The Political Marginalization of Arab Christians in the British Mandatory Period

Samuel J. McCann
IAS 3473: Arab/Israeli Conflict
December 7, 2015

The Arab/Israeli conflict has been addressed as an ethnic conflict to a simple conflict over land. The use of a religious framework receives a lot of attention in the popular imagination, pitting Islam against Judaism. There are numerous problems with this paradigm, but one problem that often goes unnoticed is the erasure of Arab Christian involvement within the conflict. This erasure causes an oversight in regards to the very important contributions Christians made to the development of Arab nationalism. This oversight causes the fundamental misunderstanding that the conflict is religious and not political. A historical examination of Arab Christian involvement can break away from this paradigm. It can also develop a deeper understanding of the conflict. Focusing the analysis on the British Mandatory period, with special regard to Christian involvement in the nationalist movement, one can gain insight into the critical moments of the conflict and the necessary processes for its maturation into what it is today. However, to understand these developments, one must understand the historical movement of Arab Christians within the branch of Arab nationalism that reacted against Zionism. The British mandatory period was the critical period in determining the future scope of the conflict and the manner in which it has continued to unfold. In so doing, one will find that Arab Christians were disproportionately influential in the Palestinian nationalist movement, but their role gradually subsided as a result of increasing Islamic rhetoric, British policy, internal sectarian divisions, and Zionist political maneuvering.

Understanding Arab Christian involvement in the Palestinian nationalist movement requires familiarity with five conditions: Christian social standing before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Zionist presence in Palestine, the movement from Pan-Arab nationalism to a more localized Palestinian nationalism, religious connection to the land, and the diversity and structure of Christian sects in Palestine. Within the Ottoman Empire, guided by Islamic law, the

millet system was formed to address the variety of religious minorities. The idea was to identify people by their religious sect and separate them into millets, which constituted their collective ability to communicate, worship, and even govern their private lives along the guidelines of their own religion.[1] This system went through extensive reform in the nineteenth century, giving more rights to religious minorities, while also being pressured by intervening Western powers under the guise of protecting the rights of Christians.[2] As the Ottoman Empire weakened in the face of Western powers, and non-Muslims were given greater rights within the system, there was a flourishing of nationalist sentiment among the various demographics, especially Christians.

The development of nationalist sentiment among Arab Christians can be attributed to a variety of causes. The first being a desire to move away from religious identification as the basis for rights within a governing system. The Ottoman millet system, while constructed to allow religious differences to exist, held Muslims in higher regard.[3] Negib Azouri's call for Arab independence reflects the discontent among Arab Christians, "the league wants, before anything else, to separate the civil and the religious power, in the interest of Islam and the Arab nation, and to form an Arab empire."[4] The second was the effect European ideas had on Arab Christians. According to Rashid Khalidi, Arab Christians were exposed to Western ideas of nationalism through contact with European Christians and missionaries.[5] Azouri is also representative of this connection. He spent time in France in the 1890s (where he was exposed to pervasive antisemitism) and took refuge in France following his critiques of the governor of Jerusalem and

[1] Beral Aral, "The Idea of Human Rights as Perceived in the Ottoman Empire," *Human Rights Quarterly* 26.2 (May 2004), 475.
[2] Ibid., 478-480.
[3] Ibid., 476.
[4] Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, eds., *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict* (New York City: Penguin Books, 2008), 10.
[5] Rashid Khalidi, "The Formation of Palestinian Identity: The Critical Years, 1917-1923," in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, edited by James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 175.

the subsequent treason charges by the Ottoman Empire.[6] The European ideological connection to Christian Arab involvement in nationalist movements is very clear.

Another cause for Christian involvement in nationalism, particularly in Palestine, is the emergence of Zionism. The Zionist enterprise of settling in Palestine became more organized contemporaneously with the rise of the Young Turks (who desired to modernize the Ottoman Empire).[7] The newspapers *al-Karmil* (established 1908) and *Filastin* (established 1911) were both founded by Christians and devoted much of their energy to anti-Zionism.[8] Many early Zionists described opposition to their cause as largely a result of Christian animosity.[9] This animosity had a long history driving it. As Mandel notes, "the Eastern Christians…had, as a group, traditionally vied with Oriental Jews in the Ottoman Empire as clerks, bankers, merchants, and interpreters."[10] This economic rivalry is reflected in the varying responses of urban Arabs to Jewish immigration, with the Christian segments definitively more concerned about the economic consequences.[11] Along with the economic concern came religious prejudice that was pervasive and violent, as a blood libel in 1847 attests.[12]

Along with this response to Zionism a more localized idea of Palestinian identity gained currency, replacing more Pan-Arab political programs. There was an expectation in Palestine and Syria that Palestine would fall under the control of Syria after the collapse of the Ottoman

---

[6] Elie Kedourie, "The Politics of Political Literature: Kawakabi, Azouri, and Jung," *Middle Eastern Studies* 8.2 (May 1972), 231-232.

