early entrepreneurial spirit.⁶⁴ *Falastin* began as a twice weekly journal devoted to issues in the Arab Christian Orthodox community but quickly turned its attention to political topics as well. It increased its readership as it began to address the status of the Palestinian peasantry, which was suffering from the decimation of an Ottoman cotton industry that was being outcompeted by its European rivals. Many *fallâhîn* were forced to work on the estates of large landowners, where they assumed large debts and experienced intensive taxation.⁶⁵ Al-‘Issa’s newfound political focus unnerved the Ottoman government, which banned *Falastin* in 1915. Al-‘Issa spent the war years exiled from Palestine and returned to Jaffa in 1920 determined to republish his newspaper under what was now British colonial rule.⁶⁶ His commitment to tackling

⁶³ Matthew Hughes, “Palestinian Collaboration with the British: The Peace Bands and the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–9,” *Journal of Contemporary History* (2015), (jch.sagepub.com/), 1.

⁶⁴ ‘Issa al-‘Issa, as qtd. in Khalaf, 45.

⁶⁵ R. Michael Bracy, *Printing Class: ‘Isa al-‘Isa, Filastin, and the Textual Construction of National Identity, 1911-1931* (Plymouth, United Kingdom: United Press of America, 2011), 87-88.

⁶⁶ Khalaf, *‘Issa al-‘Issa*, 48.

serious political issues in *Falastin* regardless of the political climate prepared him for an icy relationship with the Mandatory government and an emerging Zionist movement.

Al-'Issa envisioned *Falastin* as a forum for Palestinian nationalism at a time when the possibility of self-determination was increasingly under attack. Historian Tarif Khalidi argues that urban professionals and intellectuals “manifested a passion for the Palestinian cause, and a general tone of anguish, revolt, rancor, resistance and death dominated the cultural domain” during the British Mandate.⁶⁷ Al-'Issa hoped to respond to this climate with a publication that would build unity among Palestinians for self-determination. While writing many editorials himself, he also allowed various journalists to reflect on the state of Palestinian politics under the Mandate. *Falastin* became a civic platform in which ideas about Palestinian statehood could be formulated and discussed. In her introduction to his memoir, Noha Tadros Khalaf writes that al-'Issa intended the journal to be both “a reflection on the aspirations of the nation and a tool of information, debate, and knowledge.”⁶⁸ While *Falastin* stressed the need of Palestinians to unify, it also voiced concerns over the tactics of various political parties. In a May 1934 editorial, *Falastin* criticized the recently-formed al-Istiqlal party for being insufficiently action-oriented. “This manner of operation is no different than the path of speeches that enter one ear and leave through the other, or telegrams transmitted along unending radio waves...[it] has nothing to do with the real jihad,” explained the editorial, revealing its exasperation over al-Istiqlal’s breezy idealism.⁶⁹ Al-'Issa’s own association with that party’s founding in 1932 demonstrated that he entertained opposing viewpoints in his journal. He viewed informed debate as a way to facilitate Palestinian nation-building.

⁶⁷ Tarif Khalidi, as qtd. in *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶⁹ *Falastin*, as quoted in Mustafa Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper of Public Opinion 1929-1939: Writing Up a Storm* (Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007), 75.

Al-'Issa's willingness to confront the Mandatory government and political Zionism earned him the rancor of British colonial officials. Upon his postwar return to Jaffa, he was initially denied the right to resume publication of his newspaper by the British High Commissioner. After Colonel Stirling, an intermediate official, intervened on his behalf, he received permission and began republishing *Falastin* on March 6, 1921.⁷⁰ Al-'Issa devoted the first few issues to discussing the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which lent British support to the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine. His critiques of colonial policy upset Stirling, and al-'Issa's memoirs recall a testy conversation between the two men shortly after *Falastin* had resumed publication:

Al-'Issa: I adopted these politics before the Balfour Declaration, and it is impossible for me not to continue with the same political voice...so permit me to fulfill my national work while you fulfill the obligations of your job.

Stirling: You don't know that your exile from Palestine was due to your campaigns against Zionism and that it was the Zionists who opposed your return, so do not do anything which could damage your situation.⁷¹

Stirling's motives for incorporating Zionist leaders' opinions into his argument are unclear.

While he may have personally feared for al-'Issa's safety, Stirling more likely was using all arguments available in order to make al-'Issa restrain the rhetoric of his paper. He also felt personally affronted at what he deemed inflammatory content in *Falastin* after convincing the High Commissioner to allow its republication. Al-'Issa responded to Colonel Stirling's warning by drawing on the continuity of his politics. By dating his "national work" to before the Balfour Declaration, he attempted to deflect arguments that *Falastin* was unfairly anti-Zionist. He viewed the British sponsorship of political Zionism as only one of many obstacles to be overcome.

⁷⁰ Khalaf, *'Issa al-'Issa*, 256.

⁷¹ 'Issa al-'Issa, as qtd. in *Ibid.*, 204.

In a bid to turn public opinion against Zionist expansion in Palestine, al-‘Issa occasionally allowed opinions to be published in *Falastin* that appear naïve in hindsight. In an editorial from the first Mandate-era issue, al-‘Issa wrote of Palestinian fears that “the Turks tried to sell this earth as merchandise to the Zionists, in order to procure money that they desperately needed” during WWI.⁷² There is little evidence to support this claim, which runs counter to the Ottomans’ efforts to defend their sultanate from a British and Arab offensive during the war years. As tensions rose in the late 1920s and early 30s, *Falastin* included a few editorials that overemphasized factionalism within the Zionist movement. Palestinian journalists sensed an opportunity with the rise of the Revisionist Zionist party led by Ze’ev Jabotinsky in the 20s. Jabotinsky advocated a more aggressive stance against Palestinians that challenged the moderate approach of Chaim Weizmann, the political leader of the Zionist movement. Witnessing tensions within Zionist politics, a *Falastin* editorial from March 3, 1931 claimed that “political Zionism is dead. Weizmann himself was forced to admit this when he declared that Zionism had as a goal the establishment of a communal (binational) State in Palestine, [and] the majority of Jews did not share this opinion.”⁷³ The author saw the rising influence of the Revisionist Zionists as evidence that the British would be forced to renege on an alliance with the Zionist movement as a whole. Yet the British responded to Jabotinsky by banning him from returning to Palestine when he briefly left in the 30s, and the Zionist movement soldiered on. Certain editorials in *Falastin* demonstrated obtuseness in their coverage of the Zionist movement.

Al-‘Issa supplemented his journalistic work with political activities as well. In his memoir, he recalled his contribution to the formation of different political parties in the 20s and 30s. “Palestine became a place of revolts and disturbances. Many Arab Congresses were held,

⁷² Ibid., 79.

