

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CURRENT ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN
CONFLICT: THE USE OF LAND AND IMMIGRATION AS SOURCES
OF TENSION DURING THE BRITISH MANDATE ERA
(1922 - 1948)

ORIGENS DO ATUAL CONFLITO NA ISRAEL-PALESTINO: O
USO DA TERRA E A IMIGRAÇÃO COMO FONTE DE TENSÃO
DURANTE O PERÍODO DE MANDATO BRITÂNICO
(1922 - 1948)

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Abstract: In this study, it is argued that the use of land and the immigration process during the British Mandate era in Palestine (1922 - 1948), as well as the political/legal structure of the Mandate, constituted a major source of unrest that culminated in conflicts between Arab Palestinians, Jews and the British. In this sense, the development of political, social, economic and juridical institutions by both the Arab Palestinian and Jewish communities will be exposed. Further, it will be explained how the Jewish organization during the mandate era made it possible for them to acquire land at the expense of the Palestinians. Finally, the article will analyze a conflict that arose from these historical contingencies, the Great Revolt of 1936-39.

Key words: Palestine; use of land; immigration; conflict.

Resumo: Neste estudo, argumenta-se que o uso da terra e o processo de imigração durante o Mandato Britânico na Palestina (1922 - 1948), bem como a estrutura política/jurídica do Mandato, constituem uma importante causa de tensão que culminou em conflitos entre Árabes Palestinos, Judeus e Britânicos. Nesse sentido, vamos expôr o desenvolvimento das instituições políticas, sociais, econômicas e jurídicas de ambos os Árabes Palestinos e o Judeus. Em seguida, explicaremos a razão pela qual os Judeus conseguiram, durante

o período do mandato, adquirir terra às custas dos Palestinos. Finalmente, explicitaremos uma situação de conflito que surgiu a partir destas contingências históricas, a Grande Revolta de 1936-39.

Palavras-chave: Palestina; uso da terra; imigração; conflito.

I. Introduction

“The event illuminates its own past, it can never be deduced from it”¹

Hannah Arendt

Hannah Arendt’s perspectives on history and politics are described, by some, as negative, or even pessimistic, due to the historical events, such as Nazism and Stalinism, that she experienced during her life time². Despite these perspectives, however, there’s room to argue that she has, in fact, an optimistic historical and political perspective. One of the main features of Arendt’s thinking is the human action, which has as a fundamental characteristic an intrinsic freedom that manifests itself through practice and action. Such freedom isn’t limited, according to her³. This means that the possibility of change is always present; there isn’t inevitability.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has several narratives. The premise of this article is that a narrative over the conflict can’t be one based on inevitability or necessity of a determined historical situation. It’s important, however, to point out at least the major narratives on the topic. There are two main narratives.

On the one hand, there’s a Jewish narrative, which understands the birth of Israel as a final step of a series of inevitable historical events. In short terms, it starts with a Biblical period, in which Jews lived in Palestine, followed by its expulsion. Then, there’s the Second Temple, which is followed by a period of foreign domination. The Holocaust is a major

1 * I am very grateful to Murat Da li (Ph.D. candidate in History, UC Berkeley) and Prof. Beshara Doumani (UC Berkeley) for providing me with an enriching introduction to the history of the Middle East. Special thanks to Murat Da li for the helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

ARENDE, Hannah. “**Understanding and Politics**”, *Partisan Review* 20, n° 4, 1953, p. 388.

2 D’ENTRÈVES, Maurizio Passerin. **The political philosophy of Hannah Arendt**. London: Routledge, 1994, p. 97.

3 Idem, p. 64 - 100.

event in Jewish history that precedes the return of the Jews to their Holy Land, Israel⁴.

On the other hand, the Arab narrative has a tone of catastrophe. It starts with the Arab conquest of the region, followed by the period of the Ottoman Empire. The Empire's end coincided with the beginning of Zionist incursions on the region, followed by foreign British domination, culminating in the birth of Israel, an event known as the Nakba Day, meaning "the catastrophe"⁵.