[7] Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-2001*, 1st Vintage Books Edition (New York City: Vintage Books, 2001), 59-60.

[8] Ibid., 63-64.

[9] Ibid., 61.

[10] Neville Mandel, "Turks, Arabs, and Jewish Immigration into Palestine, 1882-1914," *Middle Eastern Affairs* 17.4 (1965), 84.

[11] Ibid., 86.

[12] Ibid., 84.

Empire, but Britain eventually ended up occupying and controlling Palestine.[13] The idea of

Palestine being incorporated in Syria had considerable support among Palestinian Arabs.[14] While

this desired border did not unite all of the Arab Middle East, it did aim at forming a large, Arab

state. This vision failed to materialize due to European encroachment and an emerging

Palestinian identity. The Sykes-Picot agreement between the British and French split the Arab

Middle East between the two powers, placing Syria under French control and Palestine under

British control. Further, Palestine was placed under British control as a mandate. Palestine was a

unique mandate in that Britain had issued the Balfour Declaration during World War I, which

promised Jews a "national home" in Palestine.[15] This vague pronouncement of Jewish rights to

the land of Palestine helped spur the conflict between Arabs and Zionists in the mandatory

period. This further separated Palestinian Arab concerns from the concerns of the wider Arab

population in the Middle East.

Another factor that helped cultivate a unique Palestinian Arab identity is the religious

connection to the land. Rashid Khalidi notes that both Muslims and Christians thought of the

land as holy.[16] For the purposes of examining the formation of Palestinian nationalism with

regard to Arab Christian involvement the view of Palestine as a holy land takes on particular

importance. The Christian view of Palestine was given definitive geographical boundaries rooted

in biblical texts, which were further reinforced by the boundaries in which the Orthodox, Latin,

and Protestant leadership exercised authority.[17] Not only were Arab Christians given a

---

[13] Musa Budeiri, "The Palestinians: Tensions Between Nationalist and Religious Identities," in *Rethinking Arab Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, edited by James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 194-195.

[14] Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement 1918-1929*, (London: Frank Cass, 1974), 71.

[15] Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, eds., *The Israel-Arab Reader*, 16.

[16] Rashid Khalidi, "The Formation of Palestinian Identity," 173.

[17] Ibid.

geographical awareness of a unique Arab land, but that awareness developed religious governance along those borders. Islam lacks such ecclesiastical organization making a rigid geographical connection less prevalent. This might explain the initial goal of a united Palestine-Syria state. As such, Arab Christians had some form of Palestinian identity predating the Mandatory period, which certainly contributed to the larger trend of localizing Palestinian concerns. Leading into the Mandatory period it was clear that Arab Christians were active in broader Arab nationalist concerns. As these nationalist ideologies became more localized there continued to be an observable Christian presence.

The diversity and internal structuring of Arab Christians both contributed and detracted from their involvement in nationalist causes. Due to the polities of Arab Christians their church hierarchies located power outside of Arab spheres.[18] The Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican churches maintain their highest ecclesiastical seats outside of Arab speaking countries. Among the Orthodox Christian laity special care was given to make the Church more Arab in nature, which often went hand-in-hand with nationalist concerns.[19] This is demonstrated by the establishment of the First Arab Orthodox Congress in 1923 that focused on attaining an Arabic speaking Bishop of Nazareth, as well as furthering nationalist causes over and against Zionism.[20] The Latin Christian community was led by the patriarch Louis Barlassina. He was very influential in how Latin Christians engaged with the nationalist movement. While he was strongly opposed to Zionism and British rule, he advocated that Latin Christians further distinguish themselves from an Arab identity.[21] This stance was effective in preventing large Latin involvement in the Arab nationalist movement, which weakened Christian involvement

