



LA PALESTINA DELLA CONVIVENZA

**An history of
Palestinians
1880|1948**



La Palestina della convivenza non è né uno slogan né un'utopia.

La Palestina della convivenza è un accaduto al tempo stesso lontano e vicino.

La Palestina della convivenza non è una forzatura, è un percorso che abbiamo costruito attraverso gli occhi di chi l'ha vissuta e di chi l'ha fotografata.

Per conoscere un paese bisogna penetrare dentro lo sguardo di chi l'ha vissuto, occorre accompagnare le sue genti nel quotidiano, mentre lavorano, mentre cantano, mentre sorridono, mentre soffrono o mentre resistono. Chi guarda gli scatti è doppiamente privilegiato. Non soltanto perché si esamina chi fotografa e chi viene fotografato, ma lo si fa soprattutto a posteriori. Perciò gli scatti sono stati raccontati nel loro intimo da didascalie che ne descrivono la biografia e ne sottoscrivono il contesto storico, culturale, politico e antropologico, che nella mente di chi fotografa e soprattutto di chi viene fotografato non è mai percepito nella sua totalità. Le persone e "le cose" ritratte in questi scatti hanno consegnato alla storia una testimonianza unica quanto veritiera per il solo fatto di essere stati fotografati. Le persone si possono mettere in posa per il tempo di uno scatto, ma ciò che le fotografie ritraggono è un mondo reale che esiste ancor prima che la fotografia lo immortalasse, anzi la fotografia e il fotografo sono proprio attratti da quel mondo che li precede.

La Palestina della convivenza è una terra ricca e ospitale che vive e fa vivere le sue genti. Negli scatti di Karima Abud, la fotografa palestinese che visse a Nazareth fra il 1896 e 1955, incontriamo i volti della Palestina colta e borghese, emancipata e aperta alla vita e alla modernità. Negli scatti di Felix Bonfils scopriamo la Palestina urbana e rurale, con i suoi campi coltivati, con le sue fortificazioni maestose, con la sua varietà di persone e etnie. Nell'archivio Assebat Association abbiamo una panoramica di una Palestina che cammina a braccetto con la modernità. Tutti gli scatti si erigono a testimoni parziali e inconfutabili di un paese vivace, inserito nel suo contesto regionale e internazionale, soggetto, come è naturale che sia, al flusso e riflusso di civiltà e culture. Questo Percorso Fotografico, il più possibile documentato storicamente, ha l'intento di fornire informazione. Nulla è stato aggiunto né manomesso, è stato solamente letto a voce alta ciò che altri hanno scritto e hanno fotografato. Sarebbe legittimo chiedersi se si ha il diritto di riesumare quei volti, quei paesaggi e quelle vite, ma forse alla fine non è di diritto che si tratta bensì di dovere. Il dovere di ridare memoria alla memoria. Il dovere etico di riportare alla luce delle narrazioni che a lungo sono state accantonate. La storia è una cosa seria e complessa, ecco perché bisogna andare a cercarla nei dettagli, non nelle gesta degli eroi e dei conquistatori, ma nelle mani di chi coltiva la speranza, negli sguardi di chi è ebbro di vita, nella fatica di chi ara la terra e accudisce l'olivo. Gli scatti senza parola alcuna gridano la loro verità, parlano alla nostra coscienza, denunciano il nostro distacco e la nostra indifferenza.

Ci chiedono : **Dov'è ora la Palestina della Convivenza?**

Rabii El Gamrani

PALESTINE IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

From 1516 to the end of the First World War the whole of the region now known as the Middle East was part of the Ottoman Empire. In the 20th Century the area that was to become Mandatory Palestine was divided into three administrative units: the district (*sanjak*) of Jerusalem, which included the southern half, and the two northern districts of Acri and Nablus. These two districts were part of the province (*vilayet*) of Beirut, while Jerusalem, because of its importance, was governed directly from Istanbul. The territory to the west of the River Jordan (then Mandatory Transjordan) was administratively separate from the Palestinian districts and was part of the *vilayet* of Syria with Damascus as its capital. At the end of the century, the population of the three Palestinian districts comprised approximately six hundred thousand people, more than 10% Christian Arabs, the rest Sunni Muslim Arabs. The Jews were a small minority of about twenty five thousand people, most of them devout, dedicated to prayer and to studying the Talmud. Other minorities were the Druze, Armenian, Circassian groups and nomadic Bedouins. Before the advent of Zionism, relations between the different communities were stable and peaceful, matured after a millennium of coexistence, various mutual adversities and strengthened by their common worship of the Biblical prophets, whose memory remains very much alive in Palestine.

Politically speaking, the loyalty of the Palestinian people towards the Empire never wavered, not least because the Turks, who were the hegemonic ethnic group, had never intended to colonise the Arab provinces, but to administrate them. An atmosphere of partnership had thus developed among different peoples in the Empire, rather than the domination of one ethnic group over another. However many things started to change at the beginning of the 20th partly because of the influence of the growing European nationalism, which had already put a strain on the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans for some decades. In this new situation reference was increasingly made to the cultural and historical specificity of the two peoples, and the Arab literary and intellectual revival, known as the *nadha*, which was spreading from the big cities of Cairo, Damascus or Beirut followed suit.



The promulgation of a new Ottoman Constitution in 1876 made it possible to elect a Parliament, in which several deputies from the Arab provinces, including Palestinians from Jerusalem, won seats. Arabs and Palestinians held important posts both in the public administration and in the magistracy, and some became ministers in the Ottoman government. In 1908, what in Europe was called the *Young Turk Revolution* brought a group of liberal reformers into power. This event increased Arab and Palestinian expectations and triggered substantial political debate, which the daily newspapers and reviews beginning to be published in Palestine helped to foster. Deputies from Jerusalem, Nablus and Gaza were elected to the new parliament. Ottoman reformism could not, however, prevent the gradual separation of the two peoples; various Arab political groups were demanding greater participation in the central government while others were inspired by pan-Arabism and calling for independence.