The purpose of this article is not to argue that such narratives are incorrect. The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the Israeli conflict raises several questions, and it's this article's objective to put emphasis on some of those questions it deems crucial. More specifically, this article aims to investigate which were the historical conditions (in the sense of social, economic, political and legal ones) that constituted the tension between Israeli and Palestinians, and, further, transformed it into conflict. Such questions are an example of Hannah Arendt's conception of history. As she puts,

"it is the light of the event itself which permits us to distinguish its own concrete elements (out of an infinite number of abstract possibilities), and it is still this same light that must guide us backwards into the always dim and equivocal past of these elements themselves"⁶.

The period of the British Mandate in Palestine witnessed the emergence of some situations that still affect the Israeli-Palestine conflict. These situations intensely shaped the relationship of the inhabitants of Palestine, as it still does. The identification of the processes of land distribution and immigration into Palestine during the mandate, as well as the legal and political structured created at that time, era allows us to understand the conflict itself, during the mandate, as well as today. The objective of the present work is to identify these processes, analyze them, and determine how they reflected themselves, in practice, in a permanent tension, that is, a conflict.

4 For a discussion about different accounts, see SCHLAIM, Avi. "The Debate about 1948", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27:3 (August 1995).

5 As Doumani points out, Nakba is "the single most formative event in modern Palestinian history", in DOUMANI, Beshara, *A tribute long overdue: Rosemary Sayigh and Palestinian Studies*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 4 (Summer 2009), p. 7.

6 ARENDT, 1953, p. 325.

This article expressly rejects the necessity and inevitability of the present day conflict in Palestine. The illumination of its past is nothing more than the analysis of the historical contingencies that lead to it. The conflict can't be deduced from these contingencies, but only understood. And in this sense, this article is also optimistic, in the sense that the understanding of these contingencies is necessary for concrete solutions to the tension between Israel and Palestine.

I.1. Political Zionism

Zionism as *political movement*⁷ was characterized by the idea of the constitution of a national home for the Jewish community. Although its origins can be traced before the late 19th century, it was during that period that it got more organized. The pattern of discrimination suffered by the Jews became very intense at that point, mainly in Eastern Europe, where most of the Jews lived. Particularly during the reigns of Alexander III (1881-1894) and Nicholas II (1894-1917), there were a series of pogroms, a kind of violence directed to a particular group, in this case against the Jews. At the same time, states in Western Europe were enacting legislation to assimilate the Jews. These circumstances created, on the one hand, in relation to Eastern Europe, a fear of violence; on the other hand, in relation to Western Europe, a concern that a dilution of the communal bonds by the Jewish community might occur, since, through assimilation, the identification of the Jews wouldn't be with the religious community anymore, rather with the nation into which they were being assimilated. The consequence would be a decline of religious observance. Hence, the assumption was, by the Jewish community, that the essence of the discrimination wouldn't be resolved through assimilation. For many, the long standing spiritual Zionism was transformed into a political Zionism, based on a Jewish nationalism, which stated that only a political solution would resolve the discrimination suffered by the Jews⁸.

7 It's important to point out that Zionism was expressed in many forms, such as political, religious and cultural Zionism. For a broad account on the evolution of this movement, cf. D. Vital's work: *The Origins of Zionism* (Oxford, 1975); *Zionism: The Formative Years* (Oxford, 1982); and *Zionism: The Crucial Phase* (Oxford, 1987), cited in: FIELDHOUSE, D.K., *Western Imperialism in the Middle East 1914-1958*, Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: January 2010.

8 CLEVELAND, William L.; BUNTON, Martin, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 4th ed., Boulder: Westview Press, 2009, p. 241.

During the last decades of the 19th century, some groups started to organize themselves under a central coordinating agency, named Lovers of Zion, which tried to sponsor small agricultural land settlements in Palestine. It didn't succeed because of its lack of resources. At the same time, written works began to appear, analyzing the conditions of the Jews in Europe, the pattern of discrimination they suffered and offering solutions. Probably the first of that kind was a book entitled *Autoemancipation*, from Leo Pinsker, in 1881. Basically, it argued that the discrimination against Jews was so intense and deeply rooted, that no matter what the Jews did, they wouldn't be treated as equals. The only solution was the establishment of an independent Jewish state. This was an incentive for an emerging political Zionist movement. However, at that time, Zionism was still an uncoordinated movement.