---

[18] Noah Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine: Communalism and Nationalism 1917-1948* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 29.
[19] Ibid., 30.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 31.

from the very start. This void was filled by Melkite Christians, who were disproportionately represented within the nationalist movement. The Melkites were locally led by Bishop Grigorios Hajjar, "the highest ranking Arab clergyman in all of Palestine."[22] His strong stance against the British garnered him influence among Arab nationalists and even led to deference being given to Melkites, even though they were both internationally and regionally less influential than the Latin community.[23] This preference for a less influential Christian sect weakened the overall influence of Arab Christians in moving and shaping the nationalist movement. However, this was a more long term result. Initially Christian influence was still significant.

One of the central reasons for the influence of Christian Arabs on the early nationalist movement was their cooperation with Muslims. If Christians were going to have any influence on the Arab nationalist movement within Palestine this cooperation would be absolutely necessary. A census taken of Mandate Palestine in 1922 showed that Christians made up just under ten percent of the population.[24] This demographic pressure alone forced Christians into cooperation with Arab Muslims. However, the Christian population of Palestine was rather urbanized.[25] This came with benefits in regard to their involvement in Arab nationalism. Their urbanization meant higher levels of education and commercial activity than their Muslim counterparts who were more evenly dispersed among urban and rural areas.[26] It was this union of Palestinian Muslims and Christians that represented the "first nationalist response to the British occupation" forming as early as 1918.[27]

---

[22] Ibid., 33.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Anthony O'Mahoney, "Palestinian Christians: Religion, Politics, and Society, c. 1800-1948," in *Palestinian Christians: Religion, Politics, and Society in the Holy Land*, edited by Anthony O'Mahoney (London: Melisende, 1999), 34.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Erik Freas, "Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Haram al-Sharif: A Pan-Islamic or Palestinian Nationalist Cause," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 39.1 (April 2012), 21.

[27] Musa Budeiri, "The Palestinians," 196.

One of the early successes of Christian/Muslim unity was the Muslim Christian Association (MCA). These interreligious organizations labored toward nationalist aims. Their early activity worked for the establishment of a Syrian nation with Palestine included, but retaining some local autonomy.[28] They also tried to activate a strong anti-Zionist stance among the populace.[29] It is fair to say that their efforts in influencing local opinion were largely successful. British administrators readily admit that the MCA was largely representative of the broader Arab opinion within Palestine.[30] This influence translated into real political results as well. When the British administration called for a legislative council, the MCA called for a boycott of the elections because the council would contain a majority of British and Jewish members, and signify an acceptance of the Balfour Declaration.[31] This boycott was a tremendous success as Christians and Muslims turned out in extremely low numbers for the elections (eighteen percent of Muslims and around five to six percent of Christians).[32] While Palestinian Arabs were working against the British administration, the actions of the MCA suggest that if any state building were to happen among the Arab population it would develop out of cooperative effort between Muslims and Christians. This is precisely what the earlier Christian Arabs wanted from a nationalist movement: cooperation between Muslims and Christians for a greater Arab cause.

However, one has to wonder how efficiently Arabs were able to transfer from the millet system, which prioritized religious identity, to a unified Arab identity. Ideologically, there was still a gulf to be bridged between Arab Christians and Arab Muslims. Erik Freas notes that Christians viewed Arab nationalism as a secular political program, but this secular movement

---

[28] Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement*, 90.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 51.
[31] Ibid., 44.
[32] Ibid., 45.

held Islam in high regard for its cultural importance to the Arab people.[33] This pragmatic tone

defined Christian involvement within Arab nationalism. Pragmatically, it was necessary to give

some deference and respect to the religious majority. Muslims did not have to be so cautious in

their espousal of Arab nationalism. The more religious Arab Muslims were able to espouse an

Arab nationalism that was inextricably linked to Islam.[34] This ideological gulf certainly strained

Muslim/Christian relations, and eventually led to the demise of their cooperation. Initially,

though this gulf existed, the MCA was an organ through which these differences could be

overcome through popular support. Certainly Muslim and Christian elites vied for control and

influence, but these differences could be put aside in the face of external pressure applied by the

British and Zionists.