⁷³ Ibid., 91.

followed by executive Committees...under the presidency of Mûsâ Kâzim al-Husaynî. I was always a member of these committees,” he wrote, demonstrating his inclusion in the political formations of the time.⁷⁴ Mûsâ Kâzim al-Husaynî was a patriarch of the al-Husaynî family and headed the Arab Higher Committee (AHC) until 1934.⁷⁵ Apart from providing a forum for Palestinian voices, these committees negotiated with British colonial officials for increased Palestinian political representation. They also sent delegations to Britain to advocate for the Palestinian national cause. The first AHC emerged from an electoral vote of the third Arab National Congress in 1920. Due to his inclusion in that first committee, Noha Tadros Khalaf concludes that al-‘Issa “was one of the thirty-three members of what defined the first political management team in Palestine.”⁷⁶ *Falastin*’s prominence on the national scene combined with al-‘Issa’s wealthy background earned him acceptance into this elite committee. This group set the stage for a proliferation of political parties, one of the earliest of which was the al-Istiqlal party, founded in 1932 by an acquaintance of al-‘Issa’s named Muhammad ‘Izzat Darwaza.⁷⁷ Al-‘Issa’s political actions showcased a man eager to provide leadership for the Palestinian national cause.

Al-‘Issa experienced a falling out with Hajj Amin al-Husaynî that would make him more critical of the national movement’s leadership. After Mûsâ Kâzim al-Husaynî’s death in 1934, Al-‘Issa campaigned to have the late leader’s position filled by a member of the Nashashîbî family. Initially neutral about Hajj Amin, al-‘Issa gradually developed a view of him as too controlling and ambitious. “My relations with Haj Amin were good...but he started to meddle in all affairs and tried to dominate the Higher Committee...which was criticized by Mûsâ Kâzim

⁷⁴ Ibid., 211.

⁷⁵ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 83.

⁷⁶ Khalaf, *‘Issa al-‘Issa*, 49.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 27.

Pacha and all the other members. . . I started then to criticize certain actions and interventions of his,” wrote al-‘Issa in his memoirs.⁷⁸ Grappling with a way to justify his shift to an alliance with the Nashashibîs, al-‘Issa claimed that even members of Hajj Amin’s own family criticized him. Al-‘Issa’s friendship with Ragheb Beyk al-Nashashîbî contributed to his dislike of Hajj Amin. When Ragheb Beyk lost the Jerusalem mayoral elections in 1934 to Jamal Pacha al-Husaynî, a relative of Hajj Amin, al-‘Issa pointed to the loss as evidence of Hajj Amin’s political machinations. “A grand propaganda campaign occurred against [Ragheb Beyk], orchestrated by Jamal Pacha al-Husaynî. . . with the support of Haj Amin. . . who saw in Ragheb Beyk a political adversary,” wrote al-‘Issa, convinced that Hajj Amin’s ambition was driving him to unfairly influence elections.⁷⁹ Al-‘Issa’s final split with Hajj Amin came when the newly elected president of the AHC collaborated to keep him from traveling to England with a delegation representing Arab Palestinian interests. Because al-‘Issa intended to represent the al-‘Difa party, which he helped found with Ragheb Beyk, Hajj Amin ordered a political partner of his, Alfred Roque, to take al-‘Issa’s place. According to al-‘Issa, “they posed all sorts of obstacles preventing my departing. Hajj Amin succeeded in replacing me with Alfred Roque. One can imagine the future repercussions of such an incident.”⁸⁰ The newspaper editor’s dramatic language demonstrated how he felt personally slighted by this move. Al-‘Issa’s memoirs characterize Hajj Amin as politically untrustworthy.

Despite reservations about Hajj Amin, al-‘Issa defended the Revolt as a legitimate response to British oppression. *Falastin* covered instances of British police aggression against Palestinians. In its June 19, 1936 issue, *Falastin* reported the inspection of an orange grove by

⁷⁸ ‘Issa al-‘Issa, as qtd. in *Ibid.*, 215.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 223.

policemen. “British and Jewish police came to Tulkarm, entered the grove near the bridge but didn’t find anything. Then they started terrorizing the watchmen and workers until they were forced to leave,” reported one article, displaying the disruption of working life caused by the police presence.⁸¹ This coverage echoed that from other Arab newspapers across Palestine.

“Reports of such measures appeared contemporaneously in the Arab press, and included charges of theft, the destruction of food, and ‘ill treatment’ of villagers,” writes Matthew Kelly.⁸²

Falastin was similar to other Palestinian newspapers in describing instances of British police brutality. Journalists sought to illustrate the climate of fear that they attributed to British colonial policy. In his memoir, al-‘Issa highlighted the imprisonment of several Palestinian political figures as evidence of colonial overreach. “After the decline in relations in 1933, the [British] government sent al-Ustaz al-Muzzafar, Fakhri al-Nashashîbî, Jamal al-Husaynî and others to prison in the south of Palestine... [and] didn’t release them until they promised not to participate in public affairs.”⁸³ This punishment proved a tall order for figures who had spent the majority of their lives in the public sphere. Al-‘Issa used *Falastin* as a way to document British abuses of power.

While publicly supportive of the Revolt, al-‘Issa privately regretted the divisions that characterized its later stages. His late 1940s memoir depicted the increasing violence of late 1936 and 1937. Rumors of “revolution against the British spread across the country. Tensions rose after many members of the Higher Committee were deported to the Seychelles,” al-‘Issa wrote.⁸⁴ The exile of these five Committee members accompanied the outlawing of all Palestinian political parties in late 1937. The British were responding to the assassination by Palestinians of

⁸¹ “Arab Student Committee in Tulkarm,” *Falastin*, June 19, 1936.

⁸² Kelly, “Revolt,” 34.

⁸³ ‘Issa al-‘Issa, as qtd. in Khalaf, *‘Issa al-‘Issa*, 222.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

a senior administrator in Nazareth in September of that year.⁸⁵ As the Mandatory government enhanced its pressure on the political leadership, Hajj Amin came under heightened surveillance. Fearing for his personal safety, he fled in disguise from Jaffa to Beirut in October of 1937.⁸⁶ The exiles, both forced and self-imposed, of these traditional political figures left a gap in domestic leadership for Palestinians. Khalaf argues that “the suspension of the Arab Higher Committee in October 1937 had as a consequence the destruction of all responsible leadership in the Palestinian Arab.”⁸⁷ She asserts that the outlawing of the Committee paved the way for a breakdown in political organization among Palestinians, as moderate parties like al-Difa‘ were pushed aside in favor of more militant actors. Al-‘Issa’s post-World War II representation of the rebellion seems to align with that of Khalaf. Apart from documenting the actions taken against members of al-Difa‘, al-‘Issa bemoaned the pettiness of certain revolutionaries. “All those who had grievances profited from the situation to take vengeance on their enemies in the name of the revolution,” he wrote, evidencing his displeasure with what he perceived as a rising number of personal attacks between Palestinians.⁸⁸ This perception reflected al-‘Issa’s frustration with both his and al-Difa‘’s declining influence.

