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The Roots of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: 1882-1914

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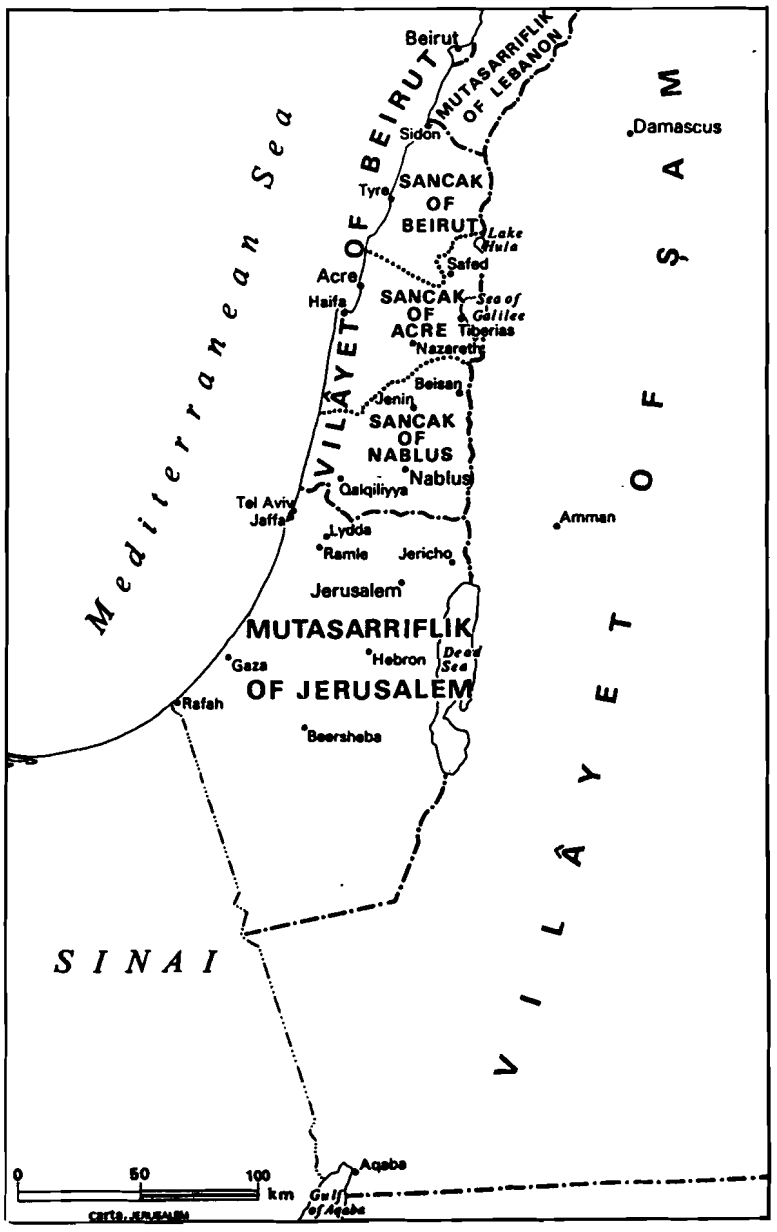
OTTOMAN PALESTINE: 1914



Map taken from Nelson J. Mandel, The Arabs and Zionism Before World War I (London: University of California Press, 1976), pg. xiv.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the fact that "In 1850, neither Jews nor Arabs viewed themselves as members of an ethnically, culturally, linguistically homogeneous, territorially based nation in the modern sense of the word."[1] And yet, within less than one hundred years, both peoples had developed such strong national ties to the same piece of land that they seem doomed to forever spill the blood of their fellow claimants in a continuous battle for supremacy. For most scholars, the starting point for this conflict seems to be quite clearly established in 1917, when the nation of Great Britain adopted a plan for the colonization of Palestine based upon the wishes of a group of political Jews who called themselves Zionists.

However, I believe that the conflict's origins can be traced further back in time, namely to the First *Aliya* (wave of migration) of Zionist Jews into Palestine, which began in the year 1882. This thesis will be proven by briefly studying the events of 1917 which are commonly thought to have initiated the conflict, and then proceeding to refute that claim through tracing the rise of national consciousness among the Zionist Jews and Palestinian Arabs and citing evidence of earlier hostilities between the two groups.

* * *

Just before the end of the first World War, Britain made three separate agreements with

three separate parties regarding the final status of Palestine in anticipation of the impending division of the Ottoman Empire. In the Hussein-McMahon correspondence of 1915-1916, Sir Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner of Egypt, promised Sharif Hussein of Mecca that the territory in question would become an independent, Arab Palestine in return for Hussein's help in encouraging the Arabs to revolt against the Ottoman Empire. The Sykes-Picot agreement, also reached in 1916, divided the Levant area (modern-day Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and the Occupied Territories of Gaza and the West Bank) into British and French "spheres of influence," with Palestine placed under "international administration" because of its special religious status.[2]