British external pressure played a causal role in cooperation among Christians and

Muslims, but their policies throughout the Mandate eventually led to the demise of this

cooperation. British policy was not very effective largely due to their ignorance in regards to the

varying religious populations within Palestine. British officials recognized Arab Christians, first

and foremost, as Christians rather than Arabs.[35] As the official organ within Palestine this surely

would have made it difficult for Arabs to stick to their unifying plan as they were constantly

recognized by what distanced them from their fellow Arabs. Edward Keith-Roach, the governor

of Jerusalem, recognized the emerging interreligious unity between Christians and Muslims, but

still felt it prudent to have governing bodies be divided up by proportional representation of

religious groups.[36] During the early stages of the Mandate, the British actually thought of

Muslim/Christian cooperation as a pretense and that neither side was truly content with the

---

[33] Erik Freas, "Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Haram al-Sharif," 21.
[34] Ibid., 20.
[35] Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 28.
[36] Ibid., 26.

other.[37] This misunderstanding of the emerging Palestinian nationalist movement, coupled with

policy that overemphasized religious distinctions, was destructive to Arab unity.

The British decided to continue the millet system leftover from the Ottoman Empire.[38]

This policy would work against Arab nationalist sentiment. By giving official backing to this

division of society the British prevented Arabs from reimagining themselves as a cohesive

whole. No longer did the British assume that Christians and Muslims would not cooperate with

one another, but now the British policy placed communal barriers between Christians and

Muslims. The prevention of inter-communal cooperation surely exacerbated any existing

religious tension that Arabs were working to overcome. Not only did this continue the previous

Ottoman divisions that Arabs were trying to eradicate, but due to the nature of the Mandate it

relegated Muslims to the millet system. Tsimhoni notes that this change placed Muslims "in an

inferior position to that of Christians and Jews; they had no representation of their own and their

religious institutions were administered by the British officials, some of whom were Jewish."[39]

This sort of relegation was sure to increase any existing tensions between the religious groups.

This continuation of the millet system also had negative effects on the Christian community.

According to Tsimhoni, it exacerbated existing sectarian differences among Christians (as

different denominations were given separate communal protections), encouraged division

between the laity and church hierarchies (non-Arab church leaders could not represent their Arab

laity), and Protestants were never formally recognized due to their lack of recognition within the

Ottoman Empire.[40] The resulting divisions failed to produce a strong, unified, Christian political

---

[37] Ibid.
[38] Daphne Tsimhoni, "The Status of Arab Christians under the British Mandate in Palestine," *Middle Eastern Studies* 20.4 (October 1984), 169.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 185-186.

body, which led to the British administration ignoring the voices of Christian communities.[41]

This gradual weakening of Arab Christian political standing created a void. This void was then

filled by a more Islamic focused Palestinian nationalism.

The increasing significance of Islam might have been inevitable considering the

ideological framework that was popular among Palestinian Muslims at the time of the Mandatory

period. Regardless, it created a rhetorical environment that was not inclusive of Christians. Hajj

Amin al-Husayni was the main figure in this political program that exploited the religious beliefs

of the populace, and as a result, the waning of Muslim/Christian cooperation. Hajj Amin al-

Husayni was the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and the head of the Supreme Muslim Council, which

placed him in control of the Muslim millet.[42] It should also be noted that he was associated with

the more radical sector of the Palestinian nationalist movement.[43] This already placed him in

opposition to most Christians. While most historians suggest that Christians gravitated towards

al-Husayni's rival Raghib al-Nashashibi out of fear of al-Husayni's religious position, Haiduc-

Dale counters that this is a simplification of the rivalry as Nashashibi's political party was more

prone to utilize anti-Christian rhetoric.[44] In the early 1920s the Nashashibi family indicated their

opposition to the Palestinian National Congresses through the establishment of the National

Muslim Association (NMA).[45] This opposition was directed against those involved in the MCA

(which was backed by the Husayni family).[46] Nashashibi's involvement with the NMA made

him a suspect ally to Palestinian Christians and could have driven Christians to Hajj Amin al-

Husayni, despite his radical stance and religious rhetoric. Further evidence that Christians would

---

[41] Ibid., 186.
[42] Freas, "Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Haram al-Sharif," 22.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christains*, 62.
[45] Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement*, 214-215.
[46] Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 49.

be unlikely to support Nashashibi is al-Husayni's vocal support of Arab Christians during the

Arab Revolt in 1936-1939.[47] Haiduc-Dale's analysis certainly adds a layer of complexity to the

historical narrative. He also recognizes that the intense rivalries among Muslims (largely the

Nashashibis and al-Husaynis) weakened Christians politically.[48] His argument strongly calls into

question the accepted idea of Christians gravitating toward the Nashashibi camp. These

conclusions merit serious consideration. However, his analysis of the relationship between

Christians and al-Husayni is lacking. This theory, which goes against the grain of most scholarly

work on the subject, does not seem to connect the al-Husayni of the 1936-1939 Revolt with the

al-Husayni of the 1920s.

