Freedom Press:

The Role of Arab Christian Journalists in the Rise of Palestinian Nationalism

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Introduction:

Many individuals in the Western world today equate Palestinian nationalism with Muslim fundamentalism, with violence, with suicide bombers and maimed Israeli children, with corruption and religious fervor, with anti-Semitism and anti-democratic views. Others recall issues of human rights and oppression, the right of autonomy and self-rule and the perhaps broken promises made by the United Nations to Palestinian Arabs. Although these representations connect Palestinian nationalism with Islam and terrorists, many of its fiercest creators and proponents during the first half of the twentieth century were neither. These images of the Palestinian national movement ignore both its history and the contributions of Palestinian Christian Arabs, a small but powerful minority that helped to establish nationalist ideas among Palestinian Arabs. In particular, Palestinian Christian journalists during the British Mandate used their newspapers to both disseminate information and propaganda about Palestinian nationalism, and to provide a place for debate about nationalism between different factions within Palestinian elite society. The religious connections with Western Europeans, urban environment, and education of many Palestinian Christians provided this community with a high enough status that, despite their minority position, they were able to help lead and influence the development of Palestinian nationalism through their control of major periodicals. However, greater factionalism, violence, and a rise in education of Palestinian Muslims during the British Mandate system, as well as the increased threat from Zionist settlers, eventually lost the Palestinian Christian journalists much of their autonomy in the latter half of the Mandate period and forced them to

choose sides to support in their journals. Despite this loss of power, the Palestinian Christian press remains an important source of information about the rise and transformation of Palestinian nationalism and the role of Arab Christians in the nationalist movement.

Part I: The History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and the Rise of Arab Nationalism

The historical background to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reveals some of the main factors that caused the ongoing discord. Also, it helps to explain why the Palestinian Christian newspaper editors chose to write and include discourse about the Palestinian national movement. The relevant history begins with the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Ottoman Turks established their empire in 1453 and had governed Palestine territory since 1516 (Smith, 10). The Ottoman rulers partitioned Palestine into five sanjaks, or districts, within a larger province that included Syria.[1] However, the Ottoman regime was preoccupied with internal discord, and as a result let Arab notables, or leaders of prominent clans, control local governments. This included Palestinian families, although Arab Christians were generally not allowed important positions in the administration because of their religion.[2] By the nineteenth century, Palestinian notables from families such as the Huseinis, Alalmis, and Khalidis were both local elites and government officials who ran the sanjak governments and collected taxes for the distant Ottoman rulers.[3]

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, however, other nations began to influence the population of Palestine. France, Russia, and Britain all attempted to establish their influence in the region as part of the larger power struggles within Europe and the need for safe land routes and resources in the Middle East. This new European involvement transformed Arab Christian status throughout the Levant, including Palestine. Christians, despite sharing the Arabic language and culture of their neighbors, had been treated as lower class citizens under the Ottomans. They along with Jewish

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[1] Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001. 10.
[2] Ibid, 10.
[3] Ibid, 27.

communities were identified as dhimmis, or protected religious minorities who believed in God but were not Muslim.[4] These individuals had to pay special taxes to the Ottomans and were denied many rights that Palestinian Muslims enjoyed, such as holding most local offices. However, these communities were given some independence, by "preserving their own laws and usages under a religious head responsible to the central power for the administration and good behavior of his people. . ."[5] However, after 1800 the decline of the Ottomans forced the empire to allow greater European involvement in its provinces, and one goal of these Western nations was to protect the rights of Arabs who shared their Christian beliefs. In particular British influence in the Palestinian region allowed Palestinian Christians to improve their status and for the first time enjoy equal or greater prosperity than their Muslim neighbors. However, this new position of Christians disconcerted Arab Muslims, who were used to a superior standing within Arabic culture and government. As Charles Smith states, "the improved position of the Christian dhimmis seemed to many Muslims to result from a loss of Ottoman power at the hands of hostile forces that sought to weaken Muslim control over lands they considered to be theirs."[6] This shift created a strain in Muslim and Christian relationships within Palestine and the greater Levant. For example, in the mid-nineteenth century the governor of Palestine and Syria, Ibrahim, gave Arab Christians equal religious and social rights and favored them for local government positions, both because he desired European support in his personal political struggles and because the dhimmis were more amenable to his tax reforms.[7] This change in power also occurred among merchants, because of the

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[4] Ibid, 7.
[5] Lord Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and fall of the Turkish Empire* (London, 1977), 112.
[6] Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001, 23.
[7] Ibid, 23.

increasing influence European traders had in Palestine in the nineteenth century. These businessmen tended to hire Arab Christians as representatives for their merchandise, and because of new laws in the Ottoman Empire protecting those who worked for Europeans the Christians obtained the status of barat, or individuals protected by the Muslim government.[8] These developments caused further tension between Muslim and Christian Arabs in Palestine, particularly when Christians paraded their new rank before the disgruntled Muslims.

The influence of Europe in this area also affected the relationships between Jewish and Christian communities. Jewish individuals were also considered dhimmis under Ottoman rule and received comparable gains in status when rulers such as Ibrahim desired their political and financial support. However, unlike the Arab Christians, "Jews accepted their official equality cautiously and without fanfare," and so Arab Muslims generally recognized their new position without resentment.[9] On the other hand, Arab Christians more often found themselves competing economically with Jewish merchants in local markets, and as a result religious riots were sometimes caused by Jewish and Christian hostility.[10]

Throughout the nineteenth century European influence, particularly that of the British, steadily increased as Ottoman power declined. In the next century World Wars I and II caused huge changes in the social, economic, and political structure of Palestine. In 1915 during the First World War, European powers, in particular France, Britain, and Russia, agreed that the Ottoman Empire, because it had allied itself with their German

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[8] Ibid, 24.
[9] Ibid, 24.
[10] Anthony O'Mahoney. "The Religious, Political, and Social Status of the Christian Communities in Palestine c.1800-1930," *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land* (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 250.

enemies, was to be dismantled after the conclusion of the conflict.[11] These nations also decided that Palestine would remain independent under the influence of Britain, because the British desired to build a railroad in this area to move oil from Iraq.[12] British interest in Palestine would become a major factor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict later in the century. Further, before and during the British mandate the European nation offered written and verbal support for both Zionist goals and Arab independence. One important diplomat, Sir Mark Sykes, wrote to both Arab and Jewish leaders promising British backing for their quests to achieve autonomy, in direct contradiction to other agreements that declared British authority over some Arab territories.[13] In 1918, Britain "promised once more to support the creation of national governments . . . derived from 'the initiative and choice of the indigenous populations.'"[14] At the end of World War I and after the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the British established a mandate system in Palestine, which was supposed to help locals create an autonomous government.[15] Thus in theory the British presence in Palestine should have concentrated on building an independent administration and then withdrew when this regime became stable. If the Europeans had followed this policy, they would have assisted all Palestinian attempts to become independent, including nationalist propaganda in the local press. However, in reality the British officials in Palestine often disapproved of or even censored these newspapers and during World War I they halted the production of these journals.[16] Despite some British opposition to Palestinian nationalism, in the mandate period Arabs

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[11] Ibid, 60.
[12] Ibid, 61.
[13] Ibid, 76.
[14] Ibid, 79.
[15] Ibid, 83.
[16] Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1997), 123.

still managed to discuss independence. It was in this period that the Palestinian Christian newspapers began to influence and guide the nationalism movement.

By the early twentieth century, Palestinian identities had been shaped in part by these historical events. Several major components that produced a new sense of identity during this period included religion, location, education, family, and wealth. For most Palestinian Arabs, their adherence to either Islam or Christianity affected both their position in society and their beliefs. Historically Muslims had a superior role in the community because of the laws of the Ottoman Empire, which had adopted Islam as the state religion. In particular the Christian status as dhimmis until the nineteenth century, which made Arab Christians subordinate to Muslims religiously, culturally, economically, and politically, helped form a division between Muslim and Christian Arabs. Sometimes this separation caused tension and hostility between the two communities. For example, in 1860 Christians in Damascus and Lebanon were massacred by Muslims discontented with European favoring of Arab Christians.[17] When Europeans favored Arab Christians in Palestine, the religious gulf widened even further. However, by the nineteenth century a higher proportion of Christians resided in Jerusalem and other large cities and were wealthier than many of their Muslim neighbors of their better relationship with Europeans.

Christian Arabs have existed in Palestine since the expansion of Christianity. Palestinian Christians, around sixteen percent of the total Arab population before the creation of Israel, often lived in separate communities such as in the Christian village of

[17] George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1946), 49.