Meanwhile a major phenomenon that had developed in central-eastern Europe was beginning to cast its shadow over the future of Palestine. European nationalism had inspired some intellectuals of Jewish origin to set up a political movement, known as Zionism. It claimed that the solution to the discrimination and persecution to which some Jewish communities were subjected in several European states, especially in the Tsarist empire, would be the acquisition of a land on which to establish a national Jewish state. The two threats that Zionism sought to escape were anti-Semitism on the one hand and national assimilation on the other. The Jews' ancient biblical ties and their devotional attachment to Palestine were considered to be the political justification for building a national state in that territory, although some Zionists had also considered different alternatives. The late C19th Zionist plan to colonise Palestine with the intention of turning it into a Jewish state, without any consideration for the existence of the autochthonous population, except as a new threat to be quashed, marked the beginning of that

turbulent phase of contemporary Palestinian history, which is still ongoing. Palestine was not "a land without people for a people without land", as Zionist propaganda claimed. Its inhabitants lived in ancient cities, such as Jerusalem-Al Quds, Hebron-Al Khalil or Jaffa, and in about eight hundred well-organised towns and rural villages, of which the French Bonfils family's photographic collection (second half of the



C19th – first quarter of the C20th) provides an extraordinary visual testimony. The majority of the population was engaged in agriculture but a small urban middle class of tradesmen had already begun to do business in agricultural produce (citrus fruits) and handicrafts at international level.

The higher class Christian and Muslim families owned vast estates, whose revenues they enjoyed; they often worked in the Ottoman public administration or in the liberal professions (lawyers, architects, etc...). This social class shared the cultural and political values of the nearby Arab metropolises like Beirut, Damascus or Alexandria, cities already open to contacts with Europe and which had crossed the threshold into modernity.

The first Zionist colony in Palestine (Petakh Tikvah) was founded in 1878 and the first wave of immigrants from eastern Europe (*aliyah*) arrived in 1882. In the same year a well-known French millionaire of Jewish origin, Baron Edmond de Rothschild, lent his support to the colonisation project. In 1896, another millionaire of Jewish origin and German nationality, Baron Maurice de Hirsch, established a branch of his Jewish Colonisation Association in Palestine. Zionist ideas found an organic representation in the book by the Hungarian journalist Theodor Herzl, published in 1896 with the title *Der Judenstaat* ("The Jewish state"). The following year the first Zionist congress was held in Basel, founding the World Zionist Organisation, geared to creating a Jewish State in Palestine. Thus, thanks to this organisation, in 1914 the Jewish population in Palestine had reached about eighty thousand and the number of colonies had risen to thirty.

The Great War unexpectedly brought Great Britain and the Arabs who were opposed to the Ottoman government into an alliance that was to have many historical consequences for the region. Sharif Hussein of Mecca, a Hashemite Ottoman official, a descendent of the line of the Prophet, hoped to obtain independence for the Arabs at the end of the war by backing the Entente against the Sublime Porte. He began a correspondence in 1915-16 with Sir Henry MacMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt, in good faith, interpreting it as an assurance that Britain would recognise the independence of a unitary state in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. But by May 1916, as the planned Arab revolt – later to become better known in Europe through T.E. Lawrence's Orientalist memoirs – broke out, Great Britain, France and the Russian Empire agreed between themselves on internationalisation, i.e. the division of the Ottoman Middle East into areas of colonial interest (Sykes – Picot Agreement). Even more fatal for the history of Palestine was a secret letter sent on 2nd November 1917 by Arthur James Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, to Baron Lionel Walter de Rothschild, an English member of parliament and president of the World Zionist Organisation. In this letter, made public years later, the British government declared its support for the formation of a *national home* for the Jewish people in Palestine. This document marks a watershed in the political fortunes of Zionism. Jerusalem-Al Quds was conquered by the British army under the command of General Allenby just a month after the letter and the rest of Palestine was occupied by October 1918. The door to the fulfilment of the Zionist plan was wide open.

PALESTINE DURING THE BRITISH MANDATE

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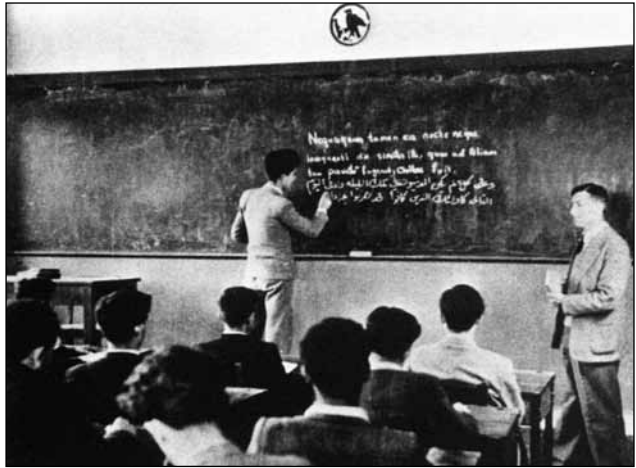
News of the secret agreements between the great powers, in the aftermath of the First World War, and the Balfour Declaration in particular, triggered stirrings of foreboding in Palestine. The Palestinians were appalled by the thought of a *national home for the Jewish people* being established on their own territory. This was basically what they had suspected Zionism had been gearing up to since the end of the C19th, but now the movement had been taken under the protective wing of the British Empire, which was supposed to be administering that very territory! The choice of words used in the Declaration added insult to injury as far as Palestinian public opinion was concerned, given the political injustice they appeared to be heralding. In fact, under the terms of the short document, Great Britain was committing to underpinning the Zionist project but also to safeguarding *the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine*. The Palestinian community represented 92% of the population, but was referred to as the “rest” of something else. Furthermore there was no mention of respect for the political rights of this “rest,”