With the work of Theodor Herzl, in its book titled *The Jewish State* (1896), political Zionism was provided with an ideological basis. Convinced that anti-Semitism was so deeply rooted that it could never be removed through legislation, Herzl argued, in sum, that the Jews constituted a nation, but lacked a political state within which they could freely express their national culture. Based on these premises, it concluded, on the one hand, that the Jews would never be free within other countries, where they would always be aliens, and, on the other hand, that the solution to this issue was, obviously, the establishment of a Jewish sovereign political entity, a Jewish state. It's important to note that his work hadn't so much a religious character, rather it had a political one. Indeed, he didn't even specify Palestine as the place for this Jewish state.

Nevertheless, the outcomes of his work, by providing an ideological basis for Zionism, were the growth of the movement and the engagement of Herzl itself in trying to unify it, which, eventually resulted in the first Zionist Congress, in Basel, in 1897. The Congress established the World Zionist Organization as the central administrative organ of the movement. A fundamental decision was the adoption of a political program proposed by Herzl: Palestine was chosen as the land for this Jewish state. The decision to choose Palestine would have further implications, such as the exclusion of Palestinians from political life of the region, as it will be better demonstrated further. The exclusion derives from the very perspective the movement had about the Palestinians. From the start, it ignored the inhabitants who lived there. This is perfectly expressed by a famous slogan of the Zionist movement: "a land without a people for a

people without a land”. This slogan clearly expresses the conception the Zionist movement had in relation to Palestine: one of emptiness. Not total emptiness, but a lack of civilized people, in the same sense that the Americans and Africans were once portrayed⁹.

2. The Balfour Declaration of 1917

Despite the intense evolution achieved by the Zionist movement, it lacked a fundamental factor for its success: the support of a great power. It wasn't until World War One (WWI) that Zionism succeeded in that task.¹⁰ On November 2nd 1917, the British government issued, through its foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour, directed to Lord Rothschild, a prominent Zionist in Britain, the Balfour Declaration¹¹, which stated as follows:

November 2nd, 1917

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

“His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

9 DOUMANI, Beshara, *Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXI, n^o 2 (Winter 1992), p. 8; LOCKMAN, Zachary, *Comrades and enemies: Arab and Jewish workers in Palestine, 1906-1948*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p. 32-33.

10 CLEVELAND; BUNTON, 2009, 242-43.

11 There are several theories which tried to demonstrate why the Balfour declaration was issued by Britain at that time. One of them was the organization of the Jews towards the Zionist cause. The Jews had already formed the World Zionist Organization, which gathered annually, and had branches throughout the world. Besides that, there was a certain sympathy towards the Jewish cause in the British cabinet and this was used skillfully by a Jewish lobby represented by Weizmann. Another important aspect is that the support for the Jews in Palestine was presented to Britain as an opportunity to secure strategic interests in the region, since it would mean the establishment of a pro-British government in its Palestinian protectorate, in CLEVELAND, William L.; BUNTON, Martin, 2009, p. 243.

Yours sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour¹²

The Balfour Declaration was of the utmost importance. A careful reading of the document enables the identification of the sensitive issues it contains. Firstly, the document constitutes a promise of a land, Palestine, from a third party, Britain¹³, to a foreign group, the Jewish community. Furthermore, it recognized the Jews as a people, while categorizing all the population which already inhabited the land as “non-Jews”. Consequently, it granted the Jews political rights, while the Palestinians (an the others who used to live there) were given solely civic and religious rights.

The implications of such an exclusion are profound: it meant that the political power would remain with the Jews, not with the “non-Jews”¹⁴. It is important to recall that political power means the power to take decisions. It is, in this sense, the power to say what the law will be, for instance. This had profound implications in the development of the region, and of the conflict, which are, still, presented today. The exclusion of those who were not Jews from the process of taking political decision, giving them only political and religious rights, created a legal structure which was perpetuated during decades. It is not by chance that one can easily see similarities with what happens on the grow in Palestine today and this structure created in the British Mandate period.