Despite al-Husayni's declarations of support in the 1936-1939 Revolt, he had built up a

radical, Islamic-focused, rhetoric in the 1920s and early 1930s. Hajj Amin al-Husayni's politics

during this period are marked by radicalism. This was in stark contrast to Arab Christians who

became more moderate and willing to work with the British government in the 1920s.[49] Hajj

Amin al-Husayni's prominence among radicals began with his leadership role in the Arab

extremist group *al-Nadi al-Arabi*, which incited anti-Jewish violence in 1921.[50] His appointment

as President of the Supreme Muslim Council (SMC) brought his radical ideas to a mainstream

institution. The appointment as the head of the SMC and as the Grand Mufti gave him more

religious than political influence, but he used his position as a religious leader to influence

political movements within Palestine. The first instance of this was the Wailing Wall Riots of

1929. The riots originated from a belief that Jews were encroaching on the Islamic religious site

---

[47] Ibid., 132.
[48] Ibid., 51-52.
[49] Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement*, 298-299.
[50] Ibid., 133-135.

at the Temple Mount with their prayers at the Wailing Wall.[51] The resulting riots largely

comprised of Palestinian Muslims responding violently to the perception of Jewish

encroachment on Islamic holy sites, and in the resulting British investigation Christians were

asked to be chauffeurs due to being perceived as "neutral."[52]

The reason for this Christian neutrality is due to the religious character of the

disturbances. This religious nature is the result of al-Husayni's posturing in the late 1920s.

Avraham Sela notes that al-Husayni called for the defense of Islamic holy sites against the

encroachment of Jews.[53] Furthermore, this political maneuver allowed al-Husayni to garner

support from rural populations that heavily identified with Islam.[54] Another important political

result is that it yielded some positive outcomes from an Arab perspective. The report by the

British following the riots called for a curtailing of Jewish immigration, and it was rather novel

for the British to respond to Arab grievances.[55] Also, Avraham Sela makes the convincing

argument that the riots created a larger political gap between Zionists and Arabs while also

increasing the importance of Judaism to the Zionist movement.[56] The Mufti's involvement with

the 1929 Riots garnered him support among Muslims (particularly rural Muslims) for an Islamic

cause. His rhetoric, and his following, worked directly against urbanized Christians seeking out a

secular nationalism.

Furthermore, the relevance of Arab Christians continued to decline with the World

Islamic Conference in 1931. Hajj Amin al-Husayni was the central architect of the conference,

---

[51] Freas, "Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Haram al-Sharif," 24-25.

[52] Ibid., 28.

[53] Avraham Sela, "The 'Wailing Wall' Riots (1929) as a Watershed in the Palestine Conflict," *The Muslim World* 84.1-2 (January-April 1994), 69.

[54] Ibid., 70.

[55] Yehoshua Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement 1929-1939: From Riots to Rebellion* (London: Frank Cass, 1977), 4.

[56] Sela, "The 'Wailing Wall' Riots," 92.

using it to focus attention on Palestinian issues.[57] Sela notes that al-Husayni's motivation for the

conference was to respond to the British government's ruling on the riots in 1929, which he

viewed as lackluster.[58] The conference was fairly successful in drawing Muslim attention to

Palestine as the conference "defined the Palestinian cause as an Islamic one."[59] By drawing in

Muslim clerics from outside of Palestine, al-Husayni pushed influence outward and away from

the localized Palestinian movements. This mixture of Islamic ideology and an outward motion of

influence detracted from Christian influence on the Palestinian nationalist movement. While

there were efforts to recognize Christians as an important part of the nationalist movement at the

conference, there was rhetoric that complained of British favoritism toward Christians.[60] This

drove another wedge between Christians and the nationalist movement.