Taybeh.[18] By the twentieth century, many different Christian denominations were present in this region. The majority of Palestinian Christians belonged to the Greek Orthodox Church, because of the influence of the Byzantine Empire after the fall of Rome. Other denominations in Palestine included Roman and Syrian Catholics, Melkites, Maronites, Copts, Jacobites, and some Protestant denominations.[19] Roman Catholicism and Protestantism arrived in Palestine much later than other eastern denominations, and were spread by late nineteenth-century European missionaries. These missionaries often became very involved in their local communities. For example, during this period French Catholics donated money to churches and other religious organizations, the German Templars created small communities in Palestine to both establish a presence within the area and to sermonize, and Protestant missionaries tried to convert Christian Arabs.[20] While some tension did exist between different Christian denominations, their religious minority status bound Arab Christians together.

Family was an important aspect of identity as well. Palestinian society during this era centered on large family lineages, whether in rural or urban areas. These clans gained hereditary power within their communities and sometimes kept local government offices among relatives for generations.[21] Notables could not have retained their positions without this familial support. Moreover, when the British took control of Palestine, they allowed these notables to maintain their authority. As a result, in Palestinian society the

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[18] Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001), 41.
[19] Anthony O'Mahoney. "The Religious, Political, and Social Status of the Christian Communities in Palestine c.1800-1930," *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land* (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 243.
[20] Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001), 31.
[21] Ibid, 27.

family individuals belonged to influenced their status in the community politically and culturally.

Another component of the Palestinian sense of self was the location of an individual, because great social and economic disparity existed between urban and rural populations. Urban Palestinians were generally more wealthy, educated, and cosmopolitan than rural Palestinians. These Arabs generally congregated in the major cities of Palestine, such as Jerusalem, Haifa, and Nablus. Also, a larger number of schools operated within these towns, especially those founded by Christian missionaries. For example, the College des Freres was established by the Jesuits in 1875, and St. George's School in Jerusalem in 1899 by Anglicans.[22] These schools mainly taught Christian Arabs, who consequently both had greater access to education and, from their close relationships to Europeans, a better understanding of Western governmental concepts. Finally, urban Palestinians had more contact with other cultures, such as Western Europeans and Jews. These cities attracted the literate and wealthy, merchants and leaders, and so became centers of economics, politics, culture, and religion. On the other hand rural Palestinians lived in clusters of small, homogeneous villages usually led by the head of a prominent local family.[23] These Arabs tended to be less educated because of their lack of access to schooling, and less well connected to new ideas and movements.

In the nineteenth century, the religion, family background, and urban or rural location of most individuals was more important than their identity as Palestinian Arabs. The village one belonged to, for instance, was more important economically and

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[22] Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1997), 50.
[23] Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001), 27.

politically to many Arabs during this period than the connection to other Palestinians. For many, the differences between various segments of society outweighed the similarities of culture and language. The British, for example, used these distinctions, particularly between Palestinian Muslims and Christians, to cause friction among the Arabs so that they would not unite against the European nations. Family lineages competing for power, such as the Khalidis and Husseinis, also created factions consisting of large clans and their supporters.[24]

However, other factors gave Palestinian Arabs a sense of community. As stated before, they shared a common language, Arabic, despite different religious allegiances. Moreover, common experiences often made Palestinians feel unified. They all lived in the area known as Palestine, resided in similar geographic environments, and shared local history. Even further, they all had shared experiences of the events of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and increased political insecurity. As European and Jewish settlers immigrated to the area, Palestinians began to find greater similarities with other Arab Palestinians than with these new foreign populations. Also, interactions in cities between different local groups and through trade allowed Palestinians of diverse backgrounds to create connections with each other. Until the collapse of the Ottomans, Palestinians were citizens of the empire. Finally, among Palestinian Muslims common religious celebrations and mutual obedience to the mufti, or spiritual leader, in Jerusalem produced ties among villagers and city dwellers, and various rural factions.[25]

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[24] Baruch Kimmerling, *Palestinians: The Making of a People* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 72.
[25] Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001), 41.

Thus, the identities of Palestinians at the time of the British mandate and the rise of Palestinian nationalism were very complicated. Each individual held a different belief about where he or she stood in society, and these ideas changed constantly as the larger community debated the meaning and role of nationalism to Palestinians. The newspapers run by Palestinian Christians provided a forum for these topics, and allowed Palestinians from diverse backgrounds to discuss these issues.

Through producing, editing and writing local newspapers Palestinian Christians contributed to the rise of nationalism in Palestine. However, the emergence of Arab nationalism must first be discussed so that the contributions of Arab Christians and the role that these newspapers played in this endeavor can be fully understood. Two main issues existed in Arab nationalism during this period. First, beginning in the nineteenth century, a movement for pan-Arabism was present in both Palestine and in other Arabic-speaking territories. This idea stressed the unity of all Arabs, despite religion or location, and the need for one independent Arabic government.[26] Also, some Palestinians began to argue for the creation of an independent Palestinian government. Many factors instigated the debates about nationalism within Palestine. First, contact with pan-Arabic nationalists in other areas of the Middle East allowed Palestinians to consider the idea of independence as a nation for the first time. Palestinians, particularly Christians, had learned about European intellectual developments, including nationalism, in urban centers through missionary founded schools and through communication with European scholars. Because of the British desire for control over the Palestine region, local Arabs interacted with Western ideas in a new way. Moreover, Palestinian Arabs had been

[26] George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1946), 86

subordinated under the authority of other ethnicities for centuries. The Ottomans had ruled over Palestine from 1516 until 1918, and the British had exerted their authority in the region since the late nineteenth century. Palestinians under the Ottomans and British often felt exploited by heavy taxes and military conscriptions.[27] Also, in the thirty-year rule of the British mandate system, Palestinian Muslims found themselves under the power of a completely foreign culture, without even sharing similar religious values, as with the Ottomans. While the British did allow most Palestinian notables to retain their positions, the fact that the European nation controlled who was allowed to receive a government office caused resentment among many Palestinians. Finally, the British often did not seem to understand the specific needs of Palestinians, as when villagers became frustrated with the Western Europeans because they did not attempt to make the agricultural changes necessary for the Palestinians to remain competitive in a larger market.[28]

The idea of nationalism, or support of the nation-state and the autonomy of a specific ethnicity, had arisen in Western Europe during the nineteenth century in politically fragmented but culturally united areas such as Germany and Italy. Proponents of nationalism believe that people who share ethnicity, language, values, and/or culture with others have a right to sovereign within an independent nation-state. This idea traveled through European Christian missionaries and scholars into the Middle East and specifically Palestine, where Arabs adopted the concept and used it to support their call for either the independence of specific nations, such as Palestine, or for a pan-Arab empire ruled by Arabs alone.

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[27] Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001), 23-24.
[28] Baruch Kimmerling, *Palestinians: The Making of a People* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 31.

The rise of the pan-Arab movement began in Syria in 1847 under French and American influence, when an Arabic literary society was created "to promote knowledge among adults by bringing them into touch with Western culture."[29] This association examined popular European ideas, including that of nationalism, and incorporated these thoughts into Arabic themes. For example, a poem written by one member, Ibrahim Yazeji "was an incitement to Arab insurgence. It sang of the achievements of the Arab race, of the glories of Arab literature . . . It . . . called upon the Syrians to band together and shake off the Turkish yoke."[30] Language was another important part of the pan-Arab drive. In the Ottoman Empire, the official language of business and politics was Turkish, even though the majority of citizens in Palestine were Arabic.[31] Arab literary scholars began to call for the use of Arabic at official events, and noted that the common language shared by all Arabs gave them a sense of unity. Arab Christians were an important element of this pan-Arab national movement. The higher proportion of Christians in these groups may have occurred because, as stated above, they had closer ties with European Christian missionaries and thus had more access to Western nationalism. Also, Arab Christians, as minorities in most of the Middle East, had more reason to support an inclusive movement such as this. Pan-Arabism would give Christians a greater sense of unity with Arab Muslims, despite religious differences. For example, the majority of members of the literary association created in 1847, called the *Society of Arts and Sciences*, were Syrian Christian.[32] The Middle Eastern historian George Antonius believes that there were a smaller proportion of Muslim members in part because the

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[29] George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1946), 51.
[30] Ibid, 54.
[31] Ibid, 87.
[32] Ibid, 52.