Al-‘Issa’s final rupture with the Revolt came after being personally targeted. In his memoirs, he highlighted the increasing pressure placed on him by the rebel movement. Upon returning to Jaffa after a trip to Italy, his brother-in-law and nephew instructed him to begin wearing the *kūfiya*. While al-‘Issa is unclear about the date of this interaction, the order by rebels to don the *kūfiya* came on August 26, 1938, which suggests that al-‘Issa was in Jaffa until then. He outlines the demands made of him and *Falastin* by militants.

⁸⁵ Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, 190.

⁸⁶ Khalaf, *‘Issa al-‘Issa*, 225.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁸⁸ ‘Issa al-‘Issa, as qtd. in *Ibid.*, 226.

I learned after my return that revolutionaries often came to the journal, where we gave them money, flour, clothes, and all sorts of taxes that they demanded from us. I suffered greatly from the effects of these taxes after my return, and some of them came to my house in Ramallah to squeeze out funds in the name of the revolution.⁸⁹

Al-‘Issa exhibited a lack of trust that these funds would be used properly, and he became increasingly disillusioned with the tactics of *mujâhidîn* who found themselves in a position of power in the cities. Shortly after these developments, his brother-in-law was killed by unknown assailants while at work in Jaffa. Al-‘Issa’s personal endangerment reached its peak after acquaintances discovered an assassination plot against him. Al-‘Issa at first appeared incredulous at the threat. “Could this happen to someone like me, who is considered as one of the most loyal men to the Palestinian cause and who helped form the nationalist spirit?” he asked, indicating his disbelief that he would be treated as a traitor.⁹⁰ Realizing that staying in Palestine was no longer an option, he fled and eventually settled in Lebanon. Historians differ slightly on the exact date of his escape but agree that he was no longer in Palestine on January 1, 1939.⁹¹ Concerned with his legacy, al-‘Issa portrayed himself as devoted to the national cause even if his tactics differed from those of rural rebels.

Al-‘Issa’s representation of the Revolt stemmed from a need to justify his moderation to skeptical *mujâhidîn*. His close ties with the Nashashîbîs earned distrust from many peasants who viewed the family as villains due to its role in sponsoring “peace bands” that fought against the Revolt. Mustafa Kabha argues that during the rebellion, “the newspapers that expressed the views of the urban notable families, headed by *Falastin*, were compelled to become more flexible in their attitude towards the villagers.”⁹² These villagers overwhelmingly filled the ranks

⁸⁹ Ibid., 227.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 228.

⁹¹ Khalaf, *‘Issa al-‘Issa*, 117.

⁹² Kabha, *Palestinian Press*, 4.

of the rebel movement and pressured upper class residents to make sacrifices for the rebellion. Responding to these pressures and others from allies of Hajj Amin, *Falastin* maintained support for the rebellion until its conclusion. In its August 14, 1938 issue, the newspaper declared that “Arabs speak as one in their refusal of the partition and the [Jewish] national home,” alluding to the partition plan set forth by a British commission that would have divided Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab one.⁹³ *Falastin* publicly supported the rebellion even while its chief editor harbored private reservations. The risks of being seen as a collaborator with the British were high enough to impact al-‘Issa’s representation of the Revolt.

While al-‘Issa formulated his legacy in his memoir, British and Zionist representations of the Revolt emerged as the dominant narrative about the failed rebellion. While this discourse contained wildly disparate elements, certain themes emerged that would have a huge impact on how Israeli, European, and American audiences understood the rebellion. These themes will be explored in the next chapter.

⁹³ *Falastin*, August 14, 1938.

Chapter Three

“Criminal Disturbances:” British and Zionist Condemnation of the Revolt

In his 1936 memoir, Douglass Duff, the former British police inspector in Palestine known for his brutal methods, recalled several exchanges with senior Arab government officials. In one exchange, he suggested that it was “the riff-raff who are making the trouble,” demonstrating his belief that a small group of Arab Palestinian agitators were responsible for rising tensions.⁹⁴ In another conversation, Duff wondered whether the Mandatory government would start “concentration camps for you people, and Black-and-Tan methods for the population.”⁹⁵ These intimations recalled the ruthless attacks on civilians by British soldiers during the Irish War of Independence. Duff openly admitted to using similar tactics as police chief in Palestine in the 1920s. While Mandatory officials distanced themselves from Duff’s comments, his statements reflected a need on the part of the British government to both contain and discredit a newly burgeoning rebellion in 1936.

The Mandatory government criminalized the Revolt in its discourse. Matthew Kelly asserts that “both the British and the Zionist leadership in 1936-1939 characterized the rebel movement not primarily as a national, but rather as a criminal enterprise.”⁹⁶ These characterizations led to terms like “armed gangs” and “disturbances” being used to describe the rebels and their actions. The arrests of Arab Higher Committee members as well as clergymen, students, and farmers in 1937 reflected British officials’ desire to quell what it deemed a series of violent, criminal acts. British security forces accompanied these detentions with raids that began in early 1936 and targeted the homes of peasants.⁹⁷ Swedenburg suggests that the British

⁹⁴ Douglass Valder Duff, *Palestine Picture* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936), as qtd. in Kelly, “Crime in the Mandate,” 146.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Kelly, “Crime in the Mandate,” 2.

⁹⁷ Kelly, “Revolt,” 34.

perceived the Revolt as a lower class instigated movement, rather than an upper class instigated one.

Zionist leaders inaccurately portrayed the Revolt as instigated by the upper classes but agreed with the British that it was a criminal enterprise. One Zionist newspaper, *Davar le-Yeladim*, differed from the British argument of a lower class movement. It asserted that the Palestinian political leadership had organized the “gangs of robbers – most of whom were criminals – murders and bandits who had fled from their own countries to escape the arm of the law.”⁹⁸ While this characterization grossly exaggerated the criminal backgrounds of rebels, it differed from British portrayals of a poor people’s movement. It characterized the rebels as chaotic actors who were being manipulated by wealthy political and religious leaders.⁹⁹ Whatever the origins of the rebellion, Zionist publications like *Davar* and *The Palestine Post* urged British Mandate leaders to take more forceful action against the rebels. The British military offensive of 1938 proved too much for a fracturing rebel movement, and Palestinian unity lay in disarray by 1939.