This all feeds into the question of Christian involvement in the Arab Revolt of 1936-

1939. Here again, Haiduc-Dale proposes ambiguity, while the scholarly consensus proposes a

simpler division of loyalties. Porath describes Christians as "aloof" in the Revolt, which

sometimes came with violent reprisals from Muslims.[61] If this account is true then it would

represent almost complete inactivity of Arab Christians in the nationalist movement. Haiduc-

Dale takes issue with Porath's analysis stating that his conclusions are based on very few

sources, and that Christian involvement in the Revolt is much more complex.[62] Instead, he

suggests that many Christians engaged in the Revolt from a wide range of positions within

society, while also recognizing that some took more moderate stances.[63] Despite Haiduc-Dale's

protestations to Porath's work, the near absence of Christian officers in the Revolt, Porath notes

---

[57] Freas, "Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Haram al-Sahrif," 38.
[58] Sela, "The 'Wailing Wall' Riots," 75.
[59] Freas, "Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Haram al-Sharif," 39.
[60] Ibid., 42.
[61] Yehoshua Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, 269.
[62] Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 131.
[63] Ibid., 152.

only 4 out of 282, is indicative of low Christian involvement.[64] Furthermore, Khalidi notes that

the participants of the Revolt were defined by radicalism, and an anti-British/anti-Zionist

stance.[65] This political character of the Revolt runs counter to the political development of Arab

Christians, who had taken more conciliatory tones toward the British government. Even Haiduc-

Dale recognizes that within the Revolt there was increased distrust of Christians, which did lead

to violent responses and even a boycott.[66] When the St. James Conference (convened to address

Palestine) was announced in 1938, Christians worked against the rebel political agenda stating

they would send a Christian delegation to better represent their interests.[67] As a result of this

action rebel leaders reversed policy and allowed Christians to work on Fridays and rest on

Sundays, which had previously been revoked.[68] This might suggest some political influence, but

it should be considered minimal. The concession of the rebels was for pragmatic concerns that

ultimately did not reshape their ideology. Considering that the controversy over Christians was

reflected in notable political discourse suggests widespread Christian inactivity in the Revolt.

Ultimately, Haiduc-Dale's argument lacks evidence and the safer conclusion is that Christians

only were minimally involved with the Revolt.

Christians were a prevalent force in the early nationalist movement. The MCA is

testament to this, but in outbursts of radicalism and violence Christians were ostracized. The

Wailing Wall Riots of 1929 and the Revolt in 1936-1939 are the result of an increasing Islamic

movement. The cause of this transition can be attributed to the prominence of the

Husayni/Nashashibi rivalry, in which Hajj Amin al-Husayni worked from a religious position to

---

[64] Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 154.

[65] Rashid Khalidi, "The Palestinians and 1948: The Underlying Causes of Failure," in *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, edited by Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 24-25.

[66] Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 140-142.

[67] Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, 270-271.

[68] Ibid., 271.

organize nationalist efforts. The Nashashibis did not offer much relief from Islamic rhetoric establishing the NMA, which expressly excludes Christians. Furthermore, radicalism became the norm in the 1930s. Christians, uncomfortable with such approaches, were pushed into political isolation, which gave rise to distrust. This distrust of Christians manifested violently during the Revolt of 1936-1939. The interreligious tensions that the early MCA had tried to overcome were free to flourish in the changing nationalist landscape that sought to exploit the religion of Islam.

It is necessary to examine the impact of Zionism on Christian involvement in Palestinian nationalism. While internal factors within the Palestinian movement were more important in the dissolution of Muslim/Christian cooperation, there was some pressure from Zionist organizations. Jews were fairly wary of Christians in Palestine. They did describe Arab Christians as the more opposed group to Jewish settlements in the early 20th century.[69] Despite this opposition, Zionist organizations felt that Christians (more specifically the Orthodox and Protestants) could become their allies through economic leverage.[70] Their efforts were consistently frustrated, which led them to believe that Christians were immovable and possibly influencing Muslims to be anti-Zionist.[71] Chaim Kalvaryski, who worked frequently with Arabs, helped the Nashashibi family start the NMA, which became the principle organ of the opposition to the MCA in Mandatory Palestine.[72] While there was distrust between Zionists and Christian Arabs, their relationship should not be simplified to just oppositional factions. The relationship was much more complex. Zionists would not have tried to win over Christians to their cause if they felt that was an impossible goal. Also, despite the strong anti-Zionism among Arab

---

[69] Yaacov Ro'i, "The Zionist Attitude to the Arabs 1908-1914," *Middle Eastern Studies* 4.3 (1968), 225.
[70] Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 27.
[71] Ibid., 27-28.
[72] Ibid., 48-49.