Finally, the Balfour Declaration, dated 2 November 1917, expressed British support for the Zionist Jews and the creation of a Jewish state in the area.[3] This last agreement won the approval of the League of Nations after the end of the war, and Britain was subsequently awarded a territorial Mandate in Palestine in order to facilitate the goals put forth in the Balfour Declaration. This Mandate, then, legitimized and empowered the Zionist movement, and the territory it encompassed became the nation of Israel in the aftermath of World War Two. Popular theory holds that this international political recognition of Zionism was the trigger for a hostile Palestinian response, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Walid Khalidi has called the resulting state of affairs in Israel a "tragedy" that "has been enacted in the twentieth century, within the life-span and under the observation of thousands of

Western politicians."[4] However, upon close examination, it is clear that the roots of this conflict reach further back into history, and that the West can not accept sole blame. Contrary to popular belief, Jewish and Palestinian nationalists first clashed well before 1917.

For Zionists, the modern political state of Israel can trace its foundation to June of 1895, when a Jewish journalist named Theodor Herzl wrote in his diary that

> For some time past I have been occupied with a work of infinite grandeur. At the moment I do not know whether I shall carry it through. It looks like a mighty dream. But for days and weeks it has possessed me beyond the limits of consciousness; it accompanies me wherever I go, hovers behind my ordinary talk . . . disturbs and intoxicates me.[5]

This "work" was the creation of a Jewish state, and in this and subsequent passages, Herzl outlined his vision for its establishment. Although Herzl considered that part of the Ottoman Empire known as Palestine to be a suitable location for this state, he also considered territories in modern-day South America and Uganda--his main concern was to find a place where Jews could escape from persecution and flourish as a nation.

As improbable as it may seem now, within 15 years, Herzl's dream had evolved from a minor religious movement into an internationally supported mandate. The Zionist movement enjoyed popular support from most Jews, for whom a sense of nationhood was already forming through the effects of centuries of oppression endured in European countries, culminating in the Russian *pogroms* of 1881-2 and the 1894 Dreyfus Affair in France. These two events reinforced

the idea that Jews could never truly assimilate into any society other than their own, and Herzl's thin book entitled The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution to the Jewish Question (which appeared in 1896) was a turning point for many Jews. It was Herzl's charisma and devotion to the Zionist cause that turned the movement into an international force to be reckoned with.

Herzl himself was born on May 2, 1860 in Budapest, Hungary into a family that stressed the importance of assimilating into the German culture over the development of a Jewish identity. Herzl maintained his interest in German culture, and especially its literature, for many years, despite the increasing anti-Semitism he encountered within the schools he attended in Budapest. At the age of eighteen, he moved to Vienna, Austria with his family, entered the University there as a law student and joined a fraternity.

As a member of this association and organizer of its literary discussions, Herzl encountered a book by Eugen Duhring called The Jewish Problem as a Problem of Race, Morals and Culture in 1881. This book argued that the Jewish race was entirely without merit and therefore must be extracted from decent society before its members could cause any further damage. Herzl was outraged, and was later to identify the starting point of his own interest in the "Jewish Question" as his reading of Duhring's work, which he called "An infamous book . . . If Duhring, who unites so much undeniable intelligence with so much universality of knowledge, can write like this, what are

we to expect from the ignorant masses?"[6]

Herzl was further infuriated when he discovered that his fraternity had participated in a Wagner Memorial meeting that had turned into an anti-Semitic demonstration, leading him to resign from the fellowship. In 1884, Herzl was admitted to the bar, but quit a year later in frustration over the anti-Semitic attitudes he encountered within the ranks of the civil service as well. At this point, he decided to become a writer, and traveled throughout Europe for many years, becoming an important free-lance contributor to several major newspapers.

In 1892, Herzl landed the prestigious position of Paris correspondent for the Austrian paper *Neue Frie Presse*. It was at this time that Herzl first became familiar with the Zionist movement and its goals. However, he originally rejected those aspirations as unrealistic, saying "It is childish to go in search of the geographic location of this homeland. And if the Jews really 'returned home' one day, they would discover on the next day that they do not belong together . . . the only thing they have in common is the [anti-Semitic] pressure which holds them together."[7]

This opinion was reversed in 1894, when Herzl was shocked by the intense anti-Semitism aroused by the Dreyfus affair, in which a Jewish officer in the French army was falsely accused of espionage. Herzl admired the ideals of the French Revolution (and the French in general), and had though that the French were civilized enough to scorn base sentiments like anti-Semitism. Therefore, the sight of mobs of Frenchmen screaming "Death to all Jews" outside of *L'ecole*

Militaire convinced him once and for all that Jews could never truly assimilate into any society.