the opportunity for them to freely elect their own representative government, in other words. The terms of the British Mandate for Palestine were approved by the League of Nations in July 1922, without the consent of the Palestinians. Article 2 of the Mandate stated that the “Mandatory shall be responsible for placing the country under such political, administrative



and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish *national home*,” Article 4 authorised the setting up of a *Jewish Agency for Palestine*, representative of Jews all over the world, as a consultant to the Mandatory; lastly, Article 6 stated that Great Britain “while ensuring that the rights and position of other sections of the population are not prejudiced, shall facilitate Jewish immigration (in Palestine) under suitable conditions and shall encourage... close settlement by Jews on the land.” This was a declaration of intent (the Balfour Declaration) secretly issued by a government to a political movement that subsequently became binding law for the *other sectors of the population* (the majority), despite their not being consulted: they were expected simply to have faith in the good intentions of their new governors. That really was asking

too much! The Palestinians therefore set about organising themselves politically even prior to the British Government's appointment of Sir Herbert Samuel, an ardent Zionist, as High Commissioner in Mandatory. It is significant that the various Palestinian political associations that opposed the *British* strategies during the Mandate were never of a confessional nature and were always party to joint programmes, both Pan-Arab and national, involving



both Christians and Muslims: evidence that a popular identity had already taken root.

The Palestinian parties elected their own delegates to a National Palestinian Congress, which in turn instituted an Executive Committee with a directorial remit. Mousa Kazim al Husseini, a previous Mayor of Jerusalem, deposed by the British in 1920 over his opposition to the Balfour Declaration, was elected Chairman of the Executive Committee, remaining in post until his death in 1934, hastened by the brutal aggression to which he had been subjected by the British Police while leading a peaceful protest march in Jaffa, in his eighties. The only thing in the Palestinians' favour was their territorial situation, in regard to both demography and land ownership: as said previously, they made up the great majority of the population and owned almost all the cultivable land.

The Mandatory and the Zionists were determined to subvert the situation, while the Palestinians were naturally determined to maintain the status quo: their natural instinct was to remain on the defensive and their political strategy was, naturally, one of resistance. The main issues for discussion with the British were Jewish immigration, the handover of land ownership and a request for a representative government. The Zionists, as supported by the Mandatory, were obviously keen to use immigration to alter the demographic ratio between the two ethnic groups and to ensure the free acquisition of land and thus reverse the ownership situation to their advantage. The hopes of the Palestinians rested in the creation of a representative government but, in a quarter century of Mandate, the British (and obviously even the Zionists) never agreed to apply the democratic *one man one vote* principle to Palestine. The application of this principle would, in fact, have stood in the way of carrying through the Zionist project they were committed to supporting.

Palestine's Jewish immigration quota, fixed at 16,500 units a year in 1920 by the First High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel, spiralled during the Thirties (61,000 units in 1935), boosting the Jewish population by 29.5%. The rise in immigration to Palestine was attributable on one hand to the dramatic political situation in Europe, where reactionary Anti-Semitic governments were being set up, in the wake of Hitler's rise to power in Germany (1933), and on the other to the upshot of the *Jewish Agency* project, which channelled European refugees towards Palestine alone, deliberately excluding other states with greater absorption capabilities (such

as the United States or the British *dominions*). Zionist policy thus coincided with important conservative sectors of American and British policy, which were not inclined, given the serious economic crisis, to liberalise immigration law in order to take in migrants fleeing Europe.

The Palestinians' fears that a complex machination was in place, threatening their future, had already been proved right when an unexpected and unprovoked protest was held on 15th August



1929 by armed members of Vladimir Jabotinsky's Zionist Revisionist Betar movement near the so-called Wailing Wall. The gratuitous provocation of demonstrations and escalating violence within an area that had hitherto been a symbol of tolerance between religious factions triggered a wave of unrest that spread throughout Palestine, leaving 133 Jews and 116 Palestinians dead. This was the signal that the ambiguous mandatory policy was inciting the sort of violence it was to prove powerless to stem. The early British reactions seemed to be to take cognisance of the situation with the intention of countering certain Palestinian claims, but the withdrawal of an expected government *White Paper* following Zionist pressure in London and the despatch of the New High Commissioner, General Sir Alfred Wauchope, with instructions to accelerate the setting up of the Jewish national home, served to convince the Palestinians that there was unlikely to be any change in British policy. In December 1935, in a bid to curb popular resentment, the Mandatory proposed the formation of a local parliament (*Legislative Council*) with consultative powers, made up of twenty eight members, fourteen of them Palestinians. This was a compromise solution intended to meet the Palestinians' fundamental demands for a representative government halfway. Although the Palestinians accounted for a good 70.5% of the population, they were nevertheless prepared to accept the proposal. However, the fact that the government was forced to withdraw the draft law in the face of fierce opposition from the pro-Zionist lobby meant that the Palestinians finally had to come to terms with the fact that they would never be in a position to appeal to English *fair play*. This heralded the onset of open popular revolt against the Mandate.



THE GREAT ARAB REVOLT (1936-1939)

The great popular revolt for independence by the Palestinians for three long years was no more than a natural response to British policy which, while seeming to be the usual colonial paternalism, was denying them the basic right to self-determination on their own land and in many cases was even beginning to threaten the survival of the weaker social classes. The British Empire was starting to totter even in places where it had exercised power for centuries, such as India, where the various anti-colonial movements under the umbrella of the national Indian Congress had adopted the civil disobedience campaigns promoted by Gandhi and other forms of struggle.