British and Zionist representations of the Revolt began early and responded to each of the two groups’ interests. British officials and newspapers used the term “armed gangs” to describe Palestinian rebels because they saw these people as criminals who were endangering law and order in Palestine. In the minds of British officials, the Mandatory government had legitimate authority over Palestine, and criminals had to be punished accordingly. Zionist journalists and political leaders had a similar reaction to the rebels but also highlighted violence committed against Jews in order to elicit international sympathy for the Zionist cause. The tendency among

⁹⁸ *Davar le-Yeladim*, as qtd. in Ian Black, *Zionism and the Arabs 1936-1939* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1986), 54-55.

⁹⁹ Black, *Zionism*, 54.

Zionist newspapers to assign blame for the Revolt's organization on upper class notables revealed an underestimation of the capabilities of lower class rebels. The Revolt's defeat allowed the discourse of criminality to become the hegemonic narrative reaching English-speaking audiences about the rebellion.

Determined to quell a rising number of "disturbances," British security forces undertook a brutal campaign against Arab Palestinians in early 1936. Tensions were running high on April 20, 1936 in Jaffa and Tel Aviv after a false rumor about Jews killing two or more Arabs left fourteen Jews and two Arabs dead. In late April, the national strike and boycott against British and Jewish goods began and quickly spread across Arab Palestinian towns and villages. While the strike was largely nonviolent, the Mandatory government worried that the Palestinians' newfound unity would lead to a wider armed revolt. This fear drove a rising number of searches and seizures by police forces.¹⁰⁰ Referencing the violent methods practiced by Duff in the 1920s, the Anglican archdeacon in Jerusalem wrote the colonial chief secretary a concerned letter on June 2: "It is believed amongst some at any rate of the British Police that they have been definitely ordered to 'Duff them [the Arabs] up.'"¹⁰¹ This concern over British police methods was not only shared by Christian missionaries. Upon visiting Jerusalem on May 12-14, Duff himself remarked on the violence to which civilians were subjected by police officers in one search. "I saw one Arab being savagely kicked by a brawny man in khaki, whilst an old man with a grey beard received a nasty cut from a leather hand-whip," described Duff, demonstrating the brutality of the inspection.¹⁰² This admission by a former inspector known for his use of torture revealed the renewed use of aggressive tactics by security forces.

¹⁰⁰ Kelly, "Revolt," 29-30.

¹⁰¹ Archdeacon to chief secretary, June 2, 1936, as qtd. in *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰² Douglass Valder Duff, *Palestine Picture* (London: Houghter & Stoughton, 1936), as qtd. in *Ibid.*

The police searches extended beyond major towns and into the countryside as well. Kelly argues that raids in villages occurred in April and May with the purpose of terrorizing villagers into submission. He quotes a War Office report disclosing that raids “took the form of searches for arms and wanted men by troops and police and, being fairly severe in nature, had also a punitive effect which began to produce most satisfactory results in the more truculent villages.”¹⁰³ The War Office deemed the searches “severe” enough that previously belligerent villages began to be placated. Kelly goes on to cite Kenneth Williams, a prominent journalist of the time, as informing the new colonial secretary of “excesses” against Arab Palestinians. Williams’ sources “were under the impression that the conduct of the troops had the approval of the High Commissioner.”¹⁰⁴ Based on these findings, Kelly asserts that the colonial government used these raids as an excuse to indiscriminately punish villagers. While the exact intentions of colonial officials who ordered these raids are unclear, the Mandatory government allowed a permissive atmosphere to permeate police actions of the time period.

High Commissioner Arthur Wauchope supplemented these police actions with demolitions in Jaffa that he hoped would stymie “lawless” rebels. In a confidential dispatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies dated July 6, 1936, he describes the decision-making process leading to the demolition of several buildings in late June. Because of Jaffa’s importance as a port city, the Mandatory government viewed Palestinian uprisings there as inimical to its economic and political control over the coast. Disturbances became criminal actions that had to be crushed. “The most lawless elements in Jaffa dwell in the Old City, where they have hitherto been able successfully to defy the police and to resist any attempt to establish effective control,”

¹⁰³ “Military Lessons,” War Office, as qtd. in *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰⁴ Colonial Office, note of conversation with Mr. Kenneth Williams, June 5, 1936, as qtd. in *Ibid.*

wrote Wauchope in his July telegram.¹⁰⁵ He pointed to the crowdedness of the Old City as a reason for the rebels' successful evasion of British security forces. While making a fleeting reference to the Arab quarter's congested conditions, Wauchope readily admitted that the primary purpose of the building demolitions was to scatter armed resistance to British rule. In order to make the demolitions appealing to authorities in London, he painted a portrait of violent rebels endangering law and order in Palestine. British patrols outside the Old City "were constantly being bombed or sniped and the Central Police Barracks were under constant fire from houses in the Old City. In short the old town of Jaffa became a rebel stronghold, which continued to defy the forces of law and order with impunity," the High Commissioner explained, revealing the dangers posed by armed Palestinian rebels.¹⁰⁶ In Wauchope's eyes, armed rebels represented a threat to a Mandatory government that was the only hope for social order in Palestine.

The process under which the building demolitions were carried out showcased divisions among colonial officials over how best to placate Palestinians. Wauchope's purpose in sending his confidential telegram to the chief colonial secretary was to defend his methods from criticism by Sir Michael McDonnell, the Chief Justice in Palestine. The two men both agreed that the demolitions should have taken place but differed in how Palestinians should have been notified. Fearing that an admission of the demolitions' military nature would further stoke Palestinians into armed revolt, Wauchope tried to allay suspicions by stressing the "administrative" reasons behind the destruction of the buildings. In the communiqué and warnings issued to residents of the Old City, he sought to "allay apprehensions by stressing, without any sacrifice of the truth,

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Wauchope to William Ormsby-Gore, "Situation in Palestine," November 4, 1936, The National Archives, FO 954/19A/3 <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C6562916>, 2.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

the administrative rather than military aspect of the operation, the normal rather than the abnormal.”¹⁰⁷ Wauchope’s definition of the “truth” is questionable here because it rests on the assumption that there was another reason behind the demolitions other than crushing resistance to the presence of British troops in Jaffa. Chief Justice McDonnell picked up on the insincerity in Wauchope’s communications with Palestinians, noting “the singularly disingenuous lack of moral courage” and “glaring case of evasiveness” evidenced by the High Commissioner’s communiqués.¹⁰⁸ While McDonnell may have critiqued Wauchope’s methods, both men agreed that Palestinian resistance deserved a strong military response.