In discussing the matter with friends, Herzl was persuaded to "Think of Uncle Tom's Cabin" and write a novel that would arouse sympathies for the Jews.[8] Shortly thereafter, Herzl came to believe that the ideas of his fictional characters, who were organizing a return to the Promised Land, were indeed the most sensible solution to the Jewish Question. Inspired by his new convictions, Herzl began his career as the father of political Zionism by arranging a meeting with Baron Maurice de Hirsch, a wealthy sponsor of Jewish settlements in Argentina, in June of 1895. At this meeting, Herzl argued that "The situation will not change for the better, but rather for the worse . . . There is only one way out: into the Promised Land."[9]

Although Herzl and Baron de Hirsch differed on many essentials, Herzl was pleased at the attention he had received and at the invitation to meet again at some later date. As Herzl reminded himself in his diary, "The man who pointed to the cover of a teakettle lifted by steam and said, 'This is how I shall move people, animals, and freight, and give the world a new appearance,' was derided as a lunatic."[10]

In order to facilitate the achievement of this goal, Herzl determined to call upon his journalistic experience and Baron de Hirsch's contacts to establish and continue his correspondence with influential and sympathetic persons in Europe, America and the Ottoman Empire. He also began to map out his plan for the movement in his diaries. No detail relating to

the proper running and appearance of a modern country was too large or too small for Herzl's speculations. His diary entries reflected on matters of great importance to the success of Zionism, such as the best way to sway public sentiment toward a mass Jewish return to Palestine and plans for transporting poor Jews in return for their labor upon reaching the Promised Land. However, other entries dwelled upon such matters as what an appropriate military uniform for the future nation's army should look like and who should write the national anthem for this future society. Still other entries jumped from questions of how best to approach certain heads of state to plans to form a committee to award prizes for Jews who performed noteworthy moral acts.[11] Truly, Herzl seems to have been "possessed" by his vision. Indeed, the eventual success of the Zionist movement depended on the fact that this man's "possession" extended beyond mere ideological fancy to a more serious concern with how to make his dream a workable reality.

Nowhere was Herzl's genius for making the impossible into the practical more evident than in his organization of the Society of Jews to support the Zionist cause, both politically and monetarily. This Society was essential to Herzl's vision, because he believed that "The Jewish question must be removed from the control of the benevolent individual" and given over to the control of the Jews themselves.[12] Although other Zionist organizations existed at the time (most notably the Lovers of Zion), they remained relatively small and ineffectual. It was Herzl who came up with the idea of enlisting the help of the governments of the major European powers in

order to achieve his goal of a Jewish homeland. Thus, his Society received the most international attention, and eventually, was most responsible for the Zionists' success.

In 1897, Herzl organized the First Zionist Congress, which met in Basel, Switzerland. This conference served to bring together various supporters of the Zionist movement to create a unified policy which could be used to garner support from the major European powers. It was at this conference that it was decided that a national home should be established in Palestine, since no other location had the same emotional significance and power necessary to attract support to the plan. While it may seem incongruous that a small ethnic movement could hope to gain the attention, much less the assistance of some of the world's great powers, one must take into consideration the colonial attitudes prevalent at the time.

European nations during this time believed that it was the "white man's burden" to civilize (and colonize) as much of Asia, Africa and the Middle East as possible. The establishment of a Jewish nation in Palestine would insure that yet another part of the world would be exposed to European values and sympathies. At the same time, Herzl's suggestion provided a perfect solution to the continuing irritant of a Jewish population in prejudiced Christian nations. As the Kaiser of Germany told Herzl in expressing his willingness to support the Zionist plan, "There are among your people certain elements whom it would be a good thing to move to Palestine."[13] The creation of a Jewish state in Palestine would also have the added benefit of further weakening the Ottoman

Empire, an aspect that was very attractive to many of the European countries eager to colonize the land that was at that time under a Muslim Sultan's jurisdiction.

Herzl was very pleased with the attention his Congress attracted, and wrote in his diary that "at Basle [sic] I founded the Jewish state. . . . If I said this out loud today, I would be answered by universal laughter. Perhaps in five years and certainly in fifty everyone will know."[14] Although Herzl died in 1905, it was greatly due to his efforts that those secular European Jews who became the backbone of the political Zionist movement came to regard Judaism as a culture, ethnicity, and way of life as opposed to a simple matter of religious belief. Since the promised return to the Holy Land had been an integral part of Jewish belief for centuries, persecution made the prospect even more attractive. In addition, once it became accepted by many that the Jews comprised a nation, it was easy to buy into the nationalist theory the Zionist movement was based upon, namely the "theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cross political ones."[15]

It should be noted here that the Zionist goal of a return to the Promised Land was not encouraged by all Jews. Those in opposition included the ultra-orthodox, who believed that only God could return the Jews to Israel, and that to force His hand would be heretical. Other, more secular Jews considered themselves to be first and foremost citizens of their home nation and only secondarily members of a certain religious group. These Jews tended to oppose the idea because

they felt the existence of a Jewish homeland would give other nations an excuse to purge their Jewish populations by forcing them all to Palestine. However, the romance inherent in the notion had captured the imagination of downtrodden Jews and sympathetic Christians all over Europe (and appealed to the self-interest of European governments), and the Zionist movement continued to grow.

Gershon Shafir has noted in his book Land, Labor and the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: 1882-1914 that "nations, unlike ethnic groups, require a territory."[16] With this in mind, the Zionists began to buy up tracts of land in Palestine from absentee Ottoman landlords and to establish Jewish communities on this land. It was this phenomenon that first brought the Zionists into conflict with the Palestinian Arabs.