The insurrection began with what became one of the longest general strikes in the history of the twentieth century: promoted by the *Arab Higher Committee*, which brought together the five principal Palestinian parties; from April to July 1936 it brought industry, trade, services and public administration to a standstill throughout Mandatory Palestine. The slogan chosen for this civil disobedience campaign came from the purest liberal tradition, recalling the 18th Century American colonists in their fight for liberation from British rule: “*no taxation without representation*.” The movement called for the immediate national independence of Palestine and the end of Jewish immigration into the country. Meanwhile, spontaneous popular committees had organised guerrilla operations against British military objectives and also against Zionist Jews, in the countryside. The Mandatory’s first reaction was the double policy of the *carrot and stick*: on the one hand the establishment of a parliamentary inquiry commission to ascertain the causes of the revolt and propose political solutions, and on the other, the retaliatory demolition of part of the old town of Jaffa, which left around 6,000 people homeless.



Peel Commission Partition Plan, 1937



Source: Palestine Royal Commission Report (Peel)
July 1937, London 1938

Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs
(PASSIA)

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In July 1937, the publication of Lord Peel’s Inquiry Commission results rekindled the revolt. After ascertaining that the Palestinians’ quest for independence and their opposition to the Jewish *national home* being formed on their land were the motives for the insurrection, the document contained the first suggestion that Mandatory Palestine be split into two states: the Jewish state comprising 33% of the land (the Zionist colonists possessed only 5.6 %), that it should include Galilee (populated entirely by Arabs) and the coastal region (with a mixed population) the port of Tel Aviv on the boundary with the French mandate; the Arab state on the remain-

ing part would be incorporated into the Kingdom of Transjordan, carved out in 1922 inside the British mandatory borders, for Abdullah, one of the noble Hussein's sons. It also provided for the so-called *transfer* - a "voluntary transfer" - of the resident Arabs from the future Jewish state (about 220,000 people). This solution, which would have been unworthy even of Salomon, was an acknowledgement that the national assimilation of Arabs and Jews was impossible, that Palestine had to be partitioned and the Jewish *national home* established on land that was free of Arabs. Despite the opposition of a large minority, the 20th Zionist Conference in Zurich approved the document (perhaps it was the prospect of the *transfer* that made the division of the land acceptable!). The *Arab Higher Committee*, however, openly rejected the Commission's conclusions, remarking that it had not even given consideration to the Palestinian request for a democratically elected parliament, representing all the ethnic communities, to entrust with solving the problem. The popular revolt intensified from autumn 1937 onwards and turned into forms of general anti-British warfare in the rural villages and of authentic self-government in several towns such as Nablus and Al Quds - Jerusalem. During 1938 Great Britain risked losing control of significant



parts of the country. The *insurgents* or *terrorists* or *ouzelbarts* (from the Arabic *ursabat* = partisan), as they were defined in the British official documents, were organised in armed groups that were not always cross-coordinated, under military commanders such as Abd el-Qader al-Husseini. They had the support of the Palestinian population from a logistical and sometimes also operational point of view; according to some estimates there were as many as ten thousand combatants in 1938.

Great Britain found itself caught up in what would now be known as *asymmetrical warfare* and reacted with an iron hand from both a military and an administrative point of view, setting aside the aims underpinning the Mandate's presence in Palestine. The *Arab Higher Committee* was immediately outlawed and five of its most influential members exiled to the Seychelles, in the Indian Ocean; an attempt was made to arrest the *Grand Mufti* of Jerusalem, Haji Amin al-Husseini, who managed to escape to Beirut.

Having thus got rid of the political counterparty, the imperial power enacted a repressive strategy against the population, with the intention of separating it from the revolt. It set up special *administrative detention* camps, where "political" prisoners were rounded up, without being charged; in 1939 there were as many as 12,622 detainees. Special military courts were established, imposing as many as 54 sentences to death by hanging and 2,463 life sentences. Torture was often used as an instrument of interrogation or as a deterrent, as was *collective punishment*, repressive actions against a whole community for crimes committed by one of its members: thus houses or whole neighbourhoods were demolished, schools were closed because the buildings were being used for military purposes, heavy fines were imposed on villages suspected of help-

ing the rebels. There were also several cases of Palestinians being used as *human shields*, as well as instances of actual atrocities committed against civilians by the British army. By then the *asymmetrical war* had inevitably become, as always, a *dirty war*.

From a strictly military point of view, as many as 50,000 British soldiers were deployed to combat the revolt: a huge number, considering that the Palestinian population amounted to fewer than one million inhabitants. Key Second World War figures, such as the famous *Major General B. Montgomery*, victorious at El Alamein, and *Air Commodore A. Harris*, the strategist behind the terrifying carpet bombing of Germany in 1944-45, gained experience in these operations. The latter is said to have declared “a 250 or 500 pound bomb on every Palestinian village that speaks out of turn will solve the problem;” at the time, he defined his strategy of bombing rebellious villages in Palestine as *air pin*.



Meanwhile, Britain started to provide the Zionist movement with weapons and military training (while it was engaged in disarming the Palestinians), so that it could play its part in repressing the Arab revolt. In tacit agreement with the clandestine militia of the *Jewish Agency*, known as the *Haganah* (in new Hebrew = Defence), the Mandatory organised and financed several militias recruited from among Palestinian Jews. In 1939 these troops numbered



around thirty thousand men, who then went on to make up the core of the future Israeli army. Concurrently, but independently of the *Jewish Agency*, the clandestine armed group known as the *Irgun* (in Modern Hebrew = the Organisation) made its own special contribution to the repression, by introducing terrorist bombings into Palestine, a tactic that by Palestinians soon began to copy, and which remained infamously emblematic of the conflict. From October 1937 onwards, the *Irgun* triggered a series of bloody attacks, placing TNT in crowded public places in Palestinian towns with the sole aim of terrorising the inhabitants. Among the most heinous attacks was the bombing of the fruit and vegetable market in Haifa (25th July 1938) leaving 45 dead and around fifty wounded, and the attack on Jaffa (26th August 1938) causing 23 deaths and about forty casualties.