Falastin’s late June coverage stressed the overwhelming British military presence that accompanied the building demolitions in Jaffa. In its June 19 issue, the newspaper worked hard to illustrate the nonviolent characteristics of the national strike that was occurring at the same time as the demolitions. “The sixtieth day [of the strike] in Jaffa came closest to resembling what is pictured in Genesis. Warehouses and stores were closed, and the streets were empty and free...Jaffa’s port was still, and there was a spirit of faith above it all,” read a front-page article.¹⁰⁹ *Falastin*’s editors hoped to showcase the unity of Arab Palestinians who were resisting British colonial rule. It juxtaposed this article with one that revealed the large number of British military reinforcements brought in to supervise the demolitions. A “number of British soldiers came with [the commanders] with four machine guns, and two big cars filled with containers of dynamite...the British police and the armed soldiers went to the Old City to inspect and threw two pieces of dynamite as a warning of the beginning of the destruction,” explained the second article.¹¹⁰ The demolitions were a sizeable operation that included many British soldiers. While

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁸ Sir Michael McDonnell, as qtd. in Ibid., 4.

¹⁰⁹ “The Spirit of the Devil,” *Falastin*, June 19, 1936.

¹¹⁰ “The Army Performs an Operation (Improvement and Beautification),” *Falastin*, June 19, 1936.

the newspaper was concerned with the facts of the demolitions, it also portrayed the disruptions to daily life posed by British military actions. In its quest to build new roads and ports, the Mandatory government “put in front of the big mosque a number of barriers...and they put barriers to the entrances of one street that leads to the port...and left at the entrance of each small port an inspection point [at which they required] a very thorough inspection by soldiers and some members of the British police.”¹¹¹ *Falastin*’s editors subtly contested the beneficial impact of these military operations in their coverage. British measures amounted to a policy of containment as colonial officials sought greater control over Palestine.

The Palestine Post’s reporting reflected a desire to maintain the powerful British government’s support for political Zionism. The *Post* emerged as one of the most widely-read newspapers in Palestine and meticulously reported on events in the Middle East and Europe. Yet its interests were also intimately tied to realizing the promises of the Balfour Declaration of 1917. While reporting on the activities of the Royal Commission in January 1937, the newspaper asserted that Lord Peel, the lead commissioner, had stated that “the drafters of the Mandate intended a Jewish National Home in Palestine and therefore did not trouble specifically to provide that the Arabs should remain a majority.”¹¹² The *Post* suggested that Lord Peel understood the Mandate as supporting a Jewish and not necessarily binational state in Palestine. The newspaper consciously characterized Peel as sympathetic to the Zionist cause in order to demonstrate the achievability of a specifically Jewish state. Because of its interests in seeing this nation realized, it took pains to highlight violence committed against Jews and minimize violence by Jews against Arab Palestinians. In its January 18, 1938 issue, the newspaper described an armed skirmish between Jewish truck drivers and Palestinians: “Four Jewish truck

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² “What Did Mandate’s Draftsmen Intend?” *The Palestine Post*, January 6, 1937.

drivers of the ‘Hovala’ Company, who were part of a Palestine Potash convoy between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, engaged an armed gang which attacked them at kilometer 10 east, shortly before 6 o’clock yesterday morning.”¹¹³ The terminology of “armed gang” matters. At a time when the Revolt was gaining strength, *The Palestine Post* criminalized rebels in a way that aligned with British criminological discourse. The newspaper’s language sought to demonstrate moral superiority over Arab Palestinians at a time when a Jewish state seemed possible.

The Egyptian Gazette contributed reporting that portrayed rebellious Palestinians as unreasonable actors. Owned by British businessmen and operating out of Cairo, the newspaper relied heavily on Mandatory sources as well as coverage from *The Palestine Post*. While informative, its articles tended to be favorable toward British and Zionist interests and heavily critical of the Palestinian national movement. The editors often copied verbatim from *The Palestine Post* reports of violence that claimed Jews as victims. In its January 1, 1937 issue, the *Gazette* published a report from the *Post* saying that a “Jewish bus passenger died in the fifth highway attack on the Jaffa-Jerusalem road in ten days.”¹¹⁴ These reports were usually true and highlighted the violence that sometimes targeted Jews. Yet *The Egyptian Gazette* neglected to provide corresponding accounts of Jewish violence against Arab Palestinians. It did not cover the moment in mid-October 1936 when two Jewish men on bicycles rode up to a taxi in Tel Aviv and “fired three shots through the windows, wounding two of the four Arabs sitting inside” then left leaflets declaring that ““No Arabs shall be seen in the streets of Tel Aviv,”” as described by Matthew Kelly.¹¹⁵ Both sides were guilty of cold-blooded acts of violence. In addition to skewed depictions of events on the ground, the newspaper exaggerated the divisions within the

¹¹³ “Drivers Fire Back in Highway Attack,” *The Palestine Post*, January 18, 1938.

¹¹⁴ *The Palestine Post*, as qtd. in *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 1, 1937.

¹¹⁵ Kelly, “Crime in the Mandate,” 155.

Palestinian political leadership. The January 7, 1937 issue of the *Gazette* reported that tensions on the Arab Higher Committee were near a breaking-point as Hajj Amin butted heads with a large number of committee members who favored testifying before the British Royal Commission that had arrived to assess the deteriorating situation in Palestine. This characterization probably overemphasized friction within the Arab Higher Committee, which required the intervention of King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia and King Abdullah of Transjordan before finally appearing before the Commission.¹¹⁶ It also obscured the strong support that Hajj Amin still held in the countryside. *The Egyptian Gazette's* representation of unreasonable Palestinians compounded a discourse of criminality that attempted to delegitimize the rebellion.

Zionist journalists differed from the British in their characterization of the origins of the Revolt. While certainly frustrated with Arab Higher Committee members, Mandatory officials usually agreed that lower class Palestinians were responsible for the burgeoning rebellion. Zionist publications were skeptical about the organizational capabilities of the lower classes and argued that the rebellion was facilitated by Arab elites and inattentive British officials. Even the British chief secretary in Palestine, Sir John Hathorn Hall, complained in March 1937 that the typically moderate *Haaretz* had implied “that Government [was] supporting murderers and agitators” and that “British and Arab officials [were] supporting rebellious people.”¹¹⁷ Hall was incredulous that *Haaretz* would accuse the Mandatory government of collaborating with Palestinians at a time when British and Zionist goals were so closely intertwined. His ensuing suspension of *Haaretz* showcased the tensions between a colonial government and a Zionist publication that viewed the Arab rebellion as a direct threat to the Jewish community in Palestine.