The Palestinian Arabs developed a sense of nationalism through both the actions of the Zionists and the policies of the Ottoman Empire. Although they had lived on the land soon to come into contention for centuries and had a shared language, culture and history, a sense of nationhood in the modern sense did not begin to develop until the discrimination of the Ottoman Turks forced many into the arms of the nascent Arab nationalist movement.[17] This movement began in the 1880s, prior to the arrival of the Zionists, as an attempt to return the Levant area to local Arab rule, and was fueled in part by western nationalist ideals espoused by European missionaries and by Arab intellectuals who had studied abroad. The favoritism towards Turks in

the civil service of the Empire and the Ottomans' lack of concern for purely Arab issues were important factors in fueling this sense of disquiet among the citizens, and especially the urban notables, of Palestine at this time. The ideas of loyalty to one's region and to fellow Arabs were gaining in popularity.[18]

During the heyday of the Ottoman Empire, however, its citizens (including those in Palestine) had based their identity upon their loyalty to their families, villages and their religion. As the protector and spiritual leader of the Islamic religion, therefore, the Ottoman Empire had its share of loyalty as well. The vast majority of people in Palestine were peasants who looked to their village sheiks for political guidance, although these local sheiks had little real power in regards to the Ottoman Empire, due to the *tanzimat* (the restructuring and centralization of Ottoman law and administration in the mid-nineteenth century).[19]

Although there had always been small numbers of Jews entering Palestine, the flow gradually increased after the Russian pogroms. These new immigrants were mainly members of the Lovers of Zion movement, which founded a small communal agricultural settlement (*kibbutzim*, plural *kibbutz*) in 1882. After Herzl's Zionist movement began, significant changes in demographics can be seen: the Jewish population of Palestine grew from 24,000 in 1882 to 85,000 by 1914.[20]

The reactions of Palestinian Arabs to these settlements were divided by their class: the

peasants reacted directly to the Jews themselves, while the reactions of the urban notables were directed mainly at the policies of the Ottoman Empire. The reactions from before and after the Young Turk revolution of 1908 also differ sharply. I will proceed by first describing Ottoman policy (and Palestinian reactions to it with relation to the Zionist settlers) before 1908, and then detailing the effects of the Young Turk revolution on Ottoman policy and Jewish/Palestinian Arab relations.

In November of 1881, the Ottoman Empire had issued a statement that would remain its official policy from that point forward. On this date, it was decreed that "[Jewish] immigrants will be able to settle as scattered groups throughout the Ottoman Empire, excluding Palestine. They must submit to all the laws of the Empire and become Ottoman subjects."[21] This policy and was formed mainly as a reaction to the unrest among Jews in bordering Russia and as a response to preliminary inquiries about the potential for such settlements by both philanthropic individuals and some governments alike.

The explicit exclusion of Palestine is notable in that it indicates an early awareness among the Ottomans of the threat posed by the Zionists and their European sponsors. The Ottomans were afraid of importing subjects with strong nationalist sentiments, and especially those who had strong ties to Europe. This determination to keep the Zionists out of Palestine was evident when Theodor Herzl approached Sultan Abdulhamid II in June of 1896 about the possibility of buying

Palestine or establishing an autonomous Jewish settlement there. The Sultan was emphatically against the idea, and told Herzl through an aide that "I cannot sell even a foot of land, for it does not belong to me, but to my people." He then prophetically continued, saying "Let the Jews save their billions. When my Empire is partitioned, they may get Palestine for nothing. But only our corpse will be divided. I will not agree to vivisection."[22]

Although the Zionists continued to woo the Sultan with promises of loans, he remained firm. Part of the Sultan's tenuous support in the far reaches of his empire depended upon his role as Caliph, or guardian of Islam. As such, he could hardly give or sell Jerusalem, site of Islam's third-holiest shrine, to the Jews. He also feared the recent spate of Imperialist expansions in the middle east--England had recently taken over Egypt, France had established dominance in Tunis, Austria-Hungary was making advances in the Balkans and neighboring Russia was a perennial threat to Ottoman security.[23] Thus, immigrants with European sympathies were highly unwelcome at this time. In fact, there is documentary evidence that the Sultan expressed concern over granting Ottoman citizenship to European Jews as early as 1891, when he was quoted as saying "it may in the future result in the creation of a Jewish government in Jerusalem."[24] In addition, the Sultan knew that the Zionists did not have access to the kind of money needed to back their extravagant offers of loans large enough to cover the Ottoman Empire's debts.[25]

Unfortunately for the native citizens of Palestine, however, reality differed sharply from

official policy. The Sultan's policy failed to have much effect on the stream of Zionist immigrants for several reasons. Firstly, many Jewish immigrants circumvented the restriction on immigration to Palestine by entering the Ottoman Empire through Constantinople before secretly working their way into Palestine.[26] Others traveled overland through Egypt with the sanction of the British, and still others first established their residency in other parts of the Ottoman Empire before applying for citizenship and earning the right to travel and settle freely.[27]