"societies were founded under the auspices of missionaries [which] had made them still more unpalatable to the non-Christian elements."[33] However, Muslim scholars did agree to join the organizations if they removed the authority of the missionaries.[34] The first Arab secret society created in 1875 to help organize a pan-Arab movement also primarily consisted of Arab Christian members.[35] Groups like these encouraged the public to overthrow Ottoman Empire, because of the corruption of the government and the Turkish ethnicity of the Ottoman rulers. These societies would use anonymous placards and dispatches as public propaganda denouncing the Ottomans.[36]

The first push for Palestinian independence arose from the nineteenth century pan-Arab movement. Many scholars believe that the Palestinian national movement was a reaction to Jewish Zionism, which claimed that Jews had a right to govern the Holy Land because of Biblical history. For example, the historian Baruch Kimmerling states that "the new, assertive Jewish nationalism, with its strong British backing and its colonization of the land . . . spurred the Jerusalem ayan to begin building an Arab national movement."[37] According to this theory, Palestinians felt threatened by these Jewish territorial claims and so used the ideas of pan-Arab nationalism within a smaller context in order to support their right of self-government within the region. This fear of Zionism, as seen in anti-Zionist articles in Palestinian newspapers, dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century, when increasing European persecution of Jews generated many new Jewish settlements in Palestine.[38] Educated urban Palestinians,

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[33] Ibid, 53.
[34] Ibid, 53.
[35] Ibid, 79.
[36] Ibid, 80.
[37] Baruch Kimmerling, *Palestinians: The Making of a People* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 77.
[38] Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1997), 93.

which included a higher proportion of Christians, noticed intensified Jewish procurement of Palestinian land, indicating expansion and permanent settlement, and Zionist literature from the Europe and America.[39] Unlike the regime of the Ottomans and the European intrusion in the Middle East, which affected all Arabs, this Jewish threat only occurred within Palestine. Jewish Zionists had little or no desire for other Arab territories, and as a result the Palestinians alone were confronted with a possible loss of authority and land. In response, Palestinian intellectual leaders, through newspapers and other print media, called for the unity of warring Arab factions within the region and the creation of an autonomous Palestinian government.

Within the Palestinian national movement, Arab Christians played a leading role. Their connections to the British, education, and location in urban centers gave Palestinian Christians more experience with nationalism. While Palestinian Christians gained many political and religious advantages under the British mandate, they knew that they would never be considered fully equal to the British because of their status as Palestinians. As a result, the Christian Arabs supported the call for Palestinian unity, which would give all Palestinians autonomy but also force the Muslim Arabs to accept religious minorities as fellow Palestinian Arabs. Even further, Muslim Arabs had begun to promote pan-Islamic revival as an alternative to pan-Arab or national movements.[40] To counteract this idea, which would lead to the exclusion of other religions, Palestinian Christians espoused a national movement that viewed Palestinians as one community despite religious differences. For instance, Christian Arabs redefined major Islamic celebrations that all

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[39] Ibid, 94.
[40] George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1946), 69.

Muslim Palestinians participated in as state events that all Arabs could enjoy.[41] One example is the Nabi Musa pilgrimage to the grave of Moses, which had been performed exclusively by Muslims but during the early nineteenth century began to include Christians as well.[42] Also, Palestinian Christians formed new alliances with Muslims, as when they created the Muslim-Christian Associations, which met to discuss problems such as Jewish Zionism.[43] However, some Christians did fear that an autonomous Palestine would never be truly secular. Other Christians feared the loss of their identity as Arab Christians, which had been a major identifying marker during the Ottoman period. One man during this era wrote that

> Membership of the Arab nation had a price–which Muslims, being the majority and the rulers, did not have to pay. It meant the abandonment of communal organization and the defiant assertion that religion was a private affair, that it could not be the constitutive principle in a society, that it had no political and little social significance.[44]

However, as later events would prove, neither the Christian nor the Muslim Palestinian communities could forget their religious backgrounds. At this point in time, though, both the Muslim and Christian Palestinians realized that working together would give them a much greater chance at achieving independence, as Muslims had greater numbers, and Christians a better relationship to the British.

One of the most important contributions of Palestinian Christians to the national movement was the creation of newspapers in the early twentieth century. Arab Christians owned, edited, and wrote in a majority of the journals published during this period. More

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[41] Baruch Kimmerling, *Palestinians: The Making of a People* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 87.
[42] Ibid, 87.
[43] Ibid, 77.
[44] Anthony O'Mahoney. "The Religious, Political, and Social Status of the Christian Communities in Palestine c.1800-1930," *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land* (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 248.

importantly, journalists wrote anti-Zionist editorials arguing for Palestinian autonomy. These papers were published in major cities such as Haifa and Jerusalem for Palestinians and other interested Arabs and were distributed throughout the region. The newspapers were read to illiterate villagers, thus allowing even rural residents to learn about and participate in the national movement. They also informed readers about the threat of Zionism to landowners and communities farming ground rented from absent owners, as one major goal of Jewish Zionists was to buy as much farmland as possible in Palestine. The most influential newspapers, *Filastin* and *al-Karmil*, were both run by Palestinian Christians.[45] *Al-Karmil* was published in 1908 in Haifa by the owner Najib Nassar and actively fought against Zionism.[46] As the Palestinian scholar Rashid Khalidi notes, "in the total of 330 issues surveyed, *al-Karmil* published 134 articles on Zionism, including 45 editorial or leading articles."[47] The newspaper *Filastin* also campaigned against Zionist goals. It began publication a few years after *al-Karmil*, in 1911, but also had Christian editors and similar anti-Zionist themes.[48] Moreover, these newspapers, along with other popular journals such as *al-Mufid* and *al-Muqtabas*, were for many Palestinians the only source of information about nationalism and Zionism. Consequently, these papers "had a major impact in shaping how Palestinians and other Arabs came to see Zionism."[49] As the owners and editors of the most important Palestinian media of the early twentieth century, Palestinian Christians, specifically Western educated urban Arabs, became leaders of the Palestinian national movement.

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[45] Baruch Kimmerling, *Palestinians: The Making of a People* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 88.
[46] Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1997), 124-5.
[47] Ibid, 125.
[48] Ibid, 126.
[49] Ibid, 127.

Their opinions and fears about the fate of Palestine were published for thousands to read and discuss. This form of media allowed debates to occur between different factions of Palestinian society about the existence of the national movement. Ironically, it was the access to Western education and technology that allowed the Christians to become the head of a movement attempting to separate Palestinians from European control.

Part II: The British Government and Palestinian Christian Journalists

During the first half of the twentieth century, the British government possessed strong political, economic, and cultural ties with Palestine. This culminated in the British Mandate system controlling this territory from 1920 until 1948, from the end of World War I until the end of World War II. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the League of Nations agreed to grant Palestine to Britain as a Mandate. On July 24,1922, the Mandate for Palestine was published, declaring in article 2 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, as laid down in the preamble, and the development of self-governing institutions, and also for safe-guarding the civil and religious rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine, irrespective of race and religion.[50]

The Mandate document explaining the goals of the British Empire reveals how, from the very beginning, Britain attempted to juggle two very different ambitions: the desire of the Palestinian Arabs for an independent country, and the Zionist calls for a Jewish Israel in Palestine. This struggle to reconcile the opposing needs of the Arab and Jewish population of Israel would dominate the actions taken by Britain in this region for the next twenty years. It would also affect the relationship of the British Mandate government with the Palestinian Christians, particularly the rising nationalists who owned and edited the most popular Palestinian periodicals.

When the British arrived in Palestine, they found a diverse population. For example, in 1918 a census reported that there were 512,000 Muslims, 61,000 Christians (including non-Arabic groups) and 66,000 Jews living in the region.[51] Among these broad

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[50] League of Nations Council, *Mandate for Palestine.*
[51] "Budget Statement," *Palestine and Transjordan Administrative Reports, 1918-1948*, 1:7.

categories, smaller communities resided, such as Armenians, Greeks, Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews from all over the world, and both Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims. At this time, the Christian Arabs formed a sizable minority in Palestine, particularly in urban areas. As a result, the British always included Christian representatives whenever local advisory boards were formed. A British District Commissioner who worked in Palestine during the Mandate, Edward Keith-Roach, reported that at the beginning of his office another administrator set up an advisory council composed of ten British bureaucrats and ten Palestinians (three Christians, four Muslims three Jews).[52] However, this division shows the disproportionate attention given to the Palestinian community by the British government. Although Christians made up ten percent of the population in 1918, they composed thirty percent of the Palestinians on the advisory board. Why did the British have such a strong connection with Palestinian Christians, and how did this affect their relationship with the Palestinian press? This section will explore how the cultural, religious, and economic links between Palestinian Christians and British officials at first caused close ties and support for Palestinian self-rule and the press, and why, as a result of the Second World War, the Holocaust, and Palestinian Arab violence and strikes there began later a backlash against Palestinian nationalism and eventually, censorship of the press.

At first, most British government officials and travelers found themselves sympathizing with the Arab community's call for independence. Many believed nationalistic sentiments to be a natural response to the connections that grew between Western Europe and the Middle East during the late nineteenth and early twentieth

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[52] Edward Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem: Memoirs of a District Commissioner under the British Mandate* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 1994), 81.

century. In one instance, the archaeologist Thomas Hodgkin, who lived in Palestine from 1932 until 1936 and counted among his associates both British officials and prominent Arabs such as the Palestinian Christian author George Antonius, asked in a letter,

> wouldn't the dislocation in their lives which our mere presence caused and our commercial relations and whatever book education we had to give them forced them to think in terms of ideas like self-determination, Arab countries for the Arabs, Parliament for the people? These ideas being so thick in the European air weren't they bound to infect any backward race that Europe came into sort of contact with[?][53]

During this era of imperialism and belief in Western cultural superiority, Europeans presumed that, merely through observation and cultural osmosis, other, lesser societies would begin to emulate such Western ideas as the desire for autonomy. Thus, the British administrators saw themselves as both the educators who helped to create the infant Arab national movement, and as individuals that shared the same aspiration for independence. Because the British believed nationalism to be a European invention, consequently they felt they had to support its rise in other societies. And, because of the Western education many Arab Christians had received, Palestinian Christians could then be naturally expected to take leadership of this new national movement. Moreover, the British probably also thought that being Christian imparted a similar set of values, perhaps making nationalism more understandable to Palestinian Christians.

Because of this sympathy for Palestinian nationalism, the British living and working in Palestine also often felt uncomfortable about their official goal: to establish a Jewish national home, as stated by the Mandate. Humphrey Bowman, the Director of Education in Palestine, recorded in his diary that "it is indeed difficult to see how we can keep our promises to the Jews by making the country a 'National Home', without

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[53] Thomas Hodgkin, *Letters from Palestine, 1932-36*, 50.

inflicting injury on 9/10ths of the population."[54] They recognized that the final objective of the Zionist immigrants entering the territory, to create not only a safe haven for Jews but an actual independent Jewish government, could not be reconciled with Palestinian Arab nationalism. Keith-Roach, a District Commissioner, writes that "my misgivings about Palestine became deeper. . . Every standard seemed to have been sacrificed to expediency. . . I asked myself the questions: Is Great Britain being really honest to the Arabs? To the Jews? To herself?"[55] He and other officials realized that the promises the British made to both the Jewish Zionists and Arab nationalists could not be kept. Even a common British soldier in Palestine disliked the official Mandate objectives. He said that

> I resented this fact, believing that the Arabs always seemed to get a raw deal. . . [the Arabs] fear that they would be swamped by Jews & their fears seem to be to be very justifiable. Every year some Arab sells his land to the Jews. No Jew ever sells his land to an Arab. The Jews are prepared to pay fantastic prices to get lands how can you expect the individual Arab, however 'patriotic,' to withstand the pressure to sell?[56]

This non-bureaucrat sympathized with Palestinian Arab goals and disliked the unfairness of many land exchanges between Jewish settlers and Arabs. Further, it was easier for British bureaucrats to understand Arab nationalism that Jewish Zionism, because the Palestinian independence movement matched European nationalism more closely. This ideology declared that an ethnic community living in a region had a right to self-rule. As the Palestinian Arabs, both Christian and Muslim, had resided in Palestine for over a thousand years and constituted an ethnic majority, they seemed to many British in the

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[54] HE Bowman, Diary, 20 December 1920, StAP, From: A.J. Sherman, *Mandate Days: British Lives in Palestine, 1918-1948* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 54.
[55] Edward Keith-Roach. *Pasha of Jerusalem: Memoirs of a District Commissioner under the British Mandate* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 1994), 93.
[56] A. Morrison. "On the Road to Anywhere!" From: A.J. Sherman, *Mandate Days: British Lives in Palestine, 1918-1948* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 110.

early Mandate period to have a stronger claim to the land. As a result, when Palestinian Christian periodicals called for Arab self-rule during this period, the British government rarely censored the Arab press.

The British, as stated before, possessed close ties with the Palestinian Christian community from the beginning of the Mandate period, through shared education, religion, and culture. In his memoirs, Edward Keith-Roach mentions several times his relationships with different Christian Arabs. He and his wife hosted Palestinian locals in an effort to gain their trust in the British Mandate regime. He explained that among the Arab women, only Christians would attend these gatherings for several years, because of modesty issues.[57] The more "modern" Palestinian Christian women were able to form closer connections with the British officer, because of some shared European values. These interactions sometimes grew even closer, as a few relationships between British men and Arab Christian women resulted in marriage.[58] Through these relationships, Arab Christian nationalists were able to explain their political beliefs to the British in a personal setting, and not only through official channels such as the press or committees.

Palestinian Christian Arabs before and during the Mandate period also had a higher rate of education than Muslims. British records from this era consistently show higher proportions of Christian schools and Palestinian Christian children attending these institutes than Muslim children. For example, in 1944 a report lists 17,815 Muslim children attending private primary and secondary schools, and 22,013 Christians (both

[57] Edward Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem: Memoirs of a District Commissioner under the British Mandate* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 1994), 113.
[58] A.J. Sherman, *Mandate Days: British Lives in Palestine, 1918-1948* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 34.

Arab and non-Arab) present in private institutions.[59] As Christians were a small minority in the Palestine region at this time, the disparity is even greater than it first appears. Figures from earlier dates are similarly skewed. This disproportionately high number occurred because of the large number of Christian church organizations in Palestine that founded schools for their offspring. Moreover, these schools tended to be better than the private institutions offered by Muslim groups. Keith-Roach writes that "the best-educated Arabs were those who had been educated at the two Anglican schools in Jerusalem, St George's and the Bishop Gobat."[60] While the District Commissioner undoubtedly was biased towards institutions founded by his own Christian denomination (Anglican), these schools still provided the finest Westernized education in Palestine. The education Arab Christians obtained gave them more opportunities during the British Mandate. Keith-Roach relates that, when he first arrived in Palestine, the translators working for the British government were mostly Palestinian Christians from Jerusalem.[61] The education these Arab Christians had received because of their urban background and ability to go a Christian school that taught English allowed them to serve positions in the British Mandate administration and consequently develop political ties with European bureaucrats.

The other connection Palestinian Christians had with the British was a shared Christian religion. There were, however, some differences between the two groups: the British officials in the region were almost uniformly Anglican, but the Arab Christian population encompassed Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant denominations.

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[59] *Palestine and Transjordan Administration Reports, 1918-1948*, 13:637.
[60] Edward Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem: Memoirs of a District Commissioner under the British Mandate* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 1994), 79.
[61] Ibid, 75.

Despite this, the British possessed a stronger link with these diverse Christian communities than the Jewish immigrants, and Arab Muslims. In the Holy Land, even more secular British officials most likely felt a strong connection to the Christian history present in the territory. Keith-Roach, for instance, includes in his memoirs several accounts of his religious life in Palestine. He relates how, when he first arrived in the region, he decided to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This and other holy sites, he remembers, brought together Christians of all sects and nationalities.[62] While the Arab Christian communities often disputed among each other, the British saw all Christians united compared to the other Muslim and Jewish religious groups.

However, World War II, the Holocaust in Europe, and the increasingly violent confrontations between the Zionists and Arabs changed the British attitudes towards the Palestinian nationalist movement and, as a result, their tolerance of the Christian press. The British records kept during the Mandate era reveal how much attention was paid to Palestinian periodicals at different times. From the period between 1918 until 1924, the reports state under the heading "Press Prosecutions" that "there is no Press Censorship in Palestine," but immediately after informs the reader that two journals were fined for different offences.[63] Another record gives further information explaining what infractions the periodicals had committed. In 1924, there was a prosecution "against 'Falastin,' an Arab newspaper at Jaffa, for contempt of Court, resulting in a fine of £E.50, and the other against 'Doar Hayom,' a Hebrew daily of Jerusalem, for blasphemy, under Article 15 of the Press Law, resulting in a fine of £E.5 on the editor and £E.25 on the writer of the

[62] Ibid, 58.
[63] "Press Prosecutions," *Palestine and Transjordan Administration Reports, 1918-1948*, 1:623.

offending article."[64] Clearly, these measures were not meant to curtail any nationalistic sentiment, but to prevent newspapers from slandering individuals or report false facts. Both an Arabic and a Hebrew journal were fined, suggesting that the British government attempted to remain impartial in the growing battle between the Zionists and Arabs, despite any personal biases. Yet another administrative account demonstrates this preoccupation with "correct" reporting, when it states that "the occasions have been numerous on which newspaper editors have been required to publish corrections of misstatements of fact, and prosecutions instituted for slander and misrepresentations of private individuals or communities. European standards of journalistic accuracy and moderation are still wanting."[65] Actual censorship of topics, particularly nationalistic sentiments, had not yet occurred.

During the first years of the Mandate, the British government had little interest in the development of local press, beyond basic facts and infractions that required the involvement of the administration. The Mandate official reports back to Britain told how many new periodicals had appeared in Palestine, how many had disappeared, how many were weekly or bi-weekly, what language they were in, and problems they had encountered with journals breaking press rules. The longest description given of specific newspapers in this period is one sentence:

> the Press comprises one daily newspaper published in Arabic, two in Hebrew, of which one issues a daily news-sheet in English, and one in English (with daily Arabic and Hebrew editions), an English weekly newspaper, several Arabic newspapers which appear two and three times weekly, and a number of Jewish party organs, technical magazines and reviews in Hebrew issued weekly, or at longer intervals.[66]

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[64] "Publications," *Palestine and Transjordan Administration Reports, 1918-1948*, 1:592.
[65] Ibid, 389
[66] Ibid, 389

These accounts do not even mention the name of the different periodicals, unless they distinguished themselves through some unique topic or infraction. To the British, the most important aspect of the local press, particularly the Arabic journals controlled by Palestinian Christians, was that they represented some form of self-governing as well as Western civilization, thus proving that the Mandate administration was successful in reaching its goals. Because of this, the British government probably encouraged local press activity, so that the League of Nations would have evidence that the British were actually helping the native population achieve both self-sufficiency and the self-awareness necessary to enter the global stage. Consequently, because of this and the ties already formed with many of the Palestinian Christian nationalists, the British allowed their periodicals the freedom to publish articles without censorship, even those that debated Palestinian nationalist aspirations.

By the 1940s, British acceptance of Arab nationalism and the Arab press had changed. The Second World War had affected not only Europe, but the entire globe, including the Middle East and the Palestine territory. Now, Palestinian Arabs were expected to support the Allies and the British, and nationalistic sentiments were viewed with suspicion. Moreover, the anti-Jewish rhetoric of Hitler and the German Nazis and the flood of Jewish refugees to Palestine both during and after the war, increased the sympathy of the British for the Zionist objectives. Suddenly, the Holocaust made calls for a Jewish Israel to be created in Palestine much more tenable and desirable for Europeans. On the other hand, Arab nationalism increasingly became connected with violence against Jews and the British, strikes, and fanaticism. As a result, the Palestinian Christian press, which had supported the Arab movement for self-rule and published articles both

for and against aggression, now faced censorship by the British government because they were seen as a threat to the safety of the Mandate.

In 1936, violence began to break out in Palestine because of several different factors. Arab landowners increasingly were forced to sell their land to Jewish settlers as a result of the worldwide Depression at the beginning of the twentieth century. Palestinian Arabs also found out about a Jewish arms smuggling operation in Jaffa, which provided weapons for Jewish immigrants.[67] Alarmed, Arabs could only assume that these arms were brought in to eventually be used against them in order to establish a Jewish state. Earlier hostilities had occurred, such as a conflict over the Wailing Wall in 1928, which eventually turned into a series of riots killing over 200 Jews and Arabs.[68] However, these were not the later organized attacks perpetuated by Palestinian nationalists. In 1936, the Arab Higher Committee ordered Palestinian Arabs to strike, boycott Jewish goods, and assault Jewish and British settlements.[69] This deeply disturbed the British government, which already dealt with the increasing threat of Germany in Europe. The Mandate administration could not afford to allow Palestinian newspapers to encourage these activities, and so strict measures were taken to control what kind of articles were published in these periodicals. Keith-Roach recalls how "emergency regulations were promulgated by the government and district commissioners were given wide powers, including authority to detain persons without trial for one year."[70] Unfortunately, even these actions could not stop the violence, which continued sporadically during the rest of the Mandate period.

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[67] Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab Israeli Conflict*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 137.
[68] Ibid, 130.
[69] Ibid, 138.
[70] Edward Keith-Roach, *Pasha of Jerusalem: Memoirs of a District Commissioner under the British Mandate* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 1994), 183.

Another factor causing Arab civil unrest consisted of the internal political struggles between different Arab factions. In the beginning of the Mandate administration, the British found a complicated political situation with intermingled groups competing for power. They reported religious conflicts between both Muslims and Christians, and among different Christian sects, and clashes between different notable urban families wanting to dominate the political arena in major cities such as Jaffa, Haifa, and Jerusalem. Religiously, the British officials such as Keith-Roach said that "the Christians were particularly venomous in their hatred of members of other Christian churches."[71] He recalled disputes that occurred even between different church officials of the same sect. Also, he reported that Christian Arab members of the advisory council spoke with him privately about being treated unfairly by Muslim council members.[72] However, despite these differences the Christian and Muslim Arabs were united by common goals of independence. While different factions may have disagreed about the correct path to take to achieve self-rule, they all believed that Palestine should be governed by the Arab majority living there, and this sentiment was reflected in the Palestinian Christian press.

The al-Husayni and al-Nashashibi families in Jerusalem competed for power throughout the mandate period, forming separate nationalist organizations and supporting separate stances on the route to Palestinian Arab independence.[73] The Arab Christian press helped advertise the positions of the factions and allowed the parties to debate through articles in their newspapers. However, with the increasing violence, even these

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[71] Ibid, 78.
[72] Ibid, 101.
[73] For a longer discussion on the internal political battles between these two families, see *Jerusalem's Other Voice: Ragheb Nashashibi and Moderation in Palestinian Politics, 1920-1948*, written by his relative Nasser Nashashibi. This works examines the stances of the moderate and more radical nationalists.

forums were not spared. The more radical Arab nationalist groups began espousing violence against more moderate Arabs, such as those even tentatively supporting some British Mandate policies, and attacked those periodical owners who wrote articles in their defense. In one instance, the British Royal Commission sent to determine what actions should be taken to end the violence in Palestine reported in 1937 that

> for an Arab to be suspected of a lukewarm adherence to the nationalist movement is to invite a visit from a body of gunmen. Such a visit was paid to the editor of one of the Arab newspapers last August shortly after he had published articles in favor of calling off the strike.[74]

In 1936, factions plotted to assassinate the Christian owner of *Filastin,* Isa al-Isa.[75] These incidents demonstrate the power of the Arab press in the nationalist movement, as their owners and editors were targeted by Arabs who did not agree with their political views. Also, the assassination attempts may have convinced some to support more radical national movements, which encouraged the British administration to repress these periodicals even more vigorously.

In 1945, British reports recorded the new press policies begun under the Emergency Regulations act. These rules were enacted in April 1936 by the Palestine Defense Order, and demanded that censors be selected, among other tasks, to prohibit "editors and owners of printing presses from publishing undesirable matter," as well as requiring "editors to submit specific or general matter for censorship before publication."[76] This corresponded with the rise in violence between Arab nationalists and Zionists occurring at the same time. Then in June of the same year, the British also ordered owners of periodicals to obtain permits under the Emergency Regulations. The

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[74] "Peel Report," From: Nasser Nashashibi, *Jerusalem's Other Voice: Ragheb Nashashibi and Moderation in Palestinian Politics, 1920-1948*, 99.
[75] Ibid, 49.
[76] "Control of the Press," *Palestine and Transjordan Administration Reports, 1918-1948*, 13:874.

records claimed that "this additional requirement was introduced to control 'dummy' newspapers, possessing normally dormant licences, which made a habit of reappearing sporadically and temporarily to replace other newspapers which had been suspended under the Press Ordinance."[77] This statement shows that journals by 1936 were being suspended often enough to cause illegal press methods to become a problem to the British. Moreover, the permit could be used to keep undesirable press owners, like the Arab Christian nationalists, from ever owning a legal newspaper. The Press Ordinance increased its control over the local press in 1939 by creating a new amendment to the laws that allowed the High Commissioner to suspend printing presses as well.[78] At this time, the Second World War had broken out in Europe, and these responses were only a part of larger British censorship of press in the empire. For instance, the official who carried out the press censorship, according to British records, was not only under the authority of the Mandate government, but also to the British Middle East Censorship administration.[79] Although these measures did not stop the publication of nationalistic sentiments, they did firmly control what a periodical was permitted to publish. Thus, abstract calls for independence may have been acceptable to the Mandate government, but specific articles demanding a hostile response to the increased Jewish immigration and buying of Arab land might result in forcing the owner to publish a retraction, or even to lose his license. The regulations state that "in the application of such censorship the criterion adopted is whether the publication of any matter submitted is likely to lead to the commission of acts of violence."[80] This aggression could be aimed towards with

[77] Ibid, 874.
[78] Ibid, 874.
[79] Ibid, 874.
[80] Ibid, 875.

Jewish Zionists or the British government, as either would affect the peace of the region. Before, press control consisted of punishing newspapers that broke very specific rules concerning slander and incorrect information. Now, periodicals could not even publish articles without submitting them to the administration.

However, the British authorities often controlled the press more strictly than their records state. Thomas Hodgkin, the archeologist, reported in his anonymous article to *Labor Monthly* in 1936 that "all the Arab daily newspapers which are published regularly were recently suspended for a fortnight. At the date of writing only one is allowed to appear and its comments on local events are strictly controlled."[81] This unofficial account of the censorship reveals a very different side than the one shown in the official British records. Here, the Arabic press alone was censored, while Hebrew, Armenian, British, and other periodicals were ignored. To the British then, the Arabic newspapers, because of their support for nationalistic fervor, constituted the largest threat to Palestinian security. This represented a shift from original British official sentiments, which believed Zionists to be the greatest danger to the fledgling state. The British feared that Arab nationalism could cause the Palestinians to side with the Axis powers courting them at the time, which in some cases actually occurred. Further, the actual violence between Arabs and Jews seen during this era in Palestine seemed to be caused more often by Arab nationalists, although Jewish settlers usually retaliated. Consequently, Arab nationalism had evolved from an imitation of European ideology that flattered British officials to a dangerous threat to the security of the Mandate.

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[81] Thomas Hodgkin, From "The Events in Palestine," *Letters from Palestine, 1932-36*, 200.

Part III: Palestinian Christian Journalists and Palestinian Nationalism

As seen in the prior section, British officials in the Palestine territory during the first half of the twentieth century faced conflicting Arab and Jewish nationalisms. By the beginning of World War II, British sympathy had moved from the Palestinian Arabs to the Zionists, and their policies reflected this shift. For example, censorship of the Arab press became more common during the latter half of the British Mandate. In particular, Palestinian Christian journalists lost the support of the British and, in response, more strongly backed not only Palestinian nationalism, but complete independence from the British as well. During the British Mandate in Palestine, Arab nationalism gradually transformed from a somewhat unified, idealistic ideology adopted by the Palestinian literate elite into a contested set of beliefs and actions used by different factions to gain political power. Throughout this process, the Palestinian Christian press both helped to create these changes and responded to them using their periodicals.

By the end of the First World War, Palestinian nationalism already existed as a concept. As seen in the first section of this paper, the Arab educated elite in the late nineteenth century was exposed to the European concept of nationalism and embraced it in the Middle East. Arab Christians in particular led this movement because of their Western education and closer religious connection with much of Europe. However, by the Second World War, Arab Muslim transformation of secular nationalism into a pan-Islamic movement, as well as political struggles for power between different ruling Arab families in Palestine, fundamentally altered and fractured Palestinian nationalism. Moreover, this pushed Christian journalists from leadership positions within the

movement to smaller roles that provided a forum for debate and supported the new leaders' positions.

Palestinian nationalism was not a stagnant, fixed idea. From its origins, different Palestinian Arabs had differing beliefs about what, exactly, nationalism was. Palestinian Christians espoused a pan-Arabic view, focused on Palestinian Arabs in particular. This included all people who spoke Arabic and shared the same Arabic culture, regardless of religion or status in society. Clearly, this would allow Christian Arabs to participate fully in the nationalist movement, and to be, for the first time, full members of society. Many Palestinian Christian elites still remembered life under Ottoman rule when, because of their religious beliefs, they were forced to pay extra taxes and were denied some of the privileges Muslim Arabs received. Further, because they had lived under this same enormous empire, many Palestinian Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, desired rule over the Palestine region in particular, instead of another Arab leader from outside of the territory taking control. However, the actual borders of Palestine were always in dispute, and while certain cities were considered indisputably to be a part of Palestine, other towns were contested. Some Palestinians, however, preferred a large independent Arab empire, because of the greater security and power offered by this option. And many Palestinian Muslims desired instead a pan-Islamic form of nationalism and wanted to recreate a caliphate that would rule over a new Islamic empire. Groups such as the Brotherhood and Purity in Palestine espoused this ideology and, as a result, mistrusted Christian Arabs because of their religious beliefs. This form of nationalism increased during the 1930s, when intensified Jewish immigration and riots encouraged Islamic

fundamentalism.[82] The Christian Arabs responded in various ways to this change in nationalist ideology. Some attempted to embrace Islamic culture and holidays while still remaining Christian, but others feared this shift and thus spoke against any form of Islamic nationalism. One Palestinian Christian nationalist, Khalil al-Sakakini, wrote to his son that, "as long as I am not a Moslem . . . I am nought."[83] For the Christians, of course, this type of nationalism was less attractive than continued rule by the British Mandate. At least under the British, Christian Arabs were given a status equal to and in some cases even favorable to Muslims. Pan-Islamic nationalism completely excluded any other religion, despite shared language and ethnicity.Therefore, even had Palestinian Christians not been inclined to fight for independence, they would have been forced to join the nationalist movement just to keep themselves from being excluded from Palestinian Arab politics when the British administration left. Also, as a minority group, the Palestinian Christians had to remain vocal and a necessary part of the movement so that their opinions would be heard by the Muslim majority.

In the first years of the British mandate, the Palestinian nationalist movement seemed relatively unified, at least to the British government. The 1920 Mandate administration report to the British government states that "the Arabs organized a political movement to resist the menace of Zionism, as they understood it. Many of the best known men in the country, both Moslem and Christian, previously as a rule antagonistic to each other, united in this movement."[84] As stated before in this paper, before the arrival of the British, Christian and Muslim Arabs in Palestine had often

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[82] Baruch Kimmerling, *Palestinians: The Making of a People* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 85-88.
[83] Ibid, 88.
[84] Herbert Samuel, "Report of the High Commissioner on the Administration of Palestine," *Palestine and Transjordan Administration Reports, 1918-1948*, 2:26.

fought for political power, both among and between themselves. However, the threat of Zionism forced these separate religious groups to recognize their common goal of Palestinian Arab independence and the need to join together in a united front. The Palestinian Muslim elite recognized that Arab Christians, because of their education, connections with powerful Western countries such as Britain, and control over major Palestinian newspapers such as *Filastin* and *al- Karmil*, were necessary allies. Muslim Arabs, in order to show their desire to ally themselves with the educated Christian Arab leaders, began making public statements declaring their support of Christians. For example, in a petition made to the British Mandate government, Muslim leaders demanded the equal and fair treatment of Christian Arabs. They wrote that, although "you [British officials] will probably be surprised to see a petition written by a Muslim society in defense of the Christian interests . . . the Orthodox Arabs suffered many afflictions and troubles under the old government . . . we therefore strongly support our Arab brethren in their demands."[85] This petition can be seen less a genuine wish for true religious freedom and equality and more as an offering of an alliance with Christian Arabs. While not all Palestinian Muslims agreed, enough were willing to show at least some solidarity with Christians for the sake of independence. The Arab press reflected this unity by backing elite Palestinian Arabs, who all supported Arab nationalism. In one instance, the same reports record that "at first, in presence of what was thought to be a real and imminent danger, some degree of common action was attained. For example, at the beginning of the movement the Arabic press approved the actions of the Political

[85] "Petition by Committee for Promoting Arabic Representation in Jerusalem," *Records of Jerusalem, 1917-1971,* 1:281.

Committee with unanimity."[86] The Political Committee, the first major Palestinian Arabic group focused on issues such as nationalism, enjoyed the backing of every major periodical until the committee grew corrupt and lost its relevance.

However, the unified response of Palestinians, both in the press and in the wider society, only lasted for a decade. Even in 1919, the British could recognize the subtle competition occurring between political rivals. When the Political Committee became less representative of the Palestinian Christian press and the entire Palestinian community, newspaper owners began to withdraw their support of the Committee and, in some cases, began to back the National Party, a rival Palestinian Arab group formed to promote Arab nationalism.[87] In 1919, Mandate officials wrote a memo explaining to the British government the major factions that they recognized among Palestinian Arabs. For example, they noted the existence of The Literary Club (El Muntada el Adabi), The Arab Club (El Nadi el Arabi), Brotherhood and Purity (El Alcha w'el Afaf), and most importantly, the Moslem-Christian society.[88] These political groups all desired Palestinian Arab independence, but they used different methods to achieve this aim. The first three, all founded by Palestinian Muslims and declaring their distrust of Christians, were considered somewhat radical by the British administration. The last, however, was an association of Christian and Muslim Palestinians who, while still desiring that same independence, were pro-British, and thus held the respect of the Mandate Government.[89] British officials believed the Moslem-Christian Association to be less violent and secretive, and more rational, perhaps also because of the inclusion of Palestinian

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[86] Herbert Samuel, "Report of the High Commissioner on the Administration of Palestine," *Palestine and Transjordan Administration Reports, 1918-1948*, 2:43.
[87] Ibid, 44.
[88] J.Camp, "Arab Movement and Zionism", *Records of Jerusalem, 1917-1971*, 1:420.
[89] Ibid, 422.

Christian nationalists. Unfortunately, the more moderate organizations such as the Moslem-Christian Association would not survive into the next decade, when violent factions drawing inspiration from groups such as the ones named above would control Palestinian politics and all debate about nationalism.