¹¹⁶ *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 7, 1937.

¹¹⁷ Sir John Hathorn Hall to Sir Cosmo Parkinson, March 11, 1937, as qtd. in Kelly, “Crime in the Mandate,” 161.

Zionist authorities tended to assign blame on Hajj Amin and then on external actors for the rebellion's continuation. Paralleling *The Egyptian Gazette*, *The Palestine Post* described Hajj Amin as the stubborn holdout who refused to cooperate with the British Royal Commission until the intervention of more reasonable actors. The newspaper eagerly reported on the problems caused by Hajj Amin's position: "The failure to arrive at a definite decision by the Higher Committee has caused despondency in Arab political circles and some Arabs have already decided to appear before the Royal Commission which, without the approval of the Higher Committee, considerably undermines that body's prestige."¹¹⁸ The *Post* pointed to disagreements between Hajj Amin and other members as evidence that the whole Committee was disintegrating. While certain Palestinians, including Nashashibi family members, wanted to appear before the Royal Commission, many Arabs felt that cooperating with the commission only played into the Mandate's hands. The *Post* created a false impression that noncooperation was an unreasonable, extreme position. Ted Swedenburg argues that after Hajj Amin's escape to Lebanon in late 1937, Zionist leaders portrayed the Revolt as influenced by external actors. According to them, outside figures used criminal proxies to unleash an "unprecedented campaign of terror and violence" that intimidated Arab Palestinians into prolonging the rebellion.¹¹⁹ This explanation aligns with publications like *Haaretz* and *The Palestine Post* that portrayed influential elites as stirring up the passions of lower class criminals. These characterizations would continue to influence the discourse after the Revolt's defeat.

After defeating the rebellion militarily, Britain used the White Paper of 1939 to give concessions to the Palestinians that the Mandatory government hoped would limit future unrest. As British troops unleashed a counteroffensive in late 1938, Palestinian unity collapsed and left

¹¹⁸ "Arab Higher Committee Deadlocked Again," *The Palestine Post*, January 4, 1937.

¹¹⁹ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 12.

the rural rebels in disarray. Despite the government's military victory, the May 1939 release of the White Paper reflected the British realization that Arab resistance to Zionism and the Mandate was strong. Hoping to placate Arab Palestinians as World War II broke out, it announced plans for an independent Palestine within ten years. "The independent State should be one in which Arabs and Jews share government in such a way as to ensure that the essential interests of each community are safeguarded," announced His Majesty's Government, thereby abandoning its earlier devotion to the creation of an exclusively Jewish state.¹²⁰ Recognizing Arab political rights, it advocated for a binational state in which Jews and Arabs would share governance. It highlighted a thriving Jewish economy and the presence of political and educational organizations as evidence that the Jewish national home was already well established in Palestine. The White Paper decided that for "each of the next five years a quota of 10,000 Jewish immigrants will be allowed" with accommodation for 25,000 additional refugees, in a nod to heightened persecution of Jews in Europe.¹²¹ The British government hoped that the continuance of some Jewish immigration would mollify opposition from Zionists.

Despite British hopes, the White Paper proved unpopular to those affected on the ground. It incensed the Zionist community, which viewed the increasing persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany as an existential threat. Determined to reclaim Palestine as a safe haven for Jews, Zionist leaders rejected the White Paper and adopted an increasingly aggressive position against both the British and Arab Palestinians. The document was not popular with Palestinians either. Its ambiguity regarding the continuation of land sales and the political structures of the future Palestinian state worried many residents who had seen the British government renege on

¹²⁰ "British White Paper of 1939", The Avalon Project, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/brwh1939.asp (April 20, 2016).

¹²¹ Ibid.

promises made before. Nevertheless, most Arab political leaders were inclined to accept the document until the intervention of Hajj Amin. Hajj Amin's protestations eventually secured a rejection of the White Paper from the Arab Higher Committee.¹²² While ignored by Zionists and Palestinians, the White Paper emerged as Britain's de facto policy in Palestine for the duration of WWII.

The rebellion's failure paved the way for British and Zionist characterizations to emerge as the dominant discourse surrounding the rebellion. The Mandatory government's renewed hold on Palestine ensured that academics favorable to Zionism and highly critical of Arab Palestinian actors would rise to prominence. Hajj Amin's visit to Nazi Germany on the eve of WWII did not help matters. By taking refuge in a place where he would be free from British capture, the political leader of the rebellion unknowingly delegitimized the Revolt in the eyes of the international community. Zionist leaders could tarnish the Revolt by linking its public face to the horrors of the Holocaust. Yad Vashem, the Holocaust national museum in Jerusalem, portrays Hajj Amin only as a Nazi collaborator, thereby implicating the entire Palestinian people in Nazism.¹²³ Until recently, Israeli historiography tended to portray Hajj Amin as a man on the edge of extremism and rebels as criminal, violent actors. "Extreme groups, particularly the younger militant organisations, were pressuring him to step-up the struggle," wrote Zvi Elpeleg about the pressures facing Hajj Amin in 1936.¹²⁴ These terms reflect the consensus that rebels were radical, violent agents as opposed to participants in a national struggle. Monty Noam Penkower evinced a similar view in his description of the "renewed wave of Arab terrorism" that was occurring in Palestine in 1938.¹²⁵ While such perceptions were not shared by Arab

¹²² Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 116.

¹²³ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 45.

¹²⁴ Elpeleg, *The Grand Mufti*, 42.

¹²⁵ Penkower, *Palestine in Turmoil*, 515.

Palestinians, they contributed to English-speaking audiences' understanding of the Revolt. Contested representations are still being grappled with in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict today.

Conclusion

How do we make sense of the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939 in the context of the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict? As historians grapple with the 1930s rebellion, news headlines demonstrate the immediacy of today's conflict. "A soldier serving in reserve duty was lightly wounded Tuesday morning in a stabbing attack at the Gush Etzion Junction in the West Bank. The Palestinian assailant was shot and killed at the scene," reported Gili Cohen and Jack Khoury in *Haaretz* on January 5, 2016.¹²⁶ Acts of violence in the West Bank continue to ripple across the international consciousness, only now with the speed and efficiency that global media and communications provide. Conflicts in the area are contributing to how political leaders across the Middle East shape policy. Historians should be careful to draw hasty conclusions about events today based on a rebellion that occurred eighty years ago. Such behavior would prove a disservice to the general public. But an informed and holistic understanding of the Revolt of 36-39 can provide an entryway into a historiography that still resonates today.