A second problem was that Empire always allowed Jews to enter Palestine as pilgrims to Jerusalem with special visas. More often than not, these Jews would simply disappear into general society, and were nowhere to be found when their visas expired. In the event that they were found, many Jews would complain to the local embassy from their home country and be granted consular protection, thus rendering them immune to deportation and relocation attempts.[28]

A third contributing factor to the failure of the Ottomans' attempts to prevent Jewish settlement was the incompetence and corruption of the officials assigned to deal with the problem. Bribery was a common business practice in the Ottoman Empire, and just about any priviledge--from entry into Palestine to land and building permits--could be bought.[29] Since many Jewish immigrants had the backing of wealthy philanthropists like Baron Edmond de Rothchild of Paris, they were able to make offers that petty officials couldn't refuse. As officials at the time were fond of saying, "If it's a question of your interests and the Empire's--yours come first."[30]

Therefore, the stream of Jewish immigrants into Palestine continued relatively unfettered.

These immigrants were not immediately unwelcome, due in part to their special status in Islamic society. The prophet Muhammad had, at the start of his mission, hoped that the monotheistic Jews would join his new religion, and his first writings were full of praises for the Jews. In fact, the original direction of the Muslim prayer was toward Jerusalem. However, as it became clear that the Jews were not going to convert *en masse* to Islam, Muhammad's writing took on a more angry and bitter tone. In later writings, the Jews are accused of having corrupted their scriptures and forgotten their covenant with God, and the orientation of prayer was eventually redirected toward Mecca. In spite of this change in tone, Muhammad makes it clear that the Jews are still possessors of one of the divine books revealed by God, and therefore to be given the status of *dhimmi* (protected person) within a Muslim state.[31]

By all accounts, therefore, the Palestinian peasants were relatively cordial to their new Jewish neighbors/landowners upon their arrival in Palestine. Even in cases where the Zionists had purchased all of the surrounding land, there were usually too few of them to successfully farm all of it, and most was initially rented back to its Palestinian tenants. In addition, the Jews needed a great deal of help in learning to farm in Palestine, and relied heavily upon the Palestinians in such matters. In many cases, the Zionist colonies hired five to ten times as many Palestinians as Jews to work the lands.[32]

This is not to say that there were no immediate clashes, but they were relatively minor, and usually had to do with a local custom flouted or a misunderstanding due to the language barrier. This is not surprising--most Jewish settlers were led to believe by the Zionist organizations that Palestine was a barren land, and were quite surprised to find that its population was both plentiful and 95 percent Arab. Most, then, were not familiar with either the Arab language or Arab custom. As the Zionists gained in numbers and in familiarity with Palestine, these clashes inevitably escalated in seriousness. The first reported major clash between Zionist settlers and Palestinian peasants took place in March of 1886, when a mob of Palestinians from the village of Yahudiya attacked the Jewish settlement of Petach Tikva.[33]

The origin of their grievance was relatively simple. The land upon which the settlement was built had originally been the property of a pair of Arab moneylenders from Jaffa, who allowed the villagers of Yahudiya to remain on the land as tenant farmers. When the moneylenders went bankrupt, they illegally sold the property to Jewish settlers--and included some common areas of land that were not actually theirs to sell. The settlers and the locals lived in relative harmony for many years, since the original settlers were a small group of native Palestinian Jews (i.e. those from strongly religious families who had never left Palestine) who rented the majority of the land back to the Palestinian Arabs in residence there. However, these original settlers were joined in 1884 by a group of Zionist immigrants, and the colony began to take up more of their land.

In so doing, the colony inadvertently violated a local custom several times over during the course of the next year and a half. Custom held that if a man used a plot of land for his summer crop, he was entitled to use it for his winter crop as well. Eventually, in retaliation for the disruption of their local farming practices, the local Palestinians plowed up a section of the road that the Zionists used to get to some of the disputed pastures. When one of the Jews rode over the newly plowed road in protest, his horse was stolen by some of the Palestinians. The Jews then retaliated by confiscating 10 mules from the Palestinians.

The next day, it rained heavily, and most of the settlers went to Jaffa since no field work could be done. Seeing the colony virtually empty, fifty to sixty of the Yahudiyan villagers attacked the compound, causing significant property damage, injuring five people (including a woman who later died from her wounds) and confiscating all of the colony's cattle and mules. Soldiers from Jaffa were dispatched to restore order, and thirty-one villagers were arrested the next day. Eventually, the situation was settled in negotiations between the settlers and the Palestinians, since neither wanted to bring the matter under the scrutiny of the Ottomans. A similar incident occurred in 1892 at the settlement of Rehovot, and numerous other land disputes often had to be settled before the Zionist settlers could work their land without harassment from the local Palestinian Arabs.[34]

Once these initial misunderstandings were overcome, the local Palestinians and the Jewish

settlers seemed to return to good relations, especially since the expanding settlements continued to need laborers and guards. The settlements were also good outlets for the sale of local goods and products, such as pottery, dairy products and fertilizer. In fact, Neville J. Mandel has concluded in his book The Arabs and Zionism Before World War I that "if one dares to summarize the whole period until 1908, a rough pattern--of initial resentment, suppressed or open hostility, giving way in time to acceptance of the situation and generally good day-to-day relations--was discernible on the part of the peasants . . .."[35]