From the early months of 1939 the revolt began to lose impetus. Over 10% of the Palestinian adult population had been killed, wounded, imprisoned or exiled. In total there were 5,032 dead, 14,760 se-





riously injured and tens of thousands homeless! Great Britain, realising the force of the insurrection and fearing the risks that would result from a possible recovery, took the opportunity to change its colonial policy in the area. In Europe, moreover, there was a growing threat of a conflict with Germany, after the failure of the

appeasement policy which culminated in the Munich Accord (October 1938). Pacifying Palestine, home to the most important

oil pipeline from Iraq to the Haifa refineries, became a strategic priority. Thus in May 1939 the British government published a new *White Paper* drafted by M. McDonald. It acknowledged that the plan for the division of Palestine proposed by the Peel Commission two years earlier was not feasible and that unquantified Jewish immigration would contradict the Mandate's commitments to the Palestinians. It acknowledged that the 450,000 Jewish immigrants who had arrived since the beginning of the Mandate marked the fulfilment of the obligations agreed under the Balfour Declaration; permission was given for the entry of a further 75,000 over five years, after which Jewish immigration would be subject to the "tacit consent" of the Palestinians. Finally it declared that within ten years a unitary, two-nation, independent state would be set up, assuming relations between the two peoples allowed it.



Palestinian public opinion, now demoralised by the unfavourable outcome of the uprising, was favourably impressed by this unexpected turn of events.

The politicians who were allowed to return home, staunchly opposed by the leaders of the revolt who were still in exile, were in favour of moderation and peace-making with the Mandatory. Thus there was an atmosphere of patient expectation which was none other than the prelude to a future "catastrophe". The international Zionist movement, on the other hand, condemned the White Paper as a genuine betrayal of the British commitments to the Jews, declaring that it was implementing a policy of appeasement towards the Arabs similar to the failed attempt to reach an agreement with Hitler. The White Paper can be said to have marked the beginning of the end of the Anglo-Zionist agreement that originated with the Balfour Declaration. The Zionists were preparing a day of reckoning which would lead to the inglorious end of the British Mandate and to Palestine's disappearance off the map.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF PALESTINE (1940-48)

4.



Unlike the First World War, Palestine was not used for military operations during WWII. It was home instead to the biggest and safest British army base in the Middle East, which served to boost the foreign military presence along with employment and industrial opportunities. In real terms, the war was synonymous with an end to the relaxation of traditional social networks. There was a rise in the number of working women, for example, who were now eligible for jobs from which they had previously been precluded on the grounds of the usual gender discriminations. Unaccompanied women began to frequent cafes and public gardens as never before. They were good years, especially for urban Palestinian women who, before the war, had always worn the veil on top of their Western clothes; now they were to be seen dressed in the latest fashions when out shopping and even donning bathing costumes at the beach.



By 1946, Palestine was really very different to the way it had been at the start of the Mandate. The new tarmac road network was jammed with thousands of cars, buses and lorries. The new media were up and running and people living in private homes were able to listen to the news, classical music or jazz and light entertainment or sporting events on the radio. The (PBS), set up in 1936 by the BBC, broadcast from Ramallah in Arabic,

Modern Hebrew and English, had greatly influenced the changes in public taste, spreading Western mass culture. There were several large cinemas in each of the cities, showing films made in Egypt or the United States, and travelling cinemas often took films to rural villages. New residential districts, some Modernist in style, were being built in Haifa and Jerusalem-Al Quds for a nascent, thoroughly westernised bourgeoisie.

The issue of political independence had not yet been resolved, however, having been buried under a veneer of widespread wellbeing and a renewal of civil endeavour during the war years. The repression of the great Revolt had, in fact, deprived Palestine of a united and determined political class, and had put the dampers on widespread politicising. The Palestinians were almost unwittingly approaching the period that was to prove decisive for the loss of their lands. After the World War, Palestinian politics had become far more influenced by the governors of the nearby Arab countries, which were becoming emancipated, albeit in rather compromised forms, from the British and French Mandatories. Great Britain had already dusted off the Pan-Arab idea (which it had helped to knock down in the immediate aftermath of the War), keen to set up a League of Arab countries under its authority, with the intention of better coordinating their efforts in the war against Germany. A preparatory conference was held in Alexandria in 1944, to lay the foundations for the , which was formed in March 1945 and encompassed Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan and the Yemen (under British sway), the Saudi monarchy (formed in 1932 with British support), Syria and Lebanon (not yet completely emancipated from the French Mandate). It



was a weak, disparate and still embryonic organisation, politically speaking. The Saudi and Egyptian dynasties were at loggerheads with their Iraqi and Transjordan counterparts, French troops were still stationed in Syria in 1946, Egypt, Iraq and Transjordan were still tied to Great Britain through unequal treaties that curbed their sovereignty in the fields of foreign policy, defence and economy. The only people to profit from Iraq's oil reserves were the British companies that had already secured the rights to them; Saudi Arabia was just beginning to produce oil and the meeting between King ibn Saud and President F.D. Roosevelt in February 1945 had laid the ground for the deal centring around the (ARAMCO) the biggest of the future "Seven Sisters." The Arab League governments, compromised by the interests of the foreign powers and in internal disarray, tried

nonetheless to support the Palestinian bids for independence, especially because public opinion in the various countries instinctively sympathised with the cause. They officially supported the enfeebled in Palestine, newly approved by Great Britain in November 1945, after 8 years of negotiation. The old Committee, which had led the popular insurrection against the Mandate, could no longer lay claim to the political unity and authority it had enjoyed during the great Revolt: with its charismatic President, Amin Al-Husseini, now out of the game, the influential, led by Raghib Al-Nashashibi, who had been expelled in 1937 for supporting the British plans for partition, took hold, now more concerned with upholding the interests of the monarchy in Jerusalem than the people's hopes for independence

Unlike the Palestinians' weak post-War political situation, it transpired that the Zionist movement was busy planning a complex and unexpected strategy for freeing itself of the British Mandate, under which it had been granted settlement and early development rights, in order to pursue its real political objective, which had been to take over Palestine in its entirety as a Jewish State in its own right (), ever since the Biltmore Conference in New York (1942).