Christians they did provide shelter for Jews during the riots in 1929.[73] Taking into account the

complexity of the relationship between Jews and Christians it is best to view their opposition in

political terms. Seeing these two groups as intrinsically against one another would do a

disservice to the understanding of the conflict. However, due to the political maneuvering of

Zionists, who sought to form a political environment conducive to their settlement, the influence

of Christians in the Palestinian nationalist movement did subside.

Christians have a long history in the land of Palestine. Though their numbers are not as

great as Muslims or Jews, they played an important role in the formation of the conflict during

the Mandatory period. Their early call for nationalism and suspicion of the Zionist movement

were important in the embryonic development of Palestinian nationalism. Unfortunately, due to a

variety of factors their roles fell by the wayside. This has had negative effects on the Palestinian

movement as many important figures who were instrumental in helping develop a coherent

nationalist platform were pushed to the margins. Furthermore, it has prevented us from viewing

the conflict for what it is and placed our focus unnecessarily on the idea of a "religious feud."

Looking long term, as a result of the marginalization of Christians in the Palestinian nationalist

movement, there are other questions that should be explored. The conflict has seen an increase in

radical Islamist involvement, in which Hamas claims the conflict is a matter of faith.[74] What,

then, is the role of Arab Christians? This becomes a matter of integration or assimilation. If

Hamas continues to operate under the notion that the true solution to this conflict is in the

pervasiveness of Islam among Palestinians, then the outlook for Arab Christian involvement is

very bleak.[75] An understanding of this history might break a binary conceptualization of this

---

[73] Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 114.
[74] Meir Litvak, "The Islamization of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: The Case of Hamas," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34.1 (January 1998), 148.
[75] Ibid., 149.

conflict and create space within scholarship for the voice of Palestinian Christians, who still are

invested in the solution of this conflict.

Bibliography

Aral, Berdal. "The Idea of Human Rights as Perceived in the Ottoman Empire." *Human Rights Quarterly* 26.2 (May 2004): 454-482.

Budeiri, Musa. "The Palestinians: Tensions Between Nationalist and Religious Identities." In *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* edited by James Jankowski and Israel Gershon, 191-206. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Freas, Erik. "Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Haram al-Sharif: A Pan-Islamic or Palestinian Nationalist Cause." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 39.1 (April 2012): 19-51.

Haiduc-Dale, Noah. *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

Kedourie, Elie. "The Politics of Political Literature." *Middle Eastern Studies* 8.2 (May 1972): 227-240.

Khalidi, Rashid. "The Formation of Palestinian Identity: The Critical Years, 1917-1923." In *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* edited by James Jankowski and Israel Gershon, 171-190. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Khalidi, Rashid. "The Palestinians and 1948: The Underlying Cause of Failure." In *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, edited by Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim, 12-36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Laqueur, Walter and Barry Rubin, eds. *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict*. 7th revised and updated edition. New York City: Penguin Books, 2008.

Litvak, Meir, "The Islamization of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: The Case of Hamas." *Middle Eastern Studies* 34.1 (January 1998): 148-163.

Morris, Benny. *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001*. 1st Vintage Books Edition. New York City: Vintage Books, 2001.

O'Mahoney, Anthony. "Palestinian Christians: Religion, Politics and Society, c. 1800-1948." In *Palestinian Christians: Religion, Politics and Society in the Holy Land*. Edited by Anthony O'Mahoney, 9-55. London: Melisende, 1999.

Porath, Yehoshua. *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement 1918-1929*. London: Frank Cass, 1974.

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

Ro'i, Yaacov. "The Zionist Attitude to the Arabs 1908-1914." *Middle Eastern Studies* 4.3. (1968): 198-242.

Sela, Avraham. "The 'Wailing Wall' Riots (1929) as a Watershed in the Palestine Conflict." *The Muslim World* 84.1-2 (January-April 1994): 60-94.

Tsimhoni, Daphne. "The Status of Arab Christians under the British Mandate in Palestine." *Middle Eastern Studies* 20.4. (October 1984): 166-192.