The reactions of urban Palestinians to the arrival of large numbers of Jewish immigrants from 1882 to 1908 differed in that they were more politically oriented. Here, the reactions were based on fear among the Palestinians of competition from Jewish merchants, coupled with resentment over Ottoman inability or unwillingness to do anything about their problems. The tendency of the Jews to live and travel in large groups that flouted local law and custom also antagonized their Arab neighbors. The first response to the influx of Jews into the towns occurred in 1891. On June 24 of that year, a group of Arab Jerusalem notables sent a telegram to the Sultan's grand vizier which requested a halt to the immigration of Jews into Palestine and a ban on the purchase of land by Jews.[36] This complaint was triggered by rumors of the impending arrival of a large number of Russian Jewish immigrants, and was answered by the appointment of an official commission, which was charged with finding a solution to the problem.[37] The

commission's conclusion, reached in 1899, was that all Jews "long resident" in Palestine should be made to become Ottoman citizens.[38]

While this solution seems to have been acceptable to the original complaining notables (they did not make a further recorded complaint about the situation at this time), many others were dissatisfied with the commission's decision. Since the solution legitimized the Jews (who had previously been illegal aliens) and granted them all the rights of an Ottoman citizen, including that to buy land at will, certain lower level officials circulated a petition expressing support for the outright removal of all Jews who had settled in Palestine after 1891.[39] Albert Antebi, the Jewish Colonization Association's (JCA) representative in Jerusalem, warned his superiors in a report shortly after the incident that "the ill-will of the local population coincides with the creation of Zionism."[40]

In addition to Antebi's warning, the leaders of the Zionist movement in Europe also received notice of the growing unrest among the Palestinian Arabs via a letter from Yusuf Diya Pasa al-Khalidi, a member of one of Jerusalem's leading Arab families and a distinguished civil servant noted for his religious tolerance and progressive political ideas. In this letter, which was sent to Herzl indirectly through Zadok Kahn, the Chief Rabbi of France, al-Khalidi warned that, although the Zionist cause was "completely natural, fine and just" in theory, its reality in Palestine would inevitably lead to a popular uprising against the Jews.[41] In order to avoid such bloodshed,

al-Khalidi wrote that it was necessary "that the Zionist movement, in the geographic sense of the word, stops."[42] Al-Khalidi suggested that the Zionists relocate their followers to some more uninhabited region of the world, but urged them to "in the name of God, let Palestine be left in peace."[43]

The "ill-will" on the part of the general populace of the urban centers of Palestine was unable to find much public expression outside of official circles because of the strict Ottoman rules of censorship that prevailed at the time. However, those Arab newspapers operating outside of the Ottomans' sphere of influence (in Egypt, for example) were known to cast a critical eye on the laxity of the Empire in allowing these new settlers in such numbers. The monthly paper *al-Manar*, edited by Muhammad Rashid Rida in Cairo, warned in 1898 that the Jews would surely take over all commerce and, eventually, the land itself if they were not controlled soon.[44] Rida was an early Arab nationalist, and actually maintained a grudging respect for the nationalist ideals upheld by the Jews invading Palestine. Further editions of his paper often urged all Arabs to emulate the cohesiveness of the Jews in order to advance their own cause and win back their land.[45]

Another early proponent of Arab nationalism, Najib 'Azuri, wrote a book in 1905 entitled *Le Reveil de la Nation Arabe* (The Awakening of the Arab Nation) while living in France. In this book, he advocated that all Arabs secede from the Ottoman Empire and form an Arab nation (under the protection of France) in the territory of modern-day Iraq, Syria, Palestine and the

Arabian Peninsula. 'Azuri warned that in the creation of this state, the Arab nationalists would inevitably come into conflict with the Zionists, which would result in a "continuous struggle, until one of the two prevails over the other. On the final outcome of this struggle between these two peoples . . . will depend the destiny of the entire world."[46]

Therefore, one can summarize the reactions of Palestinian Arabs to Zionist Jews before 1908 by noting that the peasant and poorer merchant classes of Palestine reacted to the growing presence of the Zionists at a grass-roots level out of concern for the disruption of their traditional way of life and fear of losing their livelihoods. The elite urban classes, on the other hand, reacted to the Jews on a more political level, seeing them as a manifestation of Ottoman corruption and discrimination against the Arabs.