The which had taken on board the fact that the collapse of the British Mandatory was imminent, squeezed by its duty to respect the (in regard to curbing Jewish immigration into Palestine), the humanitarian emergency caused by the Nazi targeting of European Jews, and the need to stay on good terms with the Arab governments to garner support for the War, set about securing the political support of the new power that was likely to have the final word at the end of the Second World War: the United States of America.

The Zionists pursued their campaign against Great Britain on three different levels: diplomatic, propagandist



and military. In diplomatic terms, influential American Jews (such as Nahum Goldmann and Abba Hillel Silver) found a powerful ally in Harry Truman, F.D. Roosevelt's Vice President, who became President after the latter's untimely death in April 1945, while the War was still raging. Between 1945 and 1946, Truman repeatedly asked its British ally to allow 100,000 European Jewish survivors of the Holocaust immediate and unconditional entry into Palestine, putting Great Britain into a seriously embarrassing position, given its duty to respect the stipulations that no more than 18,000 people should be granted entry per year. The humanitarian background to the President's request did, however, trigger plans for an equivalent entry package for Jewish migrants to the United States, which were not, in the event, implemented, as the USA granted entry permits to a mere 25,000 Jewish refugees between 1945 and 1948. In 1948, furthermore, Truman publicly stated that he supported the 's partition plan for Palestine. The project was a re-working of the 1939 Peel Plan, rejected by the Palestinians and withdrawn by Great Britain, involving the creation of a Jewish State that would occupy 60% of Palestine, Jewish land ownership at that stage being below 7%. American support for the Zionist claims shattered every last hope of creating a single bi-national state, which the British government had been tied into with the .

The Zionist 's most efficacious propagandist tactic against Great Britain in the immediate aftermath of the War was the implementation of an extensive system of illegal immigration to Palestine. In an operation masterminded by the , several dozen ships, often not kitted out for navigation, were filled with destitute Jewish Holocaust survivors and then set sail for the Palestinian coast. Even if they managed to avoid the British patrols and their unfortunate passengers were able to disembark, a fresh challenge lay ahead, in the shape of the 's restrictive immigration policy; however, if the vessel was intercepted, legitimate intervention by the Mandatory could be presented to the American and British public as a act of cruelty that deprived the unfortu-



nate survivors of the Nazi concentration camps of their one chance of survival. In actual fact, only 10% of the three million Jews left in Europe after the Holocaust chose to move to Mandatory Palestine, despite the considerable efforts at persuasion, sometimes bordering on intimidation, by the many Zionist emissaries in the Allied prison camps on occupied German soil between 1945 and 1947.

On a military front, the Zionist campaign against Great Britain took the form of repeated terrorist attacks against civilian and administrative Mandatory infrastructures and the assassination of British soldiers and political exponents. Bridges, ports, oil pipelines, railways and bus stations in Palestine were targeted by the and another terrorist organisation (= Fighters for the Freedom of Israel, in Modern Hebrew), known to the British as the , after its founder. It was during this period that bombs left in cars parked near their targets first began to enjoy currency. Great Britain's reaction to the civil Zionist campaign of terror was remarkably low-key compared with the ruthless, planned repression of the Popular Arab Revolt of ten years earlier. For example, while the members of the at the helm of the Palestinian insurrection were exiled for at least eight years and some of them banished for good, the members of the , thought to be responsible for some of the attacks, were jailed for five months and then released. The number of victims was also embarrassing: 169 British citizens, military and civilians left dead, as against 37 Zionist militants. The only time in the history of armed insurrections that rebels sustained fewer losses than the security forces! By now, Great Britain was flagging, caught in the crossfire of powerful and opposing pressures from both the Zionist movement and the American government on one hand and the on the other. Britain was reaping what it had sown thirty years earlier with the Balfour Declaration. The British government, loath to quash the Zionist insurrection and unable to fulfil its commitment either to the Mandatory policy as set out in the (opposing the approved by Truman), or to splitting the country into two states (because of the refusal of the majority of the Palestinian population, supported by the), was beginning to have had its fill of Palestine. In February 1946, the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, announced that he had put the question of the independence of Palestine to the United Nations General Assembly. The UN was then a new supranational organisation that had risen from the ashes of the League of Nations, which had assigned the Mandate to the British Government. Great Britain was fading from the scene. As had happened in 1922, the decision on the Palestinians' political future was again to be made entirely without their consent. The Palestinian situation was, in fact, the first major conflict in which the UN became involved.