The immediate implications, in terms of political power, of the Balfour Declaration, were that the high commissioner of the mandate in Palestine was a Jew and an ardent Zionist, Sir Herbert Samuel. Zionist’s interpretation of the Balfour declaration was that national home meant a Jewish state and the role of Zionism was to make possible the achievement of this political goal. It’s important to note that by the term Jewish state, the Zionist movement meant what Chaim Weizmann, one of the movement most influential lobbyists, once said referring to Palestine: “the country should be Jewish in the same way that France is French and England is English”¹⁵. Clearly, the Palestine envisaged within this context is

12 http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/balfour.asp, last access on April 2nd, 2012.

13 In fact, at the time of the Balfour Declaration, Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire.

14 DOUMANI, Beshara, *Palestine versus the Palestinians? The Iron laws and ironies of a people denied*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXXVI, n^o 4 (Summer 2007), p. 51.

15 This was said Paris Peace Conference after World War One, in CLEVELAND; BUNTON, 2009, p. 245.

one in which the Arab Palestinians would be, in some form, politically excluded, with all the implications that this meant.

3. British mandate period (1922 - 1948)

The mandate era started in 1922, ending in 1948. It was established under the San Remo Conference of 1920 and sanctioned by the League of Nations in 1922¹⁶.

The Mandate was a source of great enthusiasm for the Jews and alarm for the Arabs. The main points of the Mandate Charter were: establishment of the Holy Places, rights of foreigners, foreign relations, the establishment of three official languages (Arabic, Hebrew, English), and, perhaps the most important point, the implementation of the Balfour declaration. Indeed, as a reflection of the implementation of the declaration, it can be noted that the word “Arab” doesn’t even appear in the Mandate text. The word “Palestinian”, by its turn, appears once: when referring to the facilitation of acquisition of Palestinian citizenship by Jews. This exclusion is not a mistake. It is, rather, part of a historical attitude towards the region, which began even before the Zionist movement itself¹⁷.

3.1. Actors; political and administrative institutions.

During the 1920s there was an effort to establish political institutions in Palestine to form a national government. As stated before, Britain nominated Sir Herbert Samuel as the High Commissioner of the mandate. He tried to create a joint government with several proposals, which ranged from the establishment of a constitution, with a legislative council composed of Arabs, Jews and Christians, until the creation of an advisory council consisting of Jews and Arabs. All efforts failed, since the Arabs rejected any kind of settlement that would imply recognizing the Balfour Declaration as null and void. In practice, the mandate imposed an impossible task for Britain, known as the policy of dual obligation: the establishment of the Jewish project and the protection of the “non-Jews”¹⁸.

The administration of Palestine, therefore, instead of being a national and unified one, was performed by the High Commissioner alone.

16 The complete text of the Mandate can be found in: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/palmanda.asp, last access in July 15.

17 DOUMANI, 1992.

18 CLEVELAND; BUNTON, 2009, p. 247.

Palestine didn't witness the creation of a constitution, parliament, elections, in sum, the basic institutions for governance. What occurred was the separate development of political institutions by each community, strengthening the solidarity within each community, while, at the same time, creating a gap between them.

3.1.1. Arabs

During the mandate, the leadership of the Arab Palestinians was a group of urban notable families. These urban families came from the Ottoman Empire's period, and based their power and wealth on their ownership of the religious and municipal offices. The notables, however, were more interested in maintaining their wealth and status than to represent a radical opposition to Britain and the Jews. Indeed, they were the intermediaries between Britain and the local population, and their existence depended on a moderate opposition and a cautious cooperation. Beyond their unwillingness to stand as opposition, they were totally unprepared to properly represent the Arabs. Ultimately, they were still linked to a tradition of centuries of Ottoman rule; their major failure was their inability to adapt themselves to a new political environment¹⁹. As Cleveland affirms, "they were provincial notables into whose hands was placed one of the most intractable problems of the twentieth century"²⁰.

Another important factor is that there was a political factionalism between notable families. They conflicted between themselves over power. It's important to recall that the notables existed since the 19th century, as it did the rivalries between them. There were two main families which competed to be the representatives of the Palestinians: the Nashashibis and the al-Husaynis. Their rivalry was constantly revived and intensified by the British governments that held office during the mandate.

This political factionalism was demonstrated by the nomination of Hajj Amin al-Husayni by Sir Herbert Samuel as the president of the Supreme Muslim Council. The nomination only occurred due to Hajj Amin's moderate political posture. Although the Supreme Muslim Council became the most extensive Arab political organization in Palestine, with the power to deal with issues such as supervising *shari`ah* courts²¹, manage-

19 DOUMANI, 2007, p. 51.

20 CLEVELAND; BUNTON, 2009, p. 248.

21 According to Doumani, *shari`ah* courts are Islamic religious courts, dating back from the decades of Ottoman

ment of *waqfs*²², establishment of Islamic religious schools etc, Hajj Amin used this power to prevent the members of the Nashashibis family from occupying positions of political and religious importance. Ultimately, he posed no serious challenge to Jewish and British rule. In fact, in many occasions there was cooperation between these actors.

At the beginning of the mandate, an executive body to represent the Palestinians was created. The Arab Executive was the result of an effort of Palestinians and Christians. They formed the Palestinian Arab Congress, which met annually after 1919. It claimed to represent all Palestinians, but failed to endure without the effective recognition of its legitimacy by Britain, which, by its turn, is another example of the political exclusion of the “non-Jews”. The Arab Executive ceased to exist with the death of its most influential member, the former mayor of Jerusalem, Musa Kazim al-Husayni.

Within this scenario, attempts to build a more representative and genuine opposition that would effectively represent the Palestinian population’s needs failed.

3.1.2. Jews

The Yishuv (denomination given to the Jewish community in Palestine at that time), by its turn, were able to develop institutions that would, in the future, serve as the basis of the Israeli state. The Jewish community had a central agency, the Jewish Agency, formed in 1929 by the World Zionist Organization, which provided an impressive array of state services, such as health, banking and education services, without mentioning it had direct access to the High Commissioner and British Officers, provided for by article 4 of the Mandate itself²³. The Agency was a truly executive organ of the Jewish community.

occupation to the present. These Courts dealt with a very broad range of issues. Doumani affirms that the records of *shari’ah* courts “illustrate in a concrete and detailed manner nearly every aspect of daily human interaction - be it in the personal, social, economic, religious, or administrative fields”, in DOUMANI, Beshara. Palestinian Islamic Court Records: A Source for Socioeconomic History, MESA Bulletin, 19:2 (December, 1985), p. 155.

- 22 A *Waqf* is a property that was donated in charity by the owner, for a good purpose. Although this is a very simple definition, the *Waqfs* are very complex institutions with important social and economic functions. Besides, they have legal rules that regulate their functioning.
- 23 The Jewish Agency substituted the Palestine Jewish Agency, created in 1921. Art. 4 of the Mandate states: Art. 4 - An appropriate Jewish agency shall be recognised as a public body for the purpose of advising and co-operating with the Administration of Palestine in such economic, social and other matters as may affect

Another institution was the National Assembly, an elected body of 300 delegates. This Assembly was responsible for selecting among themselves the members of the National Council (denominated Va`ad Leumi), which was in charge of administrative issues and was treated by the mandate government as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian Jewry.

Perhaps the most important institution created during the Mandate period was the Histadrut, the Federation of Jewish Labor, which had an important role in trade unionism, which, gradually, expanded its activities to social and economic assistance. The objective was to achieve self-sufficiency. For this end, public works projects and companies that acted in activities such as shipping, agricultural marketing, road and housing construction, banking and insurance were created²⁴.

The Histadrut also controlled the Jewish defense forces, Hagannah. This armed force body was formed in response to Arab attacks. Although it encountered resistance by the British government, it transformed itself in a permanent underground reserve army fully integrated into the political institutions of the Jews as a whole²⁵.

Another important aspect was the growing funding received by external support from individuals and organizations operating outside Palestine. This support included the lobby made by Chaim Weizmann, mainly when the World Zionist Organization headquarters were transferred to London, in 1920. Weizmann had direct access to key positions on the British government. Another source of support was the establishment of the Zionist Organization of America, in 1917. Eventually, private contributions from the United States made up significant portion of the funds donated to the Zionist movement.

Finally, in this scenario, it was possible the emergence of political parties, such as the Mapai in the 30s. Basically, this whole structure of institutions was the prototype of future state institutions.

the establishment of the Jewish national home and the interests of the Jewish population in Palestine, and, subject always to the control of the Administration to assist and take part in the development of the country. The Zionist organization, so long as its organization and constitution are in the opinion of the Mandatory appropriate, shall be recognised as such agency. It shall take steps in consultation with His Britannic Majesty's Government to secure the co-operation of all Jews who are willing to assist in the establishment of the Jewish national home.

24 CLEVELAND; BUNTON, 2009, p. 251.

25 CLEVELAND; BUNTON, 2009, p. 252.

3.2. Immigration and land acquisition

Jewish immigration to Palestine occurred in the form of what was called *aliyahs*, that is, waves of immigrants. The growth of the rate of immigration created a demand for land in a context in which the supply continued static. The Jewish institutions were more prepared to absorb the newly arriving immigrants than the Arabs in maintaining their property. The acquisition of land caused a social and economic exclusion that lies at the heart of the Israeli-Palestine conflict.

In 1922, the record indicated the presence of 93.000 Jews in Palestine. In the 1920s, another 80.000 Jews arrived in Palestine. At the same time, the Arab population also grew. The logic consequence of both factors is that the demand for land grew intensely, since land is source of settlement and subsistence.

The continuing growth of the number of people in such a small piece of land would eventually lead to conflict. This occurred in the 1930. The rise to power of fascist governments in Europe, mainly Hitler in Germany, intensified the Jewish immigration to Palestine. Not by chance, by 1936, the Jewish population numbered 382.000. In 1941, this number arose to 489.830, and, in 1946, to 599.992. During this period, the Arab population also grew from 700.000 at the beginning of the mandate, to 983,244 in 1936, until 1.310.866 in 1946. The variations can be seen in the following table²⁶:

Table 1: The population of Palestine by Ethnic Group, 1931 - 46.

Period	Arab	%	Jewish	%	Other	%	Total
1931	864.806	82	174.139	16	18.269	2	1.057.601
1936	983.244	71	382.857	28	22.751	2	1.388.852
1941	1.123.168	68	489.830	30	26.758	2	1.639.756
1946	1.310.866	67	599.922	31	31.562	2	1.942.350

The Jews also developed another institution with the intent of buying land: the Jewish National Fund. The high prices the National Fund was willing to pay attracted Arab landowners, which sold significant par-

26 McCARTHY, Justin, *The population of Palestine*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 36, in CLEVELAND; BUNTON, 2009, p. 255.

cels of their land to the fund. By 1939, 5% of the total area of the mandate, which meant 10% of the cultivable land, was Jewish property. As stated above, the development of the Histadrut meant the possibility of employment to the waves of immigrants and the development of a self-sufficient economy, based on agriculture. Taking into account the fact that the land bought by the National Found was sold exclusively to Jews, this system enabled the settlement of the wave of Jewish immigrants and had a devastating effect on Palestinian economy, with profound social impacts.

The first issue that must be analyzed is the fact that the land bought by the National Found was mainly from Arab large landowners, such as Palestinians notable families. The whole body of peasants (which represented two thirds of the Arab population) that used to work on these lands was not absorbed by the new Jewish landowners. The Jews didn't employ Arabs, but only Jews, due to the ever increasing number of immigrants. Furthermore, the Jews didn't buy Arab products. This boycott lead to a stagnation of the Arab economy. Those small land owners who depended on their land to survive couldn't sell their products anymore, and, hence, couldn't pay the British taxes. Differently from the Ottoman period, in which taxes could be paid in kind, the British demanded the paying of taxes in cash. This led those small landowners to borrow funds at high rates from local moneylenders (who were mostly the large landowners). Frequently, these small landowners were indebted, without any alternative but to sell their lands, either to the large landowners or the Jews. In any case, the majority of the land went to the Jews, due to the policy of the National Found explained above.

As Cleveland exposes, “it is little wonder that in a region of limited agricultural potential, the ownership of arable land became a matter of *contention*”²⁷.

3.3. Implications: social and economic exclusion

The conjunction of these factors was an ever increasing expansion of the Jewish settlements, due to the increase of Jewish population derived from the waves of immigration, as well as a huge increase in the number of unemployed, impoverished and marginalized Arabs. In the terminology used by Doumani, “territorial appropriation and demographic displacement of Palestinians from their ancestral lands” constitute

27 CLEVELAND; BUNTON, 2009, p. 255, the author's emphasis.

the “twin engines of the conflict”²⁸. Differently from the Jews, which had a *quasi*-state apparatus to support them, the Arabs found themselves without any kind of support. They didn’t have any institutions to provide them employment or assistance and Britain didn’t put efforts to resolve the issue either.

Such social and economic exclusion, the “twin engines”, met the already existing political exclusion derived from the structure created by the Balfour Declaration. Without voice and without political and legal alternatives to find solutions, the long-standing tension present in the relation of Arabs and Jews would, eventually, culminate in conflict.

3.3.1. Conflict: The Great Revolt 1936-39

There were many situations of unrest during the mandate period. We will analyze one of these situations: the Great Revolt of 1936-1939.

The Great Revolt is of particular importance due to what it represents. It was a popular movement from below, spontaneous, against the Zionists, British imperialism and the Arab leaders. Its popular and spontaneous character demonstrated the extent to which the social and economic conditions of the Arab Palestinians deteriorated and the total lack of any instance of political and legal recourse. The revolt began in April 15, when violence from both sides resulted in the death of Jews and Arabs. In April 19 the Arabs declared a general strike and formed the Arab Higher Committee, composed by Christians, Muslims, members of both the Nashashibis and al-Husaynis families, in an attempt to form a unified and representative body able to oppose British and Jewish claims. The strike was met with violence after mediation efforts, with the loss of 80 Jews and 1000 Arabs. The failure, however, didn’t represent social rest, since the tension continued to exist.

The revolt emerged again in the following years, but in a much broader scale. The rebels were able to gather support in the rural areas and even controlled some cities and parts of Jerusalem. The response was harsh. Britain sent 20.000 troops, while the Jews also sent their armed forces. In March 1939, the revolt was over, with more than 3.000 Arabs, 2.000 Jews and 600 British casualties.

It was a revolt of impoverished peasants, which met brutal repression. The British imposed collective punishment and destruction of

28 DOUMANI, 2007, p. 50.

property of peasants. The revolt leaders were either dead, in prison or in exile. The economic damage was intense, as well as the large number of killings.

4. Conclusion

The importance of understanding the source of the social unrest, represented mainly by the Great Revolt of 1936-39 relies on the fact that, today, such tensions still exist today. Actually, the conflict still exists, and it is due, in great part, to the pattern of land distribution, the so called “twin engines of the conflict”, as well as the political and legal structure established by the Balfour Declaration. The expansion of Jewish settlements is a constant on the news and almost always represents some kind of tension on the ground.

As in 1917, when the Balfour Declaration was issued, passing through the whole twentieth century and even today, Palestinians are still excluded from political life. They aren't a people; they are absent in history. As brilliantly exposed by Trouillot:

“That some people and things are absent from history, lost, as it were, to the possible world of knowledge, is much less relevant to historical practice than the fact that some people and things are absent in history, and that this absence itself is constitutive of the process of historical production”.²⁹

The structure created by the Balfour Declaration was one of exclusion. It excluded Palestinians from taking decisions and chapping the future of the land they used to inhabit. Today, the events in Palestine illuminate their own past. Poverty in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank, as well as the reality of Refugee Camps, are not an inevitable development of the history of the region. They are part of a structure of exclusion established almost hundred years ago, beginning with the Balfour Declaration, and that it is still perpetuated. Ultimately, the Israeli-Palestine conflict isn't a moment; it is, rather, a process that continues today. In this sense, it is highly important to realize that a solution to this conflict will necessarily require giving the Palestinians rights as a people. The structure of exclusion will continue and, indeed, perpetuate the “twin engines of the con-

29 In DOUMANI, Beshara, **A tribute long overdue: Rosemary Sayigh and Palestinian Studies**, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXXVIII, n^o 4 (Summer 2009), p. 8.

flict” until the Palestinians are considered a people, in the modern sense of the word, with all the implications this generates. The most important of which is their organization into a collective political entity, where they will have political rights, as well as a land. This means: a Palestinian state. Just then will the Palestinians be written into history.

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