On July 24, 1908, the Ottoman Empire went through a dramatic series of changes due to the seizure of power by a group of Turkish officers and officials who called themselves the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), and were more commonly known as the Young Turks. The Young Turks attitude toward Zionism was very similar to the old regime's. As proponents of the creation of an Empire-wide Ottoman identity and loyalty, the Young Turks viewed the differing nationalist sentiments of the Zionists with suspicion.[47] The fact that the Young Turk revolution coincided closely with the Second *Aliya* (which began in 1903), whose members were more inclined to support political than religious Zionism, did not improve the image of these

immigrants within the Empire. And yet, the Young Turks did not take any direct action to combat the Zionist presence in Palestine. The measures taken by these reformers which most affected the state of Zionist/ Palestinian relations were not initiated with the intent of either inflaming or alleviating the conflict, but rather were designed to assist the consolidation and centralization of power within the Ottoman Empire.[48]

The most widespread reform initiated by the Young Turks was the reinstatement of the Constitution, which had been granted by Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1876 and then rescinded two years later. This reinstatement impacted the Zionist-Palestinian conflict because press censorship was repealed and new political parties were permitted to form. These developments increased the ability of the literate, urban notables to express and expand their anti-Zionist sentiments. The freeing of the press was an especially important factor.[49] While the official gazette of the Ottoman Empire had been the only Arab-language paper available in Palestine before 1908, thirty-five Arab newspapers began circulation in Palestine and Syria during the first year after the Young Turk revolution.[50]

Many of these newspapers began immediately to attack the Zionists and their goals. The Zionists were usually attacked from one of four angles: from an Ottoman stance, from a local (Palestinian) patriot point of view, from an Islamic unity perspective or as a threat to Pan-Arabism.[51] Those newspapers that interest us most in the context of this paper are those

actually published in Palestine during this time period. These newspapers tended to attack from both a local and an Ottoman standpoint.

One such paper was *Al-Asma'i*, which was founded in Jaffa in 1908, and reported in that year that the Zionist immigrants

> harm the local population and wrong them, by relying on the special rights accorded to foreign powers in the Ottoman Empire and on the corruption and treachery of the local administration. . . . Their labour competes with the local population and . . . [t]he local population cannot stand up to their competition.[52]

Al-Asma'i suggested that Palestinian Arabs combat this problem by buying from and hiring their fellow Arabs exclusively. It also recommended that Palestinian peasants adopt the Zionists' modern farming techniques in order to remain competitive.[53]

Another, even more vehemently anti-Zionist, newspaper was founded in Haifa in 1908. *Al-Karmil* ran 134 articles about Zionism, including 45 editorials, between 1908 and 1913. Its editor, Najib Nassar, often cautioned of the growing political and economic power of the Zionists, and warned that the "heart of every Ottoman must be rich with nationalism" in order to thwart the Zionist plot to take over Palestine.[54] Interestingly, Nassar follows the pattern of many anti-Zionists of this time period, who feared the intentions of the Zionists but admired their work ethic and organization. Nassar once wrote that Palestine "needs devoted leaders, like Herzl . . . who sacrifice themselves for the common good."[55]

It is important to note that just because the major anti-Zionist newspapers of Palestine supported the notion of Ottoman nationalism did not mean that they backed the Committee of Union and Progress and the Young Turks. In fact, many of the Palestinian elite were frustrated by CUP's lack of action on the Zionist issue, and continued to see the problem in terms of a failure of Ottoman policy. The reason for this inaction was that the Young Turks became fairly indifferent to the Zionists, being far more concerned with Turkish nationalism after their seizure of power than with issues affecting more distant, more Arab parts of the Empire.[56]

This indifference persisted despite the best efforts of Jerusalem's three Palestinian representatives in the Ottoman parliament, two of whom were known for their impassioned speeches in favor of an immediate halt to Jewish immigration into Palestine. Aside from the Young Turks' insensitivity to the intensity of feeling with regards to Zionist immigration, however, was the added factor of CUP's financial problems, which the party alleviated with the aid of funds from various Zionist organizations. In return for the Zionists' hefty donation, CUP repealed all immigration laws, gave Jews full rights to purchase land in Palestine and shut down three anti-Zionist papers, including *al-Karmil*, in 1913. These enactments gave rise to a conspiracy theory that became popular among Palestinians, who charged that CUP had actually been taken over from within by Zionists.[57]

These more open hostilities between Palestinians and Israelis in the wake of the Young

Turk revolution manifested themselves among the peasantry in the form of a growing rate of crime related to nationalist sentiments. Between 1882 and 1908, only two Jews living in farming communities were recorded as murdered by Palestinians for nationalist reasons.[58] In 1909 alone, four Jews in such communities were listed as murdered for nationalist reasons, and another 12 were killed before 1913.[59] This increased violence can be partially attributed to the arrival of the Second *Aliya*, which, as previously mentioned, consisted of more strident and secular Zionists than the First *Aliya*. Whereas the first immigrants to Palestine had run into trouble through inadvertent misunderstandings of local custom, these later immigrants were more inclined to completely disregard and look down upon local sensitivities.[60] In addition, more Jewish immigrants meant fewer jobs and less land for Palestinians, and so the disruption of traditional life increased for many families and villages.

The reactions of the Zionists to these increased hostilities was much the same as the reactions of modern-day Israelis to terrorist attacks--in other words, the settlers tended to keep more and more apart from Palestinian society, and each new attack seemed only to increase the Zionist settlers' determination to realize their goal. As Itzhak Epstein wrote in 1908, "if Eretz Israel belongs to us [the Jews], the people of Israel, then our national interests take precedence for us over everything. There is no room for compromise in that case."[61]

Most Jewish colonists believed that Palestine was their last chance to build a society where

they could both be safe and earn a respected status within that society.[62] This view helped to foster the combative attitude that so often led to conflict with their Arab neighbors. As one colonist said in 1911 when asked to comment on the death of a friend who had chosen to die rather than give up his farm animals to an attacking Palestinian, "Nissanov [the victim] would say 'that a Jewish worker will not permit himself to be put to shame, even if it costs him his life, for on this [attitude] depends the honor and future of his nation.'"[63]

* * *

Thus, we see that Zionists and Arab nationalists clashed on two different levels well before Britain adopted the Balfour Declaration in 1917. On the peasant level, conflicts usually occurred because of personal, cultural misunderstandings and direct competition for land and business. At the urban level, the rise of the Zionists was regarded as one of the many symptoms of the fatal disease which eventually destroyed the "Sick Man of Europe." It is also obvious that the rise of the Young Turks in 1908 was a prominent factor in fueling Zionist-Palestinian tensions. Upon examination, it is clear that the fledgling Zionist and Palestinian nationalist movements, which had been developing separately before the First *Aliya*, conflicted in such a way as to develop the other into a stronger and greater force to be reckoned with. It is in this initial encounter, between 1882 and 1914, that one can find the roots of the contemporary Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

ENDNOTES

[1]Deborah J. Gerner, One Land, Two Peoples: The Conflict Over Palestine (Westview Press, Inc.: Boulder, CO. 1991), p. 11.

[2]Charles L. Geddes, ed., A Documentary History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict (Praeger: New York, 1991), p. 29.

[3]Ibid., p. 35.

[4]Walid Khalidi, From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem Until 1948 (Washington, D.C.: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1987), p. xxi.

[5]Theodor Herzl, The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl, vol. I, ed. by Raphael Patai, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Herzl Press, 1960), p. 3.

[6]quoted in Alex Bein, Theodore Herzl (Philadelphia: Jewish Publishing Society, 1940), p. 26.

[7]Ibid., p. 31.

[8]Herzl, Diaries vol. I, p. 12.

[9]quoted in Bein, Herzl, p. 37.

[10]Herzl, Diaries vol. I, p. 61.

[11]Ibid., pp. 32-39.

[12]quoted in Bein, Herzl, p. 50.

[13]Ibid., p. 45.

[14]Theodore Herzl, The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl, vol. II, ed. by Raphael Patai, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Herzl Press, 1960), p. 581.

[15]Gershon Shafir, Land, labor and the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: 1882-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 7.

[16]Ibid., p. 8.

[17]Dr. Peter Sluglett, professor of Middle Eastern History, Lecture on 18 November, 1993 (Durham University: Durham, England).

[18]Ibid.

[19]Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 272.

[20]Neville J. Mandel, The Arabs and Zionism Before World War I (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, p. xxiv.

[21]Ibid, p. 2.

[22]cited in Ibid., p. 11.

[23]Sluglett, Lecture on 7 October, 1993 (Durham University: Durham, England).

[24]cited in Mandel, The Arabs, p. 10.

[25]Richard Allen, Imperialism and Nationalism in the Fertile Crescent: Sources and Prospects of the Arab-Israeli Conflict (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 211.

[26]Muhammad Y. Muslih, The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 73.

[27]Ibid.
[28]cited in Mandel, The Arabs, p. 19.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Ibid.
[31]Dr. Raymond Hinnebusch, visiting professor of Middle Eastern History, Lecture on 26 January, 1994 (Durham University: Durham, England).
[32]Mandel, The Arabs, p. 38.
[33]Shafir, Land, p. 200.
[34]This account was put together from my readings in Mandel, The Arabs, pp. 35-37 and Shafir, Land, pp. 200-201.
[35]Mandel, The Arabs, p. 38.
[36] Muslih, The Origins, p. 72.
[37]Mandel, The Arabs, p. 39.
[38] Ibid., p. 41.
[39]Ibid.
[40]cited in Ibid., p. 42.
[41]cited in Ibid., p. 47
[42]cited in Ibid., p. 48.
[43]Ibid.
[44]Muslih, The Origins, p. 74.
[45]Ibid.
[46]cited in Ibid., p. 78.
[47]Sluglett, Lecture on 18 October, 1993 (Durham University: Durham, England).
[48]Ibid.
[49]Muslih, The Origins, p. 79.
[50]Ibid.
[51]This analysis was made with the help of my readings in Mandel, The Arabs, p. 80, and Muslih, The Origins, p. 79-80.
[52]cited in Mandel, The Arabs, p. 81.
[53]cited in Ibid.
[54]cited in Muslih, The Origins, p. 81.
[55]cited in Ibid.
[56] Hourani, A History, p. 309.
[57]Mandel, The Arabs, p. 83.
[58]Shafir, Land, p. 203.
[59]Ibid.
[60]Ibid., p. 208.
[61]cited in Ibid., p. 209.

[62]Ibid.
[63]cited in Ibid.

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