The term "contested representations" almost obscures the animosity of feeling on all sides at the end of the Revolt. While many *fallâhîn* were reeling from devastating losses by the British, they were directing much of their frustration at upper class notables and other betrayers of the national cause. Upper class figures like the Nashashîbîs were struggling to explain their infidelity to a rebellion that had proved beyond their control while at the same time working to ensure that they would remain in the good graces of the Mandatory government. Mandatory officials were taken aback by the ferocity of the rebellion and tried to craft new policy that would placate both Palestinians and Zionists. Zionist leaders united in their denunciation of the armed

¹²⁶ Gili Cohen and Jack Khoury, "Israeli Soldier Lightly Wounded in Gush Etzion Stabbing," *Haaretz*, January 5, 2016 <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.695507>.

rebellion and pressured the British to hasten the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Contested representations of the conflict shaped how actors in Palestine pursued future national goals.

The subsequent perpetration of the Holocaust lent international legitimacy to the necessity for a Jewish national home. The actions of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis left millions of Jews dead and devastated the remaining Jewish community in Europe. While Hitler's persecution of Jews was certainly known during WWII, the true extent of Auschwitz and other concentration camps was only unearthed and publicized after the war's conclusion. While representing a culmination of anti-Semitism in Nazi-controlled Europe, the Holocaust also forced global leaders to acknowledge unfounded animosity toward Jews in many of their own countries. International sympathy rose in nations that until now had been reluctant to take in more Jewish refugees, and Jewish self-determination became a pressing political issue. Zionism became increasingly appealing to a religious community that seemed to experience discrimination in whatever country it found itself in. Zionists advocated for a return to an ancestral homeland that offered economic opportunity and fraternity. American officials joined the call for the establishment of a national home for the Jews. Pressure rose on Britain from both Zionist leaders and a newly sympathetic United States to hasten the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 had as an unintended consequence the relegation of Palestinian discourse to the periphery. While Arab Palestinian perspectives were never treated as the dominant voice in Mandatory Palestine, they strongly opposed Britain's sponsorship of the Zionist movement. This sponsorship began with the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and continued with the facilitation of Jewish immigration and the favorable subsidies that the Mandatory government provided the Zionist community in Palestine. Palestinians objected to the preferential treatment afforded Zionists and the deterioration of their livelihoods that came

with rapid land sales. The national movement displayed surprising moments of strength, as evidenced by the Revolt of 1936-39 and the alarmed reaction to it by the British colonial government. Yet while providing self-determination for one group of people, Israeli independence ironically relegated another group to the background. The 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which caused the deaths of thousands, created the Palestinian refugee problem. In addition to losing their livelihoods and ancestral homeland, these Palestinians also lost claim to a discourse that increasingly branded them as outsiders and radical actors. The emergence of prominent academics who fiercely defended Zionism would prove the inferiority with which Palestinians were treated in the historical domain.

Historians like Zvi Elpeleg and Monty Poam Penkower represent a discourse of defensive Zionism. While accomplished historians, these scholars too often label Arab Palestinian actors in the 1930s as “extremists.” Their interest in Palestinian decision-making only extends to the point that it proves the legitimacy of Zionism. Elpeleg dismisses the violence of 1937-1939 as an example of Arab “terrorism.” He describes the “horrific means” of violence practiced by the rebels and contrasts them with *havlagah*, the policy of restraint practiced by Labor Zionists of the period, which he designates as “one of the extraordinary manifestations of Jewish spirit to be seen in Palestine.”¹²⁷ Elpeleg’s decision to contrast Arab violence with the restraint of certain Zionists diminishes a rebellion that was united until 1938 against the structural violence of the British Mandate. Penkower’s analysis of the violence surrounding Hajj Amin’s escape to Lebanon in 1937 demonstrates similarly troubling language. He describes violence committed by Palestinians as a “sudden outbreak of Arab terrorism between October 14 and 16, designed to distract the British police while [Hajj Amin] made good his flight.”¹²⁸ Penkower does not

¹²⁷ Zvi Elpeleg, as qtd. in Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 14.

¹²⁸ Penkower, *Palestine in Turmoil*, 439.

mention whom the violence targeted. Was this violence “terrorism?” Or did it respond to a structurally violent Mandate that put police patrols in cities and villages and disrupted the daily life of Palestinian residents? Language is everything, and the historiography practiced by Elpeleg and Penkower tends to simplify an armed revolt that most Arab Palestinians felt was justified. This simplification is driven by the desire to position Zionism as the more reasonable movement of the period.

Edward Said paved the way for a new understanding of anti-colonial struggles in the Middle East. Said’s 1978 book *Orientalism* argued that Western interpretations of the Middle East and Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries were rooted in assumptions of cultural superiority. Economic and political considerations drove imperialism, but European leaders justified their endeavors by highlighting the need to “civilize” an exotic East. This superiority complex manifested itself in the way in which British colonialists disregarded the wishes of Palestinians. Said incorporates Zionism into the colonial framework, arguing that “Zionism came fully into its own by actively destroying as many Arab traces as it could.”¹²⁹ An erasure of Arab Palestinian history accompanied a Zionist takeover of public space in Palestine. Said connects the Zionist project with a British colonial legacy.

While Zionism certainly earned the hostility of many Arab Palestinians, I argue that the rebellion of 1936-39 was directed primarily against the British Mandatory government. Arabs targeted Jews in several instances but mostly focused their attacks on British soldiers and facilities. Matthew Kelly demonstrates the tendency of British officials to ignore the structural violence that was driving these attacks. “The tendency to gloss over the role of British violence in begetting Arab violence...is not restricted to 1936. Just as the British underplayed the

¹²⁹ Edward Said, as qtd. in Swedenburg, 8.

importance of their use of force in determining the early trajectory of the rebellion in Palestine, so too did they overlook its fundamental role in shaping events in the Mandate in the period after 1936,” he writes, describing the way in which British archival documents downplayed the use of force employed by police patrols in the 1930s.¹³⁰ This technique led to the criminological discourse that emphasized the criminal rather than national characteristics of the rebellion. Rashid Khalidi demonstrates how lower class Palestinians pushed their leaders to take a more confrontational stance against the Mandate. When “radical change in the course of Palestinian political opposition to the British and to Zionism was firmly blocked by the determined resistance of the traditional notable leaders... frustrated popular discontent had to find another avenue of expression.” Khalidi points to the failed uprising of Shaykh al-Qassâm, the prolonged general strike and boycott, and the massive Revolt as evidence of this grassroots frustration.¹³¹ The emphasis on lower class organization matters because it recognizes the groundwork done by rebels who are often marginalized in the historical discourse.