The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) was officially appointed to decide Palestine's fate. The eleven members of the Committee had no experience of the Middle East and very little knowledge of the real situation in the area. They had already received an outline proposal for partition from the skilful and well-prepared emissaries of the ; the Palestinians and the Arab governments, on the other hand, were unable to come up with an alternative, but unanimously and forcefully opposed the country's partition. During its tour of inspection in summer 1947, "the Committee was more struck by the depressing sight of the reception camps for Holocaust survivors in Europe, than by what it saw in Palestine. Whereas the tragedy had just ended in Europe, it was just about to begin there" (Ilan Pappé). The UN Assembly worked on the Committee's report from September to November. The majority of the Committee was in favour of a plan for partition (Zionist project) while the minority favoured a bi-national federal state (previous British project). The 's proposed solution, required a preliminary decision from the Court of Justice in the Hague as to the competence of the General Assembly to make decisions on partitioning a country against the will of the majority of its population, and was rejected by just one vote. In October the United States and the USSR announced their support for partition. On 29th October, to help speed up the process, Great Britain announced that it would withdraw from Palestine within the following six months. The General Assembly thus approved Resolution No. 181 on 29th October 1947. It recommended that Palestine be divided into two states, one Jewish and one Palestinian, that the area of Jerusalem and Bethlehem be internationalised (), and that the city of Jaffa become a Palestinian within the Jewish state. Even after twenty years of immigration under Mandatory rules and the waves of illegal immigration of two years earlier, Jews still accounted for less than 35% of the entire population of Palestine and owned less than 7% of the land, almost all of it acquired by the . They would have been granted 55% of the entire Palestinian territory, including almost all the citrus plantations and approximately 80% of the land planted with cereal. Furthermore, approximately 400,000 Palestinians would have remained inside the borders of the future Jewish state. Now, the Palestinians had lost almost 4,000 of their number fighting the British plans for partition between 1937 and 1939 and the had been opposed to the division of Palestine since its inception: all the Arabs in the Middle East were aware of the fact that the project had been conceived by the Zionists and implemented in order to satisfy the political needs of the Zionist movement, again without



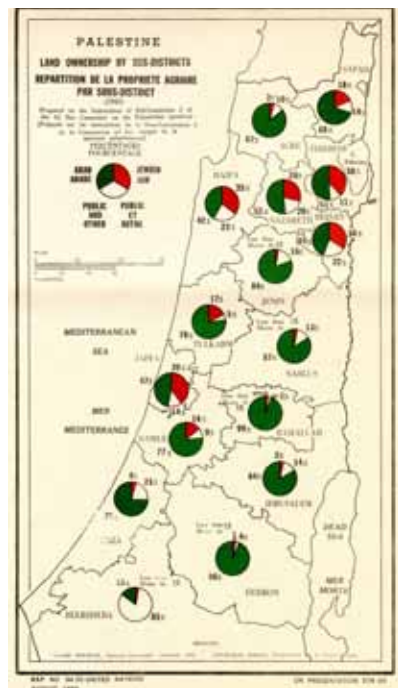
THE PALESTINE POST

PARTITION APPROVED BY MORE THAN 2/3; 33 TO 13

FLUDDING MEADOWS, Saturday (U.P.) — When the plan for the Partition of Palestine and the setting up of Jewish and Arab States appeared certain of enough votes to pass the General Assembly today, the Arab States in a last-ditch effort to prevent this, proposed the establishment of a federated state based on the system in which the Jews and Arabs would be organized as far as possible.

The Arab motion, which was attended as a move to sabotage the U.N. Partition plan, was opposed by the representatives of the Ad Hoc Committee, Mr. Thon, and by the delegates of the United States, Mr. R. Johnson, who asked the Chairman, Dr. Arazchi, to call for a vote on the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendation for Partition. Mr. Arazchi ruled that the delegates would have to vote on the partition plan after hearing last

CAIRO P. OUT FOR





taking account of the legitimate Palestinian aspirations. Nobody could have accepted it. Furthermore the Resolution, which called for a qualified majority in order to be approved, had only scraped through (33 in favour, 13

against and 10 abstentions) and only thanks to considerable pressure from the United States on some of its client states. The Soviet Ambassador to the UN, Andrej Gromyko himself, put forward the reasons why the powers supported the partition. In his speech to the General Assembly, which he had prepared with Stalin, he said: “.” However the Palestinians were at a loss to understand why they should have had to pay for the tragic Holocaust perpetrated by Europeans against other Europeans in the heart of Europe and were well aware that the Zionist movement had been up and running by the end of the C19th, long before Hitler's rise to power. Lastly, and this was the most powerful argument, they could not understand why it was not considered fair for the Jews to be a minority in a Unitarian Palestinian state, while it was deemed fair that almost half the Palestinian population (the autochthonous majority) should become a minority part of the future Jewish state.



Even prior to the approval of partition, the Zionist movement had seen military organisation as its priority and had put together some extremely detailed plans for conquering the territory assigned to them and for getting rid of the Palestinian civilian population (it should be noted in fact that the Jewish state envisaged by the UN project would have had a percentage of Palestinian inhabitants only just short of the percentage of Jews). According to the Anglo-American Committee, the (the “underground” Zionist army) comprised 62,000 soldiers in 1946, some of whom had been trained and armed by the

British ten years earlier, during the Arab Revolt. The was fully aware of its own military superiority over the Palestinians. Their lack of preparation was primarily a knock-on effect of the British repression, which had halted the armed revolt ten years earlier, but was also due to a (misplaced) faith in the ability of the to stand up to the Zionist forces. In reality the Arab League operations were uncoordinated and indecisive, and it was not until December 1947, by which time violence had escalated dramatically in Palestine, that it resolved to send in a squad of 3,000 poorly equipped and badly trained volunteers. The led by Fawzi Al-Qawukji, a veteran of the Arab Revolt, was deputed to protect Palestinian civilians from Zionist aggression.

The Dalet Plan (, “Plan D” in Modern Hebrew), which had been ready for some time, was not im-

plemented till the beginning of April 1948, once they could be certain that the British, who were still the authority in Palestine, would not intervene and after a meeting between Weizmann and Truman in Washington had made America's support clear. The military operations were designed firstly to occupy and destroy the Palestinian villages lining the road from Jaffa to Jerusalem (5-20 April 1948), that would not have formed part of the Jewish state under the UN partition plan. Then, once the British had withdrawn from the cities, as planned, they were to target the expulsion of Palestinian citizens from the ethnically mixed urban centres, such as Tiberias, Jaffa and Haifa (18th April-early May 1948).