The British also noted that the Palestinian Arab leaders, traditionally the heads of important families, could easily influence the majority of the Palestinian Arab population. As one Mandate official reported, "the majority of the people are illiterate, placid, and, as a rule, easily led by men in whom they place confidence; they are prone to fierce personal and family quarrels . . ."[90] As the British recognized, education in Palestine among the Arabs was a valuable commodity. Only members of social elite received a significant amount of schooling, and these individuals eventually became the leaders of the Palestinian Arabs. Consequently, Palestinian Christians, who received more education proportionally than Palestinian Muslims, already had a strong advantage as potential heads of their communities. This report, written in 1920, also foreshadows the eventual factionalism that affected Palestinian nationalism during the second half of the British Mandate. The "family quarrels" of the Nashashibis and Husseinis, the two most important Arab lineages in Palestine, eventually caused the nationalist movement to splinter. For example, in 1935, the British recorded that "the Nashashibi Party has won over to its side, it is reported, by subsidies, 'Filastin,' 'El Difa,' and "Al Jamina al Islamia' and all these journals (particularly the first named) have made it clear their policy to deprecate and discredit the Husseini family."[91]

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[90].Ibid, 3.
[91] "Appreciation Summary no. 6/35, Criminal Investigation Department, 20 April, 1935," *Records of Jerusalem, 1917-1971*, 3:248.

In fifteen years, the former desire for unity of all Palestinians, held by both Christian and Muslim Arabs, was replaced by factionalism and infighting. *Filastin*, owned by a Palestinian Christian, now was known more for attacking another political group, even though it was one that shared similar goals of independence and self-rule. What had changed? Palestinians, who had become increasingly well educated, began to argue about the best methods for achieving this independence. Nationalism was no longer an abstract objective that the British Mandate would achieve for them, but was now bitterly contested. With documents such as the Peel Commission Report and the 1939 White Paper, the British Mandate had proved itself untrustworthy to the Palestinians, and increasing Jewish immigration and British support for Zionism were becoming a strong threat to Palestinian independence. Palestinian Arabs now recognized that, if they wished to rule themselves, they would have to pursue this aim without the assistance of the Mandate administration. As a result, rival factions began to argue the best way to achieve independence and jockeyed for control of the nationalism movement because leading a successful movement would allow that group to remain in charge of a newly autonomous Palestine.

One factor that caused the shift in Palestinian nationalism was the withdrawal of British support. During the first half of the mandate, many Palestinian elites trusted that, under British guidance, they would eventually be given full independence and control over the Palestine region. Arab Christians especially backed the British, because of their close connections to Western European education and religion. However, certain documents released by the British Mandate proved to the Palestinian Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, that they could no longer rely on the British. In 1915, the British High

commissioner, Henry McMahon, promised a major Arab ruler, Sharif Husayn, complete independence for all Arab territories.[92] However, by 1937 the British had backtracked, reneged on original promises by pointing to ambiguities in past documents, and were now promising Zionists an independent home in Palestine. For instance, the Palestine Royal Commission Report, a text written by a team of British officials that traveled to Palestine to decide the best course of action after the riots between Arabs and Jewish settlers, determined that "the Arabs must acquiesce in the exclusion from their sovereignty of a piece of territory, long occupied and once ruled by them."[93] To the Palestinian Arabs, particularly Christians who had supported the British Mandate for decades despite vague promises, these very definite calls for partition must have seemed devastating. Further, two years later the British government issued the White Paper, which, while promising to "safeguard the civil and religious rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine," also declared that the country "should be a State in which the two peoples in Palestine, Arabs and Jews, share authority in government."[94] To the British, this was a compromise that promised Palestinian Arabs that they would never be controlled by Jewish settlers. To both Muslim and Christian Arabs, however, this document only legitimated the Zionists' desire to create a Jewish homeland in territory the Palestinians believed to be irrevocably theirs. Because of these British policy statements, Palestinian Arabs decided that they could no longer depend on the Mandate government for any kind of support, legal or otherwise. Moreover, the Palestinian Christian journalists, who had enjoyed a higher status as close British allies, now lost power. They moved from leadership positions within the nationalist movement to supporting Muslim elites through their articles and propaganda.

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[92] Henry McMahon, "The Husayn-McMahon Correspondence," *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 98.
[93] "Peel Commission," *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 162.
[94] "The 1939 White Paper," *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 163-164.

Although the Palestinian Christians had helped found Palestinian nationalism, they were now relegated to a smaller role within the factions fighting for self-rule.

Another factor that caused the transformation in Palestinian nationalism and the loss of power of the Christian Arabs was the rise in education among Muslims. After the First World War, the British Mandate government, as stated before, found a disproportionately high number of Christian students and schools, as compared to Muslims in Palestine. Throughout the next two decades, however, the administration recorded a steady increase in the number of Muslim schools, as Palestinian Muslims increasingly realized the value of education in politics, and economic prosperity grew. As the children of Palestinian Muslim leaders received enough schooling to compete with Palestinian Christians, the latter community began to lose yet another advantage. Because the Christians were such a small minority among Palestinian Arabs, they had relied on their education and their connection with the West to maintain power within Palestinian society. Now, however, Christians slowly began to lose their status among Muslim leaders and, as a result, their own leadership among nationalists. Further, the increasing number of literate Muslims allowed more Muslim newspapers to be created, which gave Palestinian Christian journalists more competition. To maintain any kind of role within this new social climate, the newspaper editors and owners were forced to choose sides between different factions and use their periodicals as propaganda for that organization. Because of these developments, Palestinian nationalism lost its unity, and the press correspondingly had to change its portrayal of the Palestinian nationalist movement.

The Palestinian Christian press had a long tradition of supporting and disseminating different political beliefs. The press first appeared in Palestine after 1908,

when the Ottoman government introduced a constitution that allowed private newspapers.[95] Before the First World War, when the Ottoman Empire suppressed these newspapers, twenty-five different publications appeared, nineteen of which Christians owned and edited, including *al-Karmil* and *Filastin*.[96] Najib Nassar, the Christian founder of *al-Karmil*, was a strong nationalist and anti-Zionist whose paper was suspended twice by the Ottomans because of his denunciation of Jewish settlers in Palestine, whom the Ottoman Empire had unofficially allowed to enter the region.[97] Other prominent Palestinian Christian journalists included al-Sakakini, who created *al-Dustur* in 1910, a magazine that included many articles about Arab nationalism.[98] The most important Christian newspaper during the Mandate period, however, was *Filastin*, whose first editorial summarized the ideology of its founders.

> It was to be an independent paper that appreciated the constitution which had resulted in the existence of the press. Its objectives were to support every development beneficial to constructive rather than destructive nation building.[99]

After the British took control of the Palestine territory from the former Ottoman Empire, the suppressed periodicals began to appear again. As the movement for nationalism grew, so did the number of Arab newspapers. Mandate records show that in 1920, "there [were] no fewer than thirteen newspapers printed in Arabic -- five appearing weekly, the rest twice or three times a week. The consequence is that all of them have a small circulation, and most have little independence or authority."[100] As the Mandate administration had

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[95] Qustandi Shomali, "Palestinian Christians: Politics, Press, and Religious Identity 1900-1948," *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land* (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 227.
[96] Ibid, 228.
[97] Ibid, 229.
[98] Ibid, 229.
[99] Ibid, 229.
[100] Herbert Samuel, "Report of the High Commissioner on the Administration of Palestine," *Palestine and Transjordan Administration Reports, 1918-1948*, 2:43.

only begun governing, the number of literate Palestinian Arabs was still too small to support a large and diverse press. As a result, the newspapers had a very limited following of elite Palestinian Arabs who most likely already supported nationalism. These journals could be used as a forum for influential Palestinians and as a method of advertising new developments in the national movement.

During the British Mandate period in Palestine, eighty-two Arabic newspaper and magazines existed, although many of these in the later period were Muslim owned as a result of the increased literary of the Muslim population and the new insurgence of pan-Islamic nationalism.[101] During the 1920s however, the Christian-owned newspapers played a leading role in urging urban populations to support Palestinian nationalism.[102] In this period, both Muslim and Christian periodicals focused on nationalism and the need for all Arabs to unite. While political factionalism existed, and the press did address the debates between different groups, these arguments never overwhelmed the basic call for Palestinian independence. One difference that did exist at this point between the Muslim and Christian Arab journals was relationship of the periodical owners to the British administration. Christian journals tended to support the Mandate government, especially the newspaper *al-Karmil.*[103] As seen in the previous section, during the 1920s the British government was generally sympathetic to Palestinian nationalism, which along with the shared religious connection probably contributed to this positive portrayal of the British. On the other hand, Muslim founders of periodicals frequently denounced

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[101] Qustandi Shomali, "Palestinian Christians: Politics, Press, and Religious Identity 1900-1948," *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land* (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 232
[102] Baruch Kimmerling, *Palestinians: The Making of a People (*New York: The Free Press, 1993), 88.
[103] Qustandi Shomali, "Palestinian Christians: Politics, Press, and Religious Identity 1900-1948," *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land* (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 231.

British rule in the region, probably because they did not share the same level of trust with the British that the Christian Arabs enjoyed.