Dr. Sharif Elmusa’s reflections on the Revolt confirmed the popular uprising described by scholars like Kelly and Khalidi. Dr. Elmusa, who grew up in Palestine, is a professor of Political Science at the American University in Cairo and a former research fellow at the Institute for Palestine Studies in Washington, D.C. In my interview with him, Elmusa remarked on the Revolt’s importance to Palestinians. “People always talked about it; it became like the U.S. 60s. People always remembered it. My father and uncles probably participated.”¹³² Elmusa revealed his relatives’ personal involvement with a rebellion that loomed large in the collective memory of Palestinians. Palestinians thought of 1936-39 as a defining moment in the formation

¹³⁰ Kelly, “Crime in the Mandate,” 4.

¹³¹ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 89-90.

¹³² Dr. Sharif Elmusa, in discussion with the author, November 29, 2015.

of their national consciousness. Elmusa agreed with Khalidi and Ted Swedenburg in his interpretation of the origins of the Revolt. “[Hajj Amin] al-Husaynî may overall have guided the Revolt from the outside, but the day-to-day [fighting was done] by Palestinians. Al-Husaynî was pushed into leading the Revolt by the lower classes.”¹³³ Elmusa’s explanation further confirms evidence of a rebellion driven by the lower classes and *fallâhîn*. While urban notables may have supported the Revolt through financial and political means, they had no intention of risking their Mandatory privileges by actively fighting in it. These realities complicate Elmusa’s assertion that the Revolt was the “first time the country came together and acted as a country.”¹³⁴ Palestinian unity extended across the lower classes opposed to British colonial rule, at least until mid-1938. However, the hesitance of many upper class residents to abandon class privileges hinted at the disarray that would arrive by 1939.

Elmusa highlighted the power of the British and their close relationship with Zionism as factors leading to the Revolt’s defeat. While acknowledging the tensions among different Palestinians, Elmusa stressed British military superiority as the primary reason behind the Revolt’s failure:

Elmusa: It’s hard to say why things failed. You can argue whatever, but you’re always facing a big power, the British, with 20,000 troops. First reason is you had the Nashashîbîs making deals with the British and even with the Zionists. No doubt elite were part of it, with the Sursouk family... [the Palestinians] didn’t have military sophistication or the numbers; that led to the deterioration of it. But the British were the prime reason; the military plus the government controlled everything.¹³⁵

Elmusa attributes the Revolt’s failure to several reasons but maintains that British military power superseded factionalism among Palestinians. Elmusa expressed hope that English-speaking

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

audiences would understand the close relationship between British colonialism and Zionism in Mandatory Palestine. He stressed that the Zionist position increased with the decimation of the rebels. “Palestinians were exhausted by 1939, and the Zionists could come out on top... The long-term plan was to build a Zionist state and force the Palestinians out.”¹³⁶ Elmusa’s claim of Zionist gains references the economic growth that Zionists experienced when demand for their goods increased due to the interruption of Arab labor during the Revolt. Elmusa also implied that the British government never intended to create an independent Palestine and had a “long-term plan” to create a Zionist state that did not include Palestinians. He sought to demonstrate how Zionist leaders enjoyed a more advantageous relationship with the Mandatory government than did Arab authorities.

Sherene Seikaly’s focus on unequal economic relationships in the Mandate strengthens the recent historiography put forth by Elmusa, Swedenburg, Kelly, and others. Her economic history highlights the aspirations and activities of a rising group of Arab capitalists, a sector of society that is often overlooked in traditional historical narratives of the period. This emerging middle class of bankers, merchants, and businessmen had their own representations of 1930s Palestine and what it could be. While acknowledging the Zionist land settlement and expropriation that displaced *fallâhîn*, she asks questions that move away from the dichotomous Zionist-Palestinian conflict. “What I seek to destabilize here is not whether Palestinians were sufficiently national, but to ask why that sufficiency and/or its lack continues to be the measuring stick for whether people can remain on the land they resided on for centuries. Must people’s investment in the random and shifting borders that imperial and colonial officials drew determine their status?” she asks, displaying an exasperation with the idea that Palestinians needed to be

¹³⁶ Ibid.

sufficiently national in order to stay on their land.¹³⁷ She focuses on the economic, everyday interactions that governed Palestinians' lives as opposed to the overtly political ones. These interactions were not limited to one demographic and included examples of economic cooperation between Jews and Arabs. But Arab Palestinian economic aspirations were stifled by the British Mandate, whereas Zionist ones were not.

Historiography that illustrates the structural violence within the Mandate and the varied responses to it by Palestinians challenges the hegemonic narrative enforced by British and Zionist authorities after the Revolt's defeat. The prominence of Zionist historians' works in the U.S. and Europe in the mid-to-late 20th century meant that American and British audiences usually heard a one-sided interpretation of the Revolt. This interpretation tended to treat Palestinian rebels as extremists in order to justify the actions of the British and Zionists in harshly repressing the rebellion. The recent increase in Palestinian scholars at British and American universities as well as younger Western historians interested in revisiting the conflict has allowed a more holistic historiography to develop. Certain Israeli historians like Ilan Pappé have made important contributions to this new historiography. My thesis aligns with these recent narratives by demonstrating that Palestinian actions during the Revolt were more diverse and calculated than as portrayed by British and Zionist representations.

These representations continue to influence the conflict today. The article by Cohen and Khoury in *Haaretz* reveals the deplorable acts of violence from certain Palestinians that endanger Israeli lives in the West Bank. Yet coverage that stresses Palestinian violence without examining the conditions that perpetuate it simplifies the conflict and makes it harder to solve.

Representations that ignore overreach by the Israeli military and the suffering of Palestinians in

¹³⁷ Seikaly, *Men of Capital*, 13.

the occupied territories only serve to inflame tensions. Another article in *Haaretz* by Asher Schechter offers a more balanced interpretation in his discussion of the recent 2014 war in Gaza. While acknowledging Israel's right to defend itself, Schechter reports that over 60 percent of those killed by 247 Israeli airstrikes were children, women and older men. He concludes that the "large number of civilian casualties, the magnitude of the damage, and the testimonies of IDF veterans point to a policy that made too little an effort to discriminate between combatants and civilians."¹³⁸ This permissive policy caused the deaths of innocent lives and contributed to the destruction of an area of land that has been described as the world's largest refugee camp. Schechter's willingness to question his government's actions offers hope that more holistic interpretations of the conflict can develop in Israel. Challenging simplistic representations will be necessary in order to bring an end to the conflict today.

¹³⁸ Asher Schechter, "Bernie Sanders Got It Right. Israel Did Use Disproportionate Force in Gaza," *Haaretz*, April 13, 2016 <http://www.haaretz.com/world-news/u-s-election-2016/1.714307>.

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