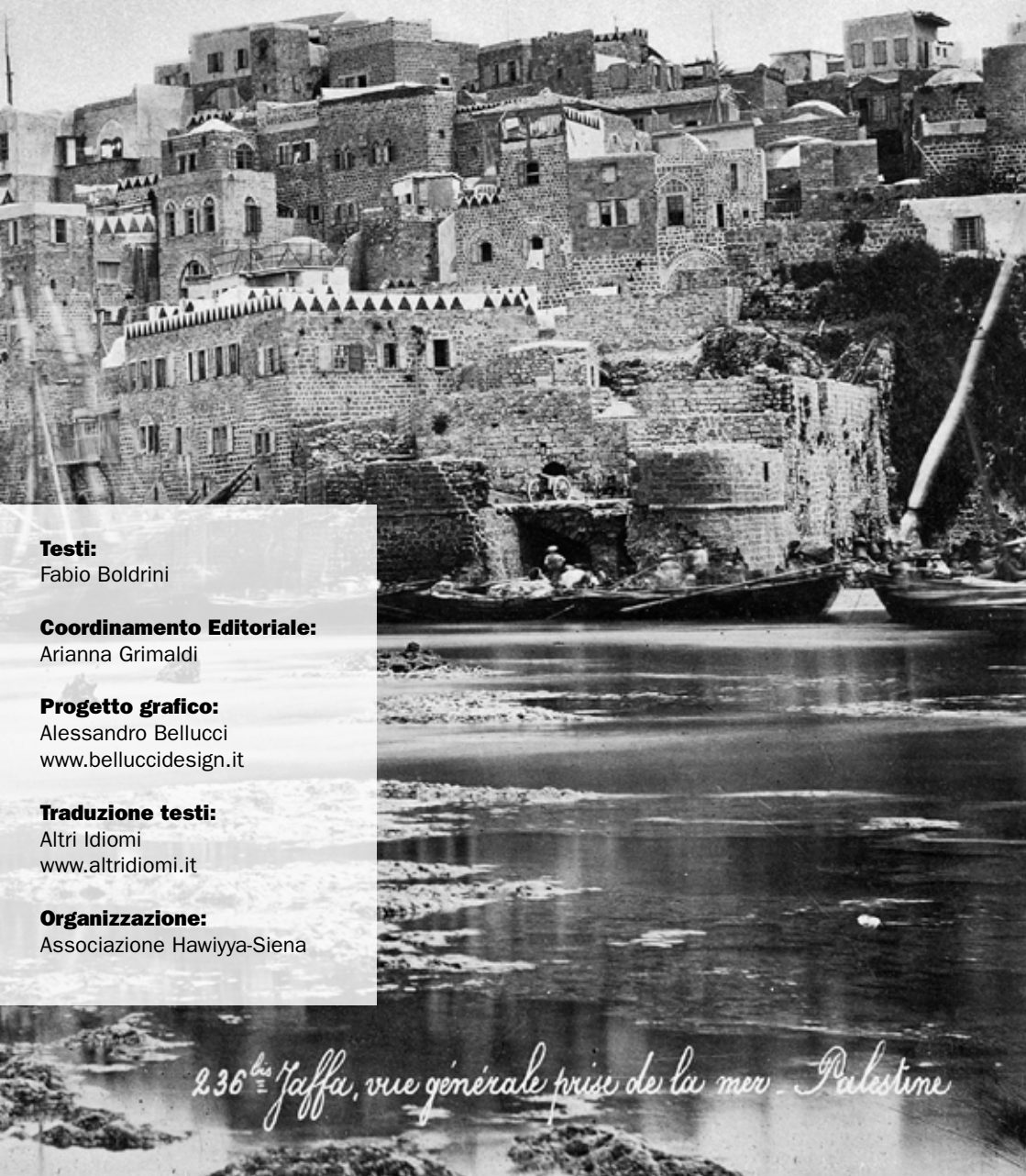
By mid-May, as the British were withdrawing from the country they had governed for over a quarter of a century, 30% of the Palestinian population had already been cleared as a consequence of the Dalet Plan.

In theory, they were still responsible for public order during the initial stages of the clearance of the Palestinian civil population, but they did nothing to stop it. The clearance was also helped by the voluntary departure of roughly 70,000 members of the urban élite, who had left their homes in Palestine for safety reasons, "evacuating" to Beirut, Damascus or Cairo while they waited for things to improve, without realising that "afterwards" they would be unable to return to their homes and properties. This exodus was, however, further proof of the efficacy of the expulsion policy put together and implemented by the Zionist movement in ethnically mixed cities. The shameful end of the British Mandate also signalled the end of the first phase of the war (December 1947-15th May 1949), which was set down in Zionist history as a "civil war." What it amounted to in effect, however, was the ethnic cleansing of often defenceless civilians. The proclaimed military intervention by the troops, following Israel's unilateral declaration of independence, came late, was badly organised and dogged by political controversy between the various governments and led indirectly to another mass exodus. The 750,000 plus refugees (half the Palestinian population) who had abandoned their homes at the end of 1949, found themselves caught between two armies which were fighting each other in their own villages and their own fields and not inside the border of the new Jewish State. It is fair to say that had the armies not intervened on 15th May 1948, not one single patch of land would have escaped



Zionist control, but even so Palestine was fast disappearing off the geographical map. The Palestinians were dispersed into three distinct geopolitical bodies: the so-called West Bank, annexed from the Hashemite monarchy without the consent of its people; Gaza, under Egyptian military control; Israel, which contained a small minority of Palestinians who had stayed on nonetheless. Part of the population had also ended up in refugee camps set up in various Arab states, from Lebanon to Iraq.

Thus was accomplished, with what the Palestinians call (the Catastrophe), the paradoxical fate, which history had decreed for a people, of becoming "the victim of Victims" (E. W. Said).



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