However, in the 1930s the nationalist press began to transform. The factionalism between the Husseinis and Nashashibis increased, and every major periodical took a stance and began to focus more on the debates between these groups and less on the need for unity. Husseini, the Jerusalem mufti and leader of a more pan-Islamic nationalist stance that advocated removing the British from power and forcing the Jewish settlers to leave, was backed by Muslim newspapers such as *Al Jami'a al-Arabia.*[104] On the other side, the more moderate Nashashibi, former mayor of Jerusalem, was supported by the Christian newspaper *Filastin,* because his beliefs in pan-Arab nationalism were more religiously inclusive. Finally, some newspapers owners and editors who did not agree with either side, such as Najib Nassar, instead sided with the British.[105] Nassar's paper still espoused Palestinian nationalism, but believed that it could only be obtained through the guidance of the British Mandate. Unfortunately, the battles over what form of nationalism to support, which dominated the press during parts of this decade, caused more harm to the nationalist movement. For example, secret Jewish reports in 1938 recorded that the Muslim press supporting Husseini was "praising the terrorists [who had attacked Zionists] and persuading the Arab world that terrorism is the most effective way of forcing the British and the Jews to give way to Arab demands," and was "praising the Mufti for his patriotism and his devotion to the Arab cause while vilifying his Arab opponent in Palestine as traitors who sold themselves to the British and the Jews."[106] As a

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[104] Ibid, 232.
[105] Ibid, 232.
[106] "Translation of a Secret Memorandum by the Jewish Agency, Paper no. E/724/20/31, January 7, 1938," *Records of Jerusalem, 1917-1971.* 3:733-34.

result of reports such as these, Palestinian Arabs were further split at a time when Zionists were rapidly unifying. The petty political battles between these factions came less from a true belief in superiority of that particular form of autonomy and more from an attempt to gain as much power as possible. Husseini, as a Muslim religious leader, could win more control over Palestinians by supporting pan-Islamic nationalism. If Palestine became independent under this ideology, he would be in a position to lead the nation. On the opposite side, Nashashibi, although no longer mayor by the 1930s, was known as a secular leader and thus would gain more from a successful pan-Arab nationalist movement. As the leader of a faction, he would most likely be reinstated as head of the new independent nation, or at the least, obtain a high position. As stated before, the Palestinian Christian press owners could not afford to remain neutral. Their status was declining rapidly, and they needed the support of more powerful groups in order to maintain any kind of legitimacy. As a result of these factors, Palestinian nationalism fractured during this period, and the portrayal of nationalism in the Palestinian Christian press also changed to reflect this shift.

At the end of the 1930s, before the beginning of the Second World War, the Palestinian attitude toward the British became even more negative, even in *al-Karmil*. The censorship by the British of all the press during this time caused resentment among even the most ardent supporters of the Mandate administration. A short time before in 1936, during the Palestinian strike, the British suspended thirty-four Palestinian Arab periodicals and banned nine journals, while only suspending one Hebrew newspaper.[107] Even worse, the British support of Zionists and refusal to grant Palestinian independence

[107] Qustandi Shomali, "Palestinian Christians: Politics, Press, and Religious Identity 1900-1948," *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land* (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 233.

over the entire region, creating instead plans to partition the country or create a joint rulership, caused any Christian journalists who had formerly backed the British to now condemn them. Najib Nassar, the strongest supporter of the Mandate government, "said that he had been accused of being pro-British and had suffered from it, both materially and morally . . . . 'Now I am bound to criticize the British policy.'"[108] Nassar was still reluctant to end his backing of the British, perhaps because he could not agree with the other major Palestinian factions. Also, the consequences of this censure may have given him pause. He changed the name of his newspaper to *al-Karmil al-Jadid*, or "New Carmel," and it was suspended on February 16, 1939 for attacking British rule in Palestine. Even further, the wife of the editor was arrested for making nationalist remarks.[109]

Throughout the British mandate period, the choices Palestinian Christian journalists, as well as Palestinians as a whole, made concerning the Palestinian nationalist movement, depended on the political, economic, and social factors of the period. The relationship between the British and Palestinians, particularly Christians, affected how Christian owners of newspapers portrayed the nationalist movement. In addition, the declining status of the Palestinian Christians in education and in association with the Mandate administration changed who and what the periodicals supported. Finally, the political fighting between the Husseinis and Nashashibi in Jerusalem fractured the once united call for independence into sometimes violent debates that spent more time criticizing the opponent than actually discussing possible ways to achieve self-rule.

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[108].Ibid, 233.
[109] Ibid, 233.

Conclusion:

Throughout the British Mandate, the Palestinian Christian press helped to create and spread new Palestinian nationalist ideas and information. This began in the late nineteenth century, when Christian Arabs, born in urban centers and educated at Western institutions, started to assimilate European ideology into their own Arab culture. Palestinian Christians introduced nationalist ideas into the region, first through literary circles, and then through editorials in the infant press. A disproportionately high number of these newspapers, including the important periodicals *al-Karmil* and *Filastin*, were owned and edited by Christian Arabs, again because of their education, urban location, and connections with Western ideas.

However, from the period between the end of the First and Second World Wars, the British took control of Palestine from the Ottoman Empire and officially administered the territory until the inhabitants were able to construct and run a government. During these years, increasing numbers of Zionist settlers began to purchase Palestinian land and demand a Jewish state. As this occurred, Palestinian leaders, both Muslim and Christian, increasingly focused on Palestinian nationalism and independence in reaction to this Zionist threat, and the Palestinian Christian press correspondingly increased its nationalist cries. However, at the same time these officials used nationalism as a tool to gain power within the broader Palestinian society, and Christian Arab newspaper owners were forced to support these factions. The two main Palestinian leaders, Nashashibi and Husseini, used these periodicals to debate the benefits of different forms of nationalism, and to extend their political influence to a wider audience. The disputes these factions held between pan-Islamic and pan-Arab nationalism greatly affected Palestinian

Christians, because their religion could have potentially excluded Arab Christians from independence movements, if pan-Islamic proponents acquired more popular support. Christian-owned newspapers such as *al-Karmil* and *Filastin* eventually supported the more moderate and pan-Arab Nashashibi party and reflected this in articles defending Nashashibi's position.

As violence both between and among Palestinians and Zionists rose, the British administrators shifted their support away from Palestinians, and in particular Palestinian Christians. In the early days of the Mandate, the British had trusted and employed Christian Arabs to a greater extent than Muslims because of the perceived religious and educational bond between these two groups. Moreover, the British understood and backed Palestinian nationalism, which was thought at the time by Western powers to be the right of all ethnic communities. When riots and other hostilities started to occur in the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, Mandate officials began to fear the increasingly violent Palestinian nationalism instead. The rise of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany and subsequent sympathy for Jewish refugees in Palestine also contributed to this change. This also caused Christian Arab press owners in turn to remove their support from the British Mandate and back violent nationalism instead, even when some Palestinian leaders demanded a pan-Islamic domain which would exclude the Christians who had contributed so much to the movement. However, Palestinian Christians had little choice, as Muslim education and consequent participation in the Palestinian press grew in the 1920s and 1930s, and Christian Arabs lost some of their influence on Palestinian society.

The Second World War and the creation of Israel in the late 1940s devastated these newspapers, as well as any other expression of nationalism. Many of the owners

and editors of the periodicals fled, and newspapers within Israel could be easily controlled. The new nationalist movement would come from outside of the region, from areas such as the University of Cairo and Yasser Arafat, or the University of Beirut in the 1950s.[110] However, the older elite members, including the Christian journalists, were in some ways considered by the Arab population to be the cause of the Palestinian downfall, and thus had completely lost their influence over the nationalist movement. Thus, the Second World War heralded the end of the nationalist Arab Christian press. New newspapers eventually arose, but the dominance of the Palestinian Christians within the independence movement was over.

After the Second World War and the decision of the United Nations to assist in the creation of Israel many members of the Palestinian Arab urban educated elite, who had resources and connections in other countries, fled because of the instability and warfare. Indeed, around half the Palestinian population of 1.4 million fled from the region and remain refugees today, including many Palestinian Christians.[111] The Arab Christians abandoned their newspapers and found refuge in other countries, particularly Lebanon and the West, where their Christian heritage gave them some connection with the local populations. However, with the humiliating defeat of the nationalist movement, other Palestinians lost faith in their writings and instead turned to new, younger leaders. Most Palestinian Christians today have assimilated into their adopted countries and in the modern era, they number only a tiny fraction of the Palestinian Arab population remaining in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. This minority status, as well as the increased focus on Islamic fundamentalism, has made Palestinian Christian

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[110] Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1997), 180.
[111] Ibid, 179.

journalists a forgotten group. However, their contributions to the emergence, spread, and transformation of Palestinian nationalism, which still flourishes today, should not be forgotten.

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