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Dr. Khalil Totah: Arab-American Quaker Educator and Palestinian Nationalist Crusader, 1914-1948

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**DR. KHALIL TOTAH: ARAB-AMERICAN QUAKER EDUCATOR
AND PALESTINIAN NATIONALIST CRUSADER,
1914-1948**

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(in History)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

May 2018

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An Abstract of the Dissertation Presented
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Born in Ramallah, Palestine, in 1886 Dr. Khalil Totah belonged to a generation of Syrians who grew up with an appreciation for the “modern” spirit that was sweeping the world. They looked forward to a social order that fostered Arab independence, but were also concerned with universal human problems. Totah’s life coincided with a period of tremendous transformation and change in the Middle East. Some historians, most recently Erez Manela, have argued that U.S. President Woodrow Wilson inspired a rising global consciousness and that his rhetoric fostered the spread of anti-colonial movements across the Middle East. Totah and his fellow intellectuals were not so much inspired by Wilson’s words, but rather they viewed them as support of a pre-existing sentiment. Greater Syrians had been developing ideas of freedom and democracy since their cultural and intellectual renaissance in the mid-19th century. Like many peoples across the globe they were not so much taken by Wilson’s “new” vocabulary as they were validated by it. There were many circumstances which influenced the political and nationalist movements of the Middle East. The story of Dr. Khalil Totah provides one small

piece of a larger transformation in Syria. His writings show the evolution of Arab nationalism in Palestine during a transformative era. Totah and his contemporaries had an alternate vision of world order shaped by their own social experiences. This study also shows a clear difference between the interests of the United States political and economic elites, who preached about democracy, and intellectuals in emerging nations who sought independence. An examination of Totah's views on the challenges facing Palestine during his lifetime offers a way to understand the development of Palestinian national consciousness in the first third of the 20th century.

DEDICATION

For my husband and my three children –

I would have never had made it this far without your love and support.

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INTRODUCTION: THE WINE OF WILSONIANISM

*The ports ye shall not enter, The roads ye shall not tread,
Go mark them with your living, And mark them with your dead.*
-The White Man's Burden, Rudyard Kipling

It is well to remember this, for to study Arab nationalism only from the outside as an object of manipulation or an impediment in the way of sweeping Western domination, is to study it standing on one's head. But to study it from the inside, is to view it in its proper perspective.
-The New Spirit in Arab Lands, H. I. Katibah

-

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries the colonized world began to push back against European imperialism. The people of Africa, India, Asia, and the Middle East defended their rights as human beings, including rights to national self-determination. But national rights did not equal human rights, as people living in the Middle East soon realized. For years, European statesmen had proudly proclaimed the benefits of their imperial reach, insisting that they brought economic progress to the rest of world, not to mention relief from despotism and backwardness. But this exercise of power could not go unchallenged forever. The actions of colonized people, their organized protests, demonstrations, and even violent acts of resistance marked a change in global history. Ideas of nationhood and self-determination, once articulated, could not be put back in the bottle. The United States, a newcomer to the power game seemed to provide an

ideological challenge to colonial rule under the proclamations of President Woodrow Wilson.¹ It was a new era and the language of self-determination spread like wildfire; colonized countries adopted nationalism to challenge both colonialism and imperialism. Greater Syria was one such country.

The year was 1922, World War I had come to an end four years earlier, and the term *Wilsonianism* had become an integral part of the American lexicon. The January edition of the monthly magazine *American Review of Reviews*, edited by journalist Albert Shaw, claimed that

The wine of Wilsonism went to the heads of the East. No phenomenon of the war was more wonderful than the way in which the old, old people of Asia responded to slogans of liberty, democracy and self-determination...even the roving Arabs of the desert took over the new watchwords in to their vocabulary... crude and elemental justice as seen by these primitive peoples, acting under the stimulus of the Wilson preachments, will be done.²

Wilson's preachments of liberty and democracy seemed to not only inspire the "roving Arabs of the desert," but also anti-colonial nationalist movements across the globe. The fact that Wilson's language of self-determination spread beyond his intended audience and influenced anti-colonial movements across the Middle East and Asia is a widely researched topic. Historian Erez Manela

¹ The pivotal years after World War I have been called the "Wilsonian moment." Woodrow Wilson called for a new world order based on national self-determination and equality of nations. This move placed him as a dominant figure in world affairs. The question remains, did this help spur mass mobilization against colonialism? Vladimir Lenin, founder of the Russian Communist Party and leader of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, had also advocated for self-determination to weaken capitalism and imperialism. See David Fromkin, "What Is Wilsonianism?" *World Policy Journal*, 11:1 (1994): 100-11. He argues that Wilson just happened to be president at a time when government change was necessary and he was not so much an originator of self-determination as he easily synthesized thoughts of other international liberals. Fromkin says that rather than act from principle Wilson made his principles justify his actions invoking high principle to do what he most likely would have done anyways. Wilson chose to elevate actions to higher moral ground whenever he could. For instance, U.S. entry into World War I was not simply presented by Wilson as a response to attacks from Germany, but in service to a higher purpose, to "make the world safe for democracy."

² "New Watchwords From America," *The American Review of Reviews* (New York: Review of Reviews, 1922), 66.

has written about this in his book *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*. Manela's thesis posits that President Woodrow Wilson's rhetoric of self-determination became a transnational language that defined democracy and freedom for anti-colonial nationalist movements in the Middle East and Asia.³

However, Greater Syrian intellectuals had been developing ideas of freedom and democracy since their cultural and intellectual renaissance in the mid-19th century. Like many peoples across the globe they were not so much drunk on Wilson's "new" vocabulary as they were validated by it. They looked forward to a social order that fostered Arab independence, but were also concerned with universal human problems. There were many conditions that played into the political nationalist movements of the Middle East and the story of Dr. Khalil Totah provides one small piece of a larger transformation in Syria.

Born in Ramallah, Palestine, in 1886 Dr. Khalil Totah belonged to a generation of Syrians who grew up with an appreciation for the "modern" spirit that was sweeping the world. Totah and his fellow intellectuals were not so much inspired by Wilson's words, as they were validated by them. His story shows the evolution of Palestinian nationalism and it also highlights the effects that the American Quaker missionary enterprise had on the residents living in his hometown of Ramallah. Totah and his contemporaries had an alternate vision of world order shaped by their own social experiences, they were not only interested in national self-determination but were looking at national issues that related to human rights and justice. Therefore, this study emphasizes the difference between the interests of the United States

³ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

political and economic elites, who preached a sermon of democracy, and the views of emerging nations seeking independence.

Like Woodrow Wilson, Dr. Totah and his peers used their understanding of history to define the world. Totah's worldview was rooted in his Arab past, less tied to Wilson's rhetoric, but centered on local experiences. Palestinian intellectuals did not passively accept Western ideas; they analyzed, critiqued, and transformed those ideas. Concepts such as democracy and liberty evolved and connected to a broader set of Enlightenment ideals that people in the Arab world had been contemplating for a century. Totah did not view self-determination as an expression of economic interest, so much as an articulation of human rights, justice, and democracy. His was a discourse with a different center than Wilson's. Wilson had managed to tap into a certain *zeitgeist* of the time, but it was larger than him and lasted well beyond the traditional Versailles time frame of January 1919- July 1920. Intellectuals used Wilson's rhetoric as a vehicle for already existing ideas, which had moved beyond Wilson's vision even before he lent his name to it. The road to Versailles was longer and more indirect than it appeared.

Missionaries stood at the forefront of a growing national identity in the Middle East. Years before Wilson appeared on the scene the American missionary enterprise had been conducted with the spirit of taking up the "white man's burden." The America Quaker missionary enterprise, although it differed theologically from mainstream missionary groups, worked to Americanize their Arab students living in and around Ramallah. Totah's American teachers promoted the "exceptionalism" of the United States and lauded its lack of imperialistic motives and its tradition of democracy. Totah's positive perceptions of the United States stemmed from his tutelage under this missionary presence. His experiences led him to accept the

idea that higher nations could “award” self-determination to a deserving nation once that nation reached a stage of development.

Total's attachment to the United States and his Americanization began in his childhood and he carried it with him as he became an adult. He eventually became part of the emerging Palestinian intelligentsia. Disillusioned with Europe, especially Britain, these intellectuals looked to the United States to support their rights for independence. By forming committees, establishing schools, organizing protests, and printing newspapers and periodicals, men and women played a leading role in the campaigns to resist Western imperialism and the emerging Zionist movement in Palestine. They also contributed to the development of a Palestinian national consciousness in the first third of the 20th century. A British denial to allow Palestine self-determination and, in 1918, the separation of Palestine from Syria (a French Mandate) and Transjordan (a British puppet monarchy) played a key role in further developing this national consciousness. Palestinians and Greater Syrians in general were not alone in this endeavor. Beginning in the eighteenth-century nation-states were the primary focus of group identity all over the world. Scholars attribute this rise of nationalism, the ideology of modern society, to various factors, including the rise of capitalism and the increased mobility of people.⁴

Total contended that the problems in Palestine were never of a religious nature, but were spurred by political and economic issues, such as lack of representative government, immigration issues, and dispossession of the agricultural class in Palestine. Christians, Jews, and Muslims, he argued, had lived in peace for years and could continue to do so, if left to manage their own diplomacy. Most of their problems stemmed from a huge shift in the global economic system as

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 15.

local economies became entwined with the global capitalist economy. As economist Samir Amin has pointed out, “The Arab world moved from the top to the bottom in the world system when modern globalized capitalism reached maturity in the 19th century.”⁵

Culture can be a complicated subject to study, especially if it is not defined clearly. For the purpose of this research I consider culture to mean the beliefs, assumptions and attitudes that are prevalent in a society, this includes religion. In some ways this study is about invented or imagined identities, the imaginary lines between East and West that have been conjured into reality by ideologies on both “sides”. Khalil Totah stood at the dividing line of that imaginary break; Arab by culture, but Western by colonial upbringing. He was raised with an American Quaker identity, which provided a sort of discriminatory framework from which he viewed himself and the larger world. American missionaries taught Totah and his fellow students an “acceptable” set of ideas about modernity; he and his classmates were conditioned to see America as a beacon of freedom, justice, and opportunity.

Any study that deals with culture should take into consideration that culture’s relationship to economics, in this case, examining Western capitalism is pertinent. In the modern capitalist system, economic laws have become naturalized and hidden. Studies have shown that the capitalist system became further legitimized when ruling powers insisted on linking ‘God’ with democracy and freedom. This ideology then came to be associated with freedom of the markets and has become a powerful mythology in our times.⁶ Under this ‘free’ economic system

⁵ Samir Amin, *The Reawakening of the Arab World Challenge and Change in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016), 6.

⁶ See Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

inequality spreads like a cancer, as wealth in one sector creates instability in another. Those in power, whether political or economic, benefit most from this system and so seek to find ways to justify inequality.⁷

Instead of fostering a just community of shared responsibility for social or economic ills, especially that of inequity, capitalist rulers blame such problems on individuals, or individual nations. The problems appear on the surface to have nothing to do with the structure itself. Inequality then becomes an individual's or a national entity's own fault. Inequality appears as categories, which people see and judge: black and white, rich and poor, male and female, us and other, and East and West. Thus, it is assumed that problems derive from a people's own inherent weaknesses (e. g. the color of their skin, their gender, even their culture). This became increasingly clear as Arabs have been marginalized in many ways over the years.

Culture, when used as a tool of hegemony, creates a division where the "civilized" society is one of progress and those that are "backwards" are stuck in time. In this case the dominant economic culture of the time, the West, invented the idea of an "eternal West" and a backwards East. This ideological dichotomy of "us" and "other" still dominates the discourse

⁷ Emily Rosenberg and J. M. Cooper (Ed.), *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson Progressivism, Internationalism, War, and Peace* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008), 256. Woodrow Wilson's vision of national self-determination also included a vision of open door economic globalization. The growth of finance capital led to American investments abroad, which involved exploiting and oppressing the peoples of the colonial and semi-colonial world, particularly in Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. Convinced that capitalism was the only system that would lift standards at home and around the globe he worked to expand the nation's financial influence.

⁸ This theory was supported by influential 20th century social theorists such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). In his seminal work he examines the patronizing representations of "The East."

related to Middle East studies.⁸ Although raised on American ideology and values, Totah found himself to be an “outside other” once he came to America and began to advocate for the Arab cause. He struggled to create a narrative of belonging against open cultural hostility. He faced racism and outright anger directed at him from a culture that he had imagined he belonged to since he was a child.

Totah had become part of a nascent Arab bourgeoisie due to his family’s ties within the Christian community. This small Christian middle-class found favor with Western imperialists and easily integrated into the expanding market economy. As historian Sherene Seikaly points out most Arabs in Palestine were small farmers and sharecroppers. The formation of large estates and the growing power of merchant capital in the late nineteenth century caused a rise in their indebtedness and led to their displacement. Although they would eventually face hardships under the British mandate, their economic decline did predate the mandate.⁹ According to Seikaly, Palestine had already entered the capitalist world in the late Ottoman period.¹⁰ But, unlike the Muslim Arab farming families, the Christian class experienced an increase in economic growth tied to European involvement in the Middle East. At the same time, they found themselves constrained by the Ottoman State and later the Young Turks. Resenting the situation at home they turned toward the West and looked for a way to liberate themselves from their oppressors (the Ottomans and the Turks).

But simply because this group of Syrians embraced the tenets of Western democracy, did not mean they were automatically accepted into the “club.” Democracy has not always been

⁹ Sherene Seikaly, “Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine,” *The Institute for Palestine Studies*, 46:3 (2017), 98.

¹⁰Ibid.

feasible for everyone, especially in regard to the success of “free” markets. Emerging nations like Syria, that sought incorporation into the global economic system began at a disadvantage; their actual freedom threatened the international system’s balance. This “modern” system offered promises that it could never live up to. To the young people of Greater Syria it seemed the possibility was real as missionaries spread the word of God, but made pledges that they could not keep.

Totalah and his peers were influenced by Western ideas as generated by the Magna Carta, and the American and French revolutions. However, it was not by mere imitation that they adopted these philosophies; they reconfigured them for their own place and time. As Syrian intellectuals began to denounce British imperialist policies they reoriented their hope for an independent future towards the United States. By the 1930s intellectuals in Palestine and Greater Syria had become attracted to an idealized version of the United States as a model nation; a nation which had successfully severed ties with Great Britain. They were inspired by the ideology of the American Revolution and swept away by the spirit of 1776. This attraction to the story of American independence, coupled with their negative experiences under the Ottoman State and, subsequently, the French and British, led many Syrian intellectuals to look to America to offer a blueprint for their future. Some Arab intellectuals pictured the Middle East as a federation of states similar to the United States of America.¹¹ Syrian activist and journalist H.I. Katibah wanted an Arabic nation modeled off America. He wrote, “in fact the American colonies may well be called the first true nation.”¹²

¹¹ H.I. Katibah, *The New Spirit in Arab Lands* (New York: H. Ibrahim, 1940), 10.

¹² Ibid.

Even though the United States had first made contact in an effort of religious outreach, the long-term effects were to inspire national political movements across the Middle East. Writer and historian Edward Atiya was born in Syria in 1903 and educated at an English missionary school in Egypt and then later at Oxford. He wrote in his autobiography that his own intellectual rising was “stimulated by missions and schools. The infusion of Western education helped with attachments (to the West).”¹³ As attachment to Europe faltered, he held out hope that the United States would be an ally for Syrian independence. He wrote, “The division of the world into ruled and rulers burned me...The Burke of the French Revolution, went hurtling down from his throne, and Tom Paine, friend of mankind, took his place...We decided we had been taken by the specious lure of European civilization.”¹⁴ Here one can see the America revolutionary rhetoric that the graduates of the Quaker American missionary schools often employed. Rising nationalists often used the words of revolutionary heroes such as Tom Paine, Samuel Adams, and Patrick Henry.

Under the influence of the American missionaries in the Middle East, many young Syrians were encouraged to form a strong bond with America and American culture. As stated previously, students in missionary schools had been introduced to modernity as defined by the capitalist West. At the same time, they struggled to find a narrative of global belonging for themselves. They wanted to maintain ties to their own cultural and intellectual heritage; a heritage, which the West had inherited from the East. As Khalil Totah once put it:

¹³ Edward Atiyah, *An Arab Tells His Story: A Study in Loyalties* (London: J. Murray, 1946), 147.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 148.

No people has a monopoly on human service, or in contributing to culture and civilization. It is a question of sequent opportunity. Thus the East served the West in many seats of culture.¹⁵

A Shining City From Afar

Academics in the West typically use the term the *Levant* to define the area formerly known as Greater Syria (which includes modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestinian territories, and Jordan). Levant is an old French word that references the rising sun. Arabs have traditionally called this area *Bilad al-Sham*, which translates roughly to “land on the left.” If a person stands in Mecca, the central point of the world in terms of the Islamic tradition, and faces east, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Palestine would be on the left. Roman Syria and Roman Assyria came to be called *Bilad al-Sham* after the Arab conquest in the 7th Century and then more commonly known as Greater Syria during Ottoman rule. In 1922 the British and French partitioned Greater Syria into what became known as Jordan and Syria in keeping with the now infamous Sykes-Picot agreement.¹⁶ From 1879 to 1882 nationalists in Egypt, led by Colonel Ahmed ‘Urabi, pushed for an end to British and French influence in their country. Urabi failed (the British remained a major political and military power in Egypt until a military-led revolution in 1952) but his actions planted the seeds of future revolution.¹⁷

¹⁵ Khalil Totah, *The Contribution of the Arabs to Education* (New York: Teachers College Columbia University, 1926), 103.

¹⁶ Nur Masala “The Concept of Palestine: The Conception Of Palestine from the Late Bronze Age to the Modern Period,” *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, 15 :2 (October, 2016):143.

¹⁷ Abdulrazzak Patel, *Arab Nahdah: The Making of the Intellectual and Humanist Movement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 259.

Within the Ottoman Empire ideas of nationalism and self-determination had been percolating for over a century, particularly with the advance of Egypt's Muhammad Ali into Syria in 1830. Following Napoleon's invasion in 1798 and subsequent retreat in 1801, Muhammad Ali advanced on Egypt in 1805 and eventually made his own empire out of Ottoman territory.¹⁸ Syria and Egypt became the center of the Arab world, which proved a major shock for the native populations, not just militarily, but culturally. Widespread use of the printing press, new technology, and an influx of European political ideas, triggered major soul searching for much of the population. Subsequently a new wave of intellectualism began to pave the way for modernity and a new wave of intellectual energy filtered down to a new generation. Butrus al-Bustani, Khalil al-Khuri, and Shakir Shuqayr are just a few individuals tied to an earlier generation of this intellectual movement. In 1857 these intellectuals formed the Syrian Scientific Society in Beirut. All the founders were native Arabs and included Christians, Muslims, and Druze. Their club had official support from Istanbul.¹⁹

Fifty years later Totah's cohorts continued this inquiry. This new generation included Tawfik Canaan, a physician, author, and Palestinian nationalist who played an important role in confronting the British under the mandate. He once described British policy as "a destructive campaign against the Arabs with the aim of exterminating them from their country."²⁰ Another scholar Omar Saleh al Barghouti strongly advocated for a liberal secular education in Greater Syria. Barghouti was a member of the *Palestinian Orientalist Society*²¹ and worked closely with

¹⁸ Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt, Military Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), preface.

¹⁹ Eliezer Tauber, *The Emergence of the Arab Movements* (London: Routledge, 2008), 332.

²⁰ "Tawfik Canaan: His Life and Works," *The Institute for Palestine Studies*, 2 (2002): 6.

²¹ Palestine Oriental Society was a club that brought together scholars working on the "Ancient Orient." See *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* (Palestine Oriental Society, 1937).

folklorist Elias Haddad, who was a relatively unknown Arab nationalist at the time.²² Boulos Shehadeh was editor of one of the most influential Palestinian newspapers, *Miraat Al-Sharq* (Mirror of the East), published in Arabic and English. He was a moderate Syrian nationalist who often promoted cooperation with the British government and Zionists. British authorities shut down his paper in 1939 for publishing an “inciting poem.”²³ Abd al-Hadi was a member of a leading landowning family in Palestine. Hadi helped to found the Young Arab Society, a nationalist society, and was among the organizers of the Arab Congress of 1913 in Paris.²⁴ Others in Totah’s circle included well-known writers and intellectuals such as Philip Hitti, H. I. Katibah, Khalil Sakakini, Issa el-Issa, Is'af al-Nashashibi, Najib Nassar and Hanna Abdullah.

Syrian intellectuals in the first third of the 20th century appreciated that the president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, supported an ideology of freedom, independence, and democracy. This helped to draw them closer into the American camp. Wilson had become famous for articulating an ideology of a new world order. His vision became known as Wilsonianism and, to this day, wrongly or rightly, it remains symbolic of an era of high hopes and aspirations. Like Totah, Wilson was influenced by cultural and religious symbolism. But while Totah linked this symbolism to his own Arab past, Wilson’s ideology had a direct link to his own Protestant identity and to the security of a world economic system with America at its center. Wilson used the bully pulpit of his presidency to spread his message of moral democracy.

²² *Bulletin of the Archaeological Institute of America* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917).

²³ “Nakba The Untold Story of a Cultural Catastrophe.” *NAD*, 13 June 2016, www.nad.ps/en/publication-resources/publication/nakba-untold-story-cultural-catastrophe. Although this article calls it a “poem” Shehade’s son Fuad has clarified that it was an article published in 1938 titled “*Where the British Authorities Embark Troubles Arise*.” This article was the cause for the British closing the paper.

²⁴ They met in Paris from June 18–23 to discuss reforms for Arabs living under Ottoman rule. See George Antonius, *Arab Awakening The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

The Wilsonian Moment appeared to be a break with the past, a new way of organizing the world. A deeper analysis of Wilson's policies shows that he embraced a liberal capitalist world order, an order which tied freedom and democracy to open markets. As part of his call for national self-determination Wilson advocated for an economic “open door” policy at the Paris Peace Conference. In the postwar era the United States positioned itself to be the economic stabilizer needed to secure a world economic system. Wilson’s language was used to redefine property and human rights, shifting the focus from human security to economic security, thus laying the groundwork for an international financial system under which the capitalist system could thrive. Historian Lloyd Ambrosius wrote of Wilson:

Prior to his presidency, he had devoted his scholarly career to American history and politics. During World War I, he drew on his understanding of the American national experience to formulate his vision of a new world order. Wilson often noted this connection, but even when he did not explicitly relate his policies to his earlier scholarship, he used his historical knowledge as the intellectual foundation for his approach to leadership in international relations. His internationalism derived from his Americanism. Consequently, an assessment of Wilsonianism must involve an examination of both Wilson’s statecraft and the American political culture from which it came.²⁵

Ambrosius’s analysis focused on the nexus between political culture, meaning Wilson’s set of values and understanding of the political system, and his international leadership. But Ambrosius hit on a core issue that Erez Manela downplayed in his research. Wilsonianism sought to internationalize the American political economy of liberal capitalism. He liberalized capitalism by tapping into the American ideology of manifest destiny and giving it an international orientation. Unfortunately for countries living in the periphery this clashed with their own aspirations of freedom and justice.

²⁵ Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 21.

Wilson's policies, although coated with "magic" words like democracy and self-determination, did not reflect what he had promised. While U.S. political and economic elites sought to internationalize the U.S. political economy by preaching a sermon of democracy they did not actually intend for emerging nations to become equal. The latter were sold a bill of goods that looked nice on the surface, but as Samir Amin so aptly put it, "actually existing Capitalism is nothing like the vision."²⁶ He wrote, "In the peripheries integrated into real world capitalism, democracy has never- or hardly ever- been on the agenda of the possible, or even desirable for the functioning of capitalist accumulation."²⁷

America was on the precipice of becoming a world power, but it seemed it might easily succumb to the ambitions of power that had toppled other imperial powers. America could follow in the footsteps of British imperialists, "enslaving other nationalities for their raw materials and markets," or it could lead the way towards a just international order.²⁸ Time had yet to tell, but Totah and his cohorts were willing to give the United States a fair chance to prove itself worthy of being called a great democracy.

Historiography

Wilsonian internationalism is a complex ideology that has been widely analyzed by a wide range of diplomatic historians. Wilson's critics in the United States and Latin America always viewed him as a neo-imperialist, and paternalist, who never truly favored immediate self-determination for nations he regarded as under-developed.²⁹ After the Paris Peace Conference it

²⁶ Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*. 122.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ H. I. Katibah, *The New Spirit in Arab Lands*, 89.

²⁹ For more critiques of Wilsonian internationalism and the Wilsonian vision see books by Ross A. Kennedy, *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), Elizabeth McKillen, *Making the World Safe for Workers: Labor, the Left, and Wilsonian Internationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of US*

was glaringly apparent that Wilson had failed to meet the expectations of nationalist groups across the world. Many turned to the solutions offered by the new Bolshevik regime in Russia headed by Vladimir Lenin. However, this turn did not occur among some Palestinians such as Totah and his fellow nationalists. Despite the outcome at Versailles they continued to look to the United States for support.

Academics of the traditional school of thought support arguments that international idealism characterized American foreign policy under Wilson, but that it was later supplanted by isolationism and nationalism under the following Republican presidencies. Later historians, however, saw greater continuities before and after Wilson, especially in the use of political, military, and financial power to exert U.S. American influence abroad to capture markets. Recent studies have identified a balance between United States isolationism and imperialist economic expansion. Joan Hoff Wilson has posited that in the years after World War II the United States was not isolationist or imperialist, but rather had employed what she has called “independent internationalism.”³⁰

In 2011 historian Meggie Clinton published a review of Manela’s book on Wilsonianism in *The Arab Studies Journal*. She praised his meticulous research into the ways in which colonial issues were at the heart of World War I.³¹ But she pointed out that nationalist leaders in Egypt, India, China, and Korea had “long articulated national-territorial and rights-based claims, which were grounded in political and economic theories from which Wilson himself drew and

Imperialism, 1915-1940 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1966* (New Jersey: Wiley, 1967), and articles by Trygve Throntveit, “The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and Self-Determination,” *Diplomatic History*, 35:3 (June 2011): 445-481.

³⁰ Joan A. Hoff, *Faustian Foreign Policy: Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³¹ Maggie Clinton review, “The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism by Erez Manila” *The Arab Studies Journal* 19: 1 (2011): 175-79.

which were interpreted through their own lived experiences of colonialism.”³² Attributing too much to Wilson in terms of his ability to influence such a broad spectrum of international movements tends to obscure the internal intellectual anti-colonial struggles that were taking place within individual regions and the debates that had been stirring in the Middle East for decades.

The Middle East became an important area for diplomatic and political studies in the United States after World War I, but its definition and boundaries still remained vague. Today the historical perspective is more diverse with social, cultural, religious, intellectual and gender histories widening the field. Early studies focused on colonialism and colonialist policies, but this evolved to studies of local response to colonialism and nationalism. In his book *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939*, historian John DeNovo showed that America had little political interest in the Middle East until after World War II. However, cultural and economic exchange between Americans and the Middle East began much earlier. Missionaries were the first to make contact and they established influential centers of education such as the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut and Robert College in Istanbul in the late 19th century.³³ DeNovo wrote, “While it is possible to overemphasize the difference between East and West, it is nonetheless apparent that the blurred images of the Arab World, Turkey and Persia

³² For example see Ngô Vĩnh Long, *Before the Revolution: the Vietnamese Peasants under the French* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). This study shows how the French colonial “civilizing mission” in Vietnam caused human suffering and disaster for the native population fostering anti-imperialist and anti-French feelings which galvanized the peasant population to resist colonialism and imperialism. Also see Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991). At Versailles in 1919 Ho Chi Minh, on behalf of a “group of Vietnamese patriots” sent a “Notebook of the Wishes of the Vietnamese People” to the Conference demanding the basic democratic freedoms for Vietnam. Years later in 1945 he proclaimed Vietnam’s independence in the words of the Declaration of America that “all men are created equal” This meant that all people on earth are born equal. “Vietnam has the right to be a free and independent country...and in fact is so already.”

³³ John DeNovo, *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963).

held by most Americans were at least matched by the lack of information and the misinformation prevalent in the Middle East about the United States.”³⁴

Missionaries contributed to these blurred images and the impressions of Arabs in the consciousness of most Americans were products of Sunday school lessons. Arabs were often stereotyped as nomads, surrounded by deserts, camel, and harems. For Arabs, America represented different things to different groups, but for the Arab Christians it was the “great country that had sent them missionaries, teachers, and physicians.”³⁵ Although there were no formal diplomatic relations between the United States and the Ottoman Empire, missionaries often requested and obtained diplomatic support from the American State Department in their work in the Middle East.³⁶

Leading Middle East historian Alixa Naff added a crucial dimension to Arab-American studies. Her book, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience*, published in 1985, looked at Arabic speaking immigrants in the United States and helped provide a voice for their experiences. Many of these immigrants worked as peddlers of aluminum wares and other household products. She documented how this peddler identity impacted their understanding of themselves and their Syrian-American identity.³⁷ Her study is important for this paper in that it relates to Totah’s own experiences in America as an aluminum salesman. Syrians’ entry into America, spurred in part by missionary support, eventually led to active political engagement in American politics.

³⁴ Ibid, 6.

³⁵ Ibid, 7.

³⁶ Ibid, 6.

³⁷ Alixa Naff, *Becoming American the Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993).

Historian Hani Bawardi has traced Arab political activism in the United States in his book *The Making of Arab Americans From Syrian Nationalism to U.S. Citizenship*. He looked at Arab American advocacy in the early twentieth century and discovered a unified Arab American political identity. Helpful to this study is his research on Khalil Totah's advocacy for the Palestinian cause and his role as director of the Institute of Arab American Affairs (IAAA). Bawardi shows that Arab American involvement with American politics influenced Syrian and Arab nationalism.³⁸

I draw extensively on the work of Thomas M. Ricks who has done the difficult work of combing through the archives and chronicling Totah's diaries and life in his book *Turbulent Times in Palestine*. The thesis of his work is that "Totah was among the few Palestinian educators and intellectuals who fully grasped the critical role of education in the liberation and development of Palestine and all that, that implied."³⁹ My work builds on that thesis and shows that Totah was linked to a broad network of like-minded intellectuals who focused on education as a means to promote a common front against their oppressor, whether, Ottoman, French or British. These actions grew from an Arab proto-nationalism that came to fruition around the same time that Woodrow Wilson articulated his vision.

³⁸ Hani J. Bawardi, *The Making of Arab Americans: From Syrian Nationalism to U.S. Citizenship* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014). In addition to these scholarly works Totah's daughter, Joy Totah Hilden, has published her account of Totah's life work and educational journey. Hers is a biographical account that helps to fill in the gaps and pieces of his life journey from a schoolboy in Ramallah to a Palestinian activist in America. Joy Totah Hilden, *A Passion for Learning: The Life Journey of Khalil Totah, a Palestinian Quaker Educator and Activist* (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris, 2016).

³⁹ Thomas M. Ricks and Khalil Totah, *Turbulent times in Palestine: the diaries of Khalil Totah, 1886-1955* (Jerusalem: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2009).

Greater Syria produced many scholars who are key to this study and who were contemporaries of Totah. To this day they continue to form a cornerstone for research in the area. They include: Albert Hourani, George Antonius, Philip Hitti, and Farhat Ziadeh. All these scholars offered important insights into understanding Syria and the Middle East. Their research followed the development of Arab nationalism by looking at thought and politics in the Arab world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hourani observed that, "Arabic-speaking people were drawn in different ways, into the new world-order."⁴⁰ Technological and industrial innovations, the growth of trade, consumption and production, missionaries and diplomatic actors had brought ideas about how men and women should live in society. Hourani found that many of these changes linked directly to new ideas about Arab identity. The growth of European power also posed a challenge to existing beliefs and values. Drawing from Arabic and Western accounts these scholars identified an evolution of nationalist awakening in the Middle East and their studies influenced scholarship for decades to come.

Farhat Ziadeh, born in Ramallah in 1917, and a pupil of both Hitti and Totah, was influential in defining Middle Eastern studies in America. He became a professor of Near East studies at the University of Washington in 1966. "We are not just educating American students," Ziadeh once wrote, "we're creating better understanding by having them weigh Arab culture within the context of world culture, as one of the main streams of world culture."⁴¹

Other intellectuals of Totah's time included popular writers such Ameen Rihani and Gibran Khalil Gibran. They drew on Eastern and Western influences for an understanding of

⁴⁰ Albert Habib Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), preface.

⁴¹ Ziadeh quoted in, "Saudi Aramco World: Arabs in America: The Transplanted Ones," *Aramco World*, archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/197502/arabs.in.america-the.transplanted.ones.htm.

Arab independence. Both Lebanese Maronites and good friends, Gibran and Rihani were passionate about freedom and Arab independence, but they were equally passionate about America. In his Master's thesis Mansour Mahabad analyzed Rihani and his struggles with an East/West identity. Mansour wrote that Rihani was part of an "Arab generation searching for itself in the early twentieth century, despite the substantial influence from the occupying Western force dominating it culturally and financially."⁴² It was from these defining moments that Arab intellectuals formed their ideas of Arab, Syrian and Palestinian nationhood.

Methodology

This study uses a micro historical approach: it tells a small story and uses that story to interpret larger historical structures of the time. Historian Jill Lapore writes

If biography is largely founded on a belief in the singularity and significance of an individual's life and his contribution to history, micro history is founded upon almost the opposite assumption: however singular a person's life may be, the value of examining it lies not in its uniqueness, but in its exemplariness, in how that individual's life serves as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole.⁴³

Using Totah's diaries to uncover a part of the past, this study offers a unique perspective on the crucial period from 1914-1948. Totah was not a revolutionary, he was a pacifist who could easily be forgotten and swept under the rug. But as an ardent and well educated Palestinian nationalist his views deserve to be explored. His life is a touchstone, connecting a network of ideas that might not otherwise be seen with the myriad struggles taking place during his lifetime.

⁴² Arif Amanat, "Representations of the Western Other In Early Arabic Novels 1900-1915." *Academia.edu*.www.academia.edu/27456615/Representations_of_the_Western_Other_In_Early_Arabic_Novels_1900-1915.

⁴³ Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography" *The Journal of American History*, 88:1(June 2001):129-144.

This work connects to a larger body of work that has been done about the autogenic nature of democracy in the Middle East and helps to reinvestigate ideas about democracy, human justice, and the role of government in the Arab world. In a sense, Totah's is a human-interest story, his life offers a valuable point of view from which to observe Syria and Palestine during a time of turbulence and transformation. Totah's story does not speak of a "clash of cultures" so much as a shared history of give and take, of trying to find the balance point in an ever-changing world. Even after the peace talks of 1919, intellectuals in Greater Syria and Palestine, which this study will focus on, remained encouraged by the prospect of American and British involvement in their land. They had not formed a strong opinion against the mandate system, in fact some like Totah looked forward to colonial "help." They thought that the United States would be a benevolent steward in this process.

Many of the Arab intellectuals, including Totah, embraced Wilson's vision. Western missionaries inspired them to emulate American life, even as they struggled to find their authentic voices in the emerging nationalist movement for independence. The story of Totah's life and educational journey came at a crucial point in the history of Palestine. He fought for the right of Palestinians to be in control of and to oversee their own education. He wanted the *fellaheen* to embrace and learn who they were from their own Arabic history; to recite their own poetry, play their own music, and work their own land. Most importantly he wanted them to have access to education, which allowed for critical thinking about their own history and future. When Totah wrote about his homeland he generally referred to it as Greater Syria, but he used Palestine when speaking about his place of birth. He often referred to the wider area around Syria as the Near East. Today the term Middle East is in common usage by most academics and, in keeping with today's scholarship, I will use the term Middle East to describe the area around

the Eastern Mediterranean, the Arab countries from Turkey to North Africa, and to Iran. Dr. Totah saw his hometown of Ramallah as the inside of a *Matryoshka* doll: Ramallah was inside of Palestine, which was part of Syria, which was part of the Arab world, which was part of the world itself. In reading his notes and diaries it is clear that Khalil Totah's identity always remained firmly rooted to Palestine, to Ramallah, to his meeting house, his family and his bayara.⁴⁴

Since Totah's story requires some background to see the broader picture, the first chapter will examine the development of the American Quaker mission in Ramallah. The second chapter will follow Totah's childhood and his growing fascination with the United States. The third and fourth chapters will focus on tumultuous events happening in Palestine as Totah's national consciousness developed. The fifth and sixth chapters will follow his life as an activist and spokesperson for Arab rights, along with his disillusionment in the American Quakers and in the U.S. relationship with the Middle East. The final chapter and conclusion will look at his vision for the future of the Middle East, Syria, and in particular Palestine

⁴⁴ *Bayara* means orchard or plantation in Arabic. Totah's daughter Joy wrote of his attachment to his orange grove "My father loved the bayara. The orange grove in Hirbiya, just north of Gaza, was his own property, his garden, his refuge for the cares and tensions of his job and the political situation. It was his special piece of Palestine. It became more important in that way as years passed. Ultimately, after the partition of Palestine, the bayara was on the Israeli side of the border and it became for us a memory, a lost hope, and a file of letters seeking compensation and redress." Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 145.

CHAPTER ONE: FROM MAINE TO PALESTINE

*Take up the White Man's burden, send forth the best ye breed
go bind your sons to exile, to serve your captives' need.* - Rudyard Kipling

“Don't leave me, mother...I will be a nice little lady; thee won't leave me, will thee?” cried three-and-a half-year-old Susan Taybor to her mother, Quaker minister, Sybil Jones. It was July 17, 1851, and Susan's mother was preparing to depart her hometown of China, Maine, and set off for Africa with her husband Eli. Their youngest son, Eli Gretel, was barely a year old and although Sybil's heart “yearned for him” she was fully prepared to leave him and Susan, as well as her three other children. She chose to risk leaving her children to embark on a dangerous journey across an ocean where the promise of her return was not guaranteed. This was her first trip abroad, but it would not be her last. Sybil routinely placed her children with friends, family, and in boarding schools for months, even years at a time as she embarked on missionary work around the globe.¹

Sybil was a member of a Protestant group properly known the Society of Friends, or Quakers.² Her husband Eli eventually found himself caught up in her missionary work. During their visit to Liberia he grew to see “the needs of these and the thousands of other humans

¹ Rufus M. Jones, *Eli and Sybil Jones: Their Life and Work* (Philadelphia: H.T. Coates, 1889), 235.

² The words “Quaker” and “Friends” can be used interchangeably, although “Friend” is most likely to be used when the audiences are members of the Religious Society of Friends; “Quaker” tends to be used for a general audience.

waiting for someone to bring to them the fuller teaching of the way to a higher Christian civilization.”³ From that time on, he became convinced he was “an instrument of help.”⁴ This extreme faith in the higher civilizational values of Christianity (and America) and the need to share it with the “downtrodden” of the world eventually led Sybil and Eli to the shores of Palestine, where in 1868 they set in motion the establishment of the first Quaker school in Ramallah.

Missionaries in a Foreign Field

Eli Jones was from a small town; raised by the banks of China Lake in the State of Maine. He was prone to using romantic imagery to describe his home and surrounding forests “whose living towers the years conspired to build. Whose giddy tops the morning loved to gild.”⁵ Eli and Sybil left the comfort of these giant pines, as well as the comfort and love of their children and church to explore unknown territory. They traded a familiar landscape for the terraced landscape of the Mediterranean world, a region that smelled not of pine but of palms, figs, and orange trees.

The reform ideology of the Second Great Awakening in the United States is crucial to understanding the Jones’ motivation for proselytizing in the East. The Second Great Awakening began in 1790 and steadily gained momentum in the early 19th century. As membership rose in evangelical churches, so too did membership in reform movements such as abolition, temperance, and women’s rights. These reform movements often extended to missionary work abroad, as young men and women embarked on crusades to redeem and reform those less fortunate than themselves. As well intentioned as they may have been, they were also

³ Jones, *Eli and Sybil Jones*, 235.

⁴ *Ibid*, 65.

⁵ *Ibid*, 14.

spokespeople for the often cruel ideology of manifest destiny. Protestant missionaries and political reformers both embraced the language of reform as justification for their efforts in proselytizing and colonizing abroad.⁶ President Woodrow Wilson had used the same language to justify the forced imposition of American democracy in places like the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Haiti, and Cuba.⁷

American missionaries often emphasized the connection between reform and democracy in their speeches. George Antonious's *Arab Awakening* argues that it was idealistic young missionaries, like the Joneses, who first planted the seeds of modern Arab nationalism.⁸ New England Congregationalist Daniel Bliss opened the doors of the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut in 1866. Renamed the American University of Beirut in 1920, the school provided American liberal education for generations of Arabs across the Middle East, creating an open door of contact between America and the Middle East. When the Quakers established their own school in Ramallah it set in motion a continuous line of contact between Ramallah and the United States, which remains in operation to this day. The American Friends influenced generations of young Arabs from Ramallah and the surrounding area.

⁶ Manifest Destiny is a nationalistic ideology underscored by a feeling of Western cultural superiority. Those who supported the ideology believed it was America's obligation to spread liberty and democracy across the continent. See Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

⁷ See Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Hunt has chronicled the darker side to Wilson's economic expansion in his study on American expansion ideology and its unwavering faith in manifest destiny.

⁸ George Antonious, *Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* [1939] (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

The American Friends were not unique in their interest in the Middle East, missionary societies of all denominations sent representatives to the region. Many of the theologians on the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) were inspired by the ideology of Manifest Destiny and as missionaries flocked to the holy land, a growth of religious fervor in the United States inspired trips to Palestine.⁹ By 1900 there were more Americans in the Middle East than any other foreign people except the British.¹⁰ These trips often inspired superficial and one-sided accounts; tourists, missionaries, and newspaper stories leaked biased information back to the United States. Syrian H.I. Katibah once wrote, “Westerners...in their knowledge of, or relations with the East, live on the level of Mother Goose Rhymes and the fairy-tales.”¹¹ Often their reports implied that it was a land frozen in time seemingly just as it was in biblical days. An 1868 travel guide written by Josiah Leslie Porter even stated that “The bible is the best handbook for Palestine.”¹²

As representatives of ABCFM, Boston ministers Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons, arrived in Palestine in 1827. The first modern encounters between the people of the United States and the people of Palestine involved missionaries and their targeted audience. The Bible was the only

⁹ See Mehmet Ali Doglan and Heather J. Sharkey, *American Missionaries and the Middle East: Foundational Encounters* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011). During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American missionary encounters in the Middle East set the standards for later U.S. and Middle East relations. Missionaries presented examples of American culture as a just and righteous culture to the indigenous peoples and they also interpreted the Middle East for Americans back home. These interactions highlight the cultural infiltration of American Christianity into the wider world.

¹⁰ John Hubers, “Making Friends with Locusts: Early ABCFM Missionary Perceptions of Muslims and Islam,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33: 3 (2009):151–154.

¹¹ H.I. Katibah, *The New Spirit in Arab Lands* (New York: H. I. Ibrahim, 1940), 122.

¹² Josiah L. Porter, *A Handbook for Travelers in Syria and Palestine* (London: J. Murray, 1868), intro. In a more current analysis, historian Ussama Makdisi covers nineteenth century American encounters with the Middle East in great detail in *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

weapon they carried as they zealously took up the “white man’s burden” to spread the gospel to those less fortunate. Simultaneously they sent home misinformed and prejudicial stories.

Historian Edward Earle said that for almost a century American opinion concerning the Ottoman world had been formed by these missionaries and they shaped opinion in a very negative light by giving “inadequate, distorted, and occasionally a grotesque picture of Moslems and Islam.”¹³

Mark Twain visited Palestine in 1867 and joked that he found “not a single permanent habitation.” The writer remarked, “Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it broods the spell of a curse that has withered its fields and fettered its energies.”¹⁴ As tongue in cheek as he might have intended, Twain’s account became the most famous 19th-century description of Palestine. The public thought Twain to be describing Palestine “as it really was.” As one critic at the time wrote, “Anyone who wants to understand without going there exactly how it looks now had better read *The Innocents Abroad*.”¹⁵ Writers, tourists and missionaries were often misguided in their attempts to document Palestinian life. Locals felt that tourists and travelers who came to see the land of the bible were “trying to make a curiosity of them, continually shooting at them with clicking cameras, and asking insolent and prying questions about their sanctuaries...thoughtlessly offending the people by making light of what [were] very sacred things.” They knew that reports sent back to the United States were misleading and “only written for dramatic effect, and based on limited observation.”¹⁶

¹³ Lawrence Davidson, *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 4.

¹⁴ Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad; Roughing It* [1869] (New York: Literary Classics of the U.S., 1984), 456.

¹⁵ Michael Press, “How a Mark Twain Travel Book Turned Palestine into a Desert,” *Hyperallergic* (21 Sept. 2017), hyperallergic.com/400528/how-a-mark-twain-travel-book-turned-palestine-into-a-desert.

¹⁶ Mousa J. Kaleel, *When I Was a Boy in Palestine* (Boston: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1914), 113.

Before 1870 Quakers knew little about the mysterious Middle East, other than what was in the Bible. Many considered the Bible as the ultimate authority on the territory and expected people who lived there to still live as described in a text written nearly 2000 years before. The Jones' were star struck by the idea that they were traveling the same roads as their biblical heroes. Ironically, as they traced the footsteps of Saul and the Good Samaritan, or stood on the very spot where they believed Jesus had been crucified, they imagined themselves as the bearers of true Christianity to the region.¹⁷ Western Christians usually accepted Eastern Christians as practicing a nominal Christianity, but thought that they needed strict reform to align with the "real" values of Christianity. As Syrian Christian minister Abraham Mitrie Rhibany once wrote, "the message of the Gospel, so strangely changed in the West, was brought back to the East as an exotic plant."¹⁸ The modern Western missionary was preaching an old and familiar story to the people of the East, but somehow thought it was new. For Syrians the Western missionary appeared to be quite unnecessary, except in the arenas of health and education.¹⁹

Eli and Sybil knew that the best way to promote Christianity in the region was through education. In order to explore the possibilities for their own missionary schools the Joneses traveled all over Greater Syria to observe schools already in operation. Sybil and Eli Jones spoke to Christians and Muslims alike. Well-known writer Boutros Bustani often accompanied them and served as translator.²⁰ In order to give "accurate accounts" of what they witnessed they composed letters later published in the *Friends Intelligencer*. They detailed their travels along the roads of "ill-governed Syria" preaching a Quaker message of love and equality to groups of

¹⁷ "Friends' Work in Syria and Palestine: Visit of Eli and Sybil Jones," *The American Friend* June, 1886.

¹⁸ Abraham Mitrie Rhibany, *Wise Men from the East and from the West* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), 180.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Enaya Othman, *Negotiating Palestinian Womanhood: Encounters Between Palestinian Women and American Missionaries, 1880s-1940s* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 19.

Syrian women and men whom they viewed as “poor creatures.” These men and women smoked *nargileh* and looked “devoid of intellect with the long pipe-tubes in their mouth.”²¹ Traveling as far north as Beirut they saw many “misfortunate souls” that needed to be raised up. It should not be ignored that a foundations of racism is the idea of a “backwardness” inherent in non-white people and societies. Not seemingly racist themselves, the attitudes of missionaries such as the Joneses, actively contributed to a justification for racist attitudes in later periods. Missionary accounts may have put Palestine in Biblical terms in order to understand and imagine it as a familiar place that they could control, but they were also creating a discriminatory framework around its people.²²

Eli and Sybil found other denominations doing work that they considered of great importance and hoped that the Quakers might be able to contribute as well. They were surprised to find a significant amount of local ownership and native involvement in the educational process. They were impressed enough about the local autonomy that they wrote home about it.²³ As Quakers they particularly appreciated local ownership because it was not tied to a top down or centralized network, Quakers preferred to work independently as the “inner light” guided them.

Go Send Your Daughters to Exile

As the story goes, a young Arab woman named Miriam approached them at one of their meetings and asked that they establish a girls’ school in the village of Ramallah. Most of the

²¹ As quoted in *Friend’s Review* volume 21(1868). This description of the *nargileh* (water pipe) displays a lack of knowledge about the Arab cultural practice of using the water pipe. Notables associated its usage with education and learning. Khalil Sakakini, one of Palestine’s most prominent intellectual of the 20th century called his *nargileh* his “second brain.” See Nadim Bawalsa, “Sakakini Defrocked,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42 (2010):5.

²² Othman, *Negotiating Palestinian Womanhood*,19.

²³ “Friends’ Work in Syria and Palestine: Visit of Eli and Sybil Jones,” *The American Friend* June 1886.

schools in the area were for boys only, and she argued that the girls needed to have their own school. Eli and Sybil agreed to use some of the money that their meetinghouse had entrusted to them to fund a school in her village. Work on a school for girls in Ramallah began after Eli and Sybil Jones had returned home. After the school was built Miriam and her colleague, Jacob Hishmeh, ran the school and a Quaker meeting with almost total autonomy. Hishmeh spoke English very well and had acted as translator for Eli and Sybil. Just how much the local population was taken by this new religion is unclear. They may have simply gathered for the social aspects. *The Friends Intelligencer* reported to Friends in America that Hishmeh had begun a Quaker study group in Ramallah:

He managed to get hold of a number of these rough, wild, independent fellows, and they hold a meeting together every night, after the day's work is over, and they are all tidied up. The old men sit round the room, with their backs resting against the wall; the younger men group themselves in the middle. Jacob Hishmeh reads and explains the Bible, and they pray, but they do not sing, for they are mostly old men who only know the wild songs of their country.²⁴

Hishmeh eventually became director of multiple Quakers' mission schools which he had built on his properties. The schools held classes four days a week and were opened in different parts of Ramallah. By 1888 the Quaker New England Yearly Meeting began to consider becoming more involved with the mission in Syria. At that point they decided they wanted control and ownership over the schools.²⁵ Although Hishmeh had run the schools for many years and wished to continue, they ignored his wishes and petitioned the Ottoman government to force him to sell his land to the Quakers.²⁶ The Friends soon began construction of a larger girls' school one of the properties and by October of 1889, The Friends Girls' Training Home of Ramallah (FGS) was

²⁴ "Religious Intelligence," *Friends' Review Journal* 37:15 (November 1883).

²⁵ Othman, *Negotiating Palestinian Womanhood*, 21.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

complete and ready to open. The initial class consisted of fifteen students from local cities such as Lydd, Jaffa, Jerusalem, Beirut, and Ramallah.²⁷

Under new Quaker ownership American missionary women began to arrive in Ramallah to staff the schools and brought with them certain middle-class prejudices.²⁸ They had overwhelmingly negative ideas about the native population; in particular the missionaries viewed the indigenous women as oppressed, backward, and inept. Missionaries often displayed a grievous lack of understanding of local culture and norms. Most of the women missionaries were college graduates, suffragettes, social activists, and progressives who believed it was up to them to save these “poor souls.” Quaker missionaries paved the way for an interesting type of American influence in Ramallah. Their emphasis on equality and nonviolence promoted humanitarian ventures as well as religious ones. They lived sparsely and read the Bible diligently; they promoted tolerance and pacifism. They also had a tangible effect on society as they developed medical and social programs, in addition to educational and religious programs for the boys and girls. They believed that their “higher civilization” had a duty to offer health and welfare reform to all who needed it. They also viewed the people they worked with as lesser human beings and felt a duty to introduce them to a better world.²⁹

Quaker missionaries acted under the assumption that their own culture was the only one that had something to offer. Yet the longer they lived in Palestine the more they understood that these people also had something to offer them. One of these Quaker missionary women would marry Khalil Totah and live with him in Ramallah where they raised three children. Quakers in Palestine experienced the Arab people, both Muslim and non-Muslim, as hospitable, warm, and

²⁷ Rosa E. Lee, *Official History: The Story of the Ram Allah Mission (1912)*.

²⁸ Othman, *Negotiating Palestinian Womanhood*, introduction.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 21.

inviting; they often found themselves invited to dinners, marriages, festivals and holidays. Rather than fear for their safety as they had predicted, missionaries in Ramallah often sensed they were in good hands and felt “almost as safe as we should in Boston.”³⁰

Childhood in Ramallah

Known as the Bride of Palestine, the little village of Ramallah was established in 1517. It had provided shelter and sustenance for a predominantly Greek Orthodox community for centuries. It had grown as an agricultural village in the late 17th and early 18th century. The majority of the population remained under the leadership of the Greek Orthodox Church, until the later part of the 19th century when missionaries like Eli and Sybil began to arrive. The Joneses succeeded in converting a small group to Quakerism during their visit. Khalil Totah’s parents, Abdallah and Azizeh, belonged to that small group. American Quakers, and virtually all other Protestant denominations, had turned their attention to converting Arab Christians as very early on they discovered a tremendous difficulty in converting Muslims to Christianity. Missionaries decided it would be easier to persuade those of their own faith first. This does not mean that they treated Christian Arabs as fellow Christians. Quaker missionary Theophilus Waldemeier wrote, “It must always be borne in mind, however, that the missionaries have to work with much more difficulty and with less success among the deluded, degraded, and dead Eastern churches than among the heathen.” He went on to write, “there is perhaps no country in the world where there are about human hearts so many walls of hatred, jealousy, suspicion, obstinacy and revenge.”³¹

³⁰ Hubers, “Making Friends with Locusts,” 151.

³¹ Theophilus Waldemeier, “Difficulties of the Field,” *The American Friend* 7:19 (1900).

The Totah family had been farmers for centuries. Abdallah Totah was a grain merchant, a wool maker, and weaver (*bisht*). He made woolen robes (*abaya*) to sell to the surrounding villages. The rise of Syrian artisans in the early 19th century is well documented in Doumani Beshara's study on the local development of the peasant class in the Nablus area. Weavers in Nablus and the surrounding villages (Ramallah being one) became known for making garments of better quality than European manufacturers, who often did not replicate correct patterns and styles or use the proper fabrics.³² Even though he had come from a generation of uneducated farmers, Abdallah Totah came to understand education as the key to a better future for his children, this understanding was key to the missionary enterprise and its revolutionary consequences. Abdallah developed a plan to save money for all of his children to receive quality education and traded his popular robes with the Quaker missionaries in exchange for part of the tuition. Although Totah's family was of the agricultural and not the landed class, he lived a fairly comfortable life in Ramallah, his family well connected due to their Christian status. While he considered himself of the *fellaheen* it was apparent that his family was rising in status and prestige.³³ Although they had originally lived in a tiny one room home they were later able to build a larger house in Ramallah, send their children to Quaker private schools, and then on to America for continuing education. Abdallah and Azizeh Totah's first-born son, Khalil, prided himself on being a "birthright" Quaker.³⁴ In his autobiography he recollected that he was very

³² Doumani Beshara, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 23.

³³ *Fellah* or its plural *Fellaheen* is a farmer or an agricultural laborer in the Middle East. The word comes from the Arabic word for "ploughman" or "tiller."

³⁴ Traditionally there were two ways to become a Friend. The first was to be a "birthright" Quaker meaning that one had Quaker parents and grew up under the direction of the Friends community. The other method was to become a "convinced" Friend. A convinced person feels an inner conviction that Quakerism is the best spiritual path to follow and so converts. See Lloyd B. Swift, "On the Meaning of Membership in the Society of Friends," *Friends Journal* 1:15 (July 1986):11-13.

spoiled by his parents and older sisters and that as the first son in a culture that revered sons he thought he was the center of the world.³⁵

During Totah's childhood there were only about a dozen clocks in the entire village, most of them in schools and convents. Instead of the clock, life in Ramallah was structured around events like morning coffee in the *madifah* where people met to discuss local events and politics. His childhood consisted of playing games, throwing balls and stones at marks, tumbling and doing "stunts," throwing pegs, mud-balling, marbles, tossing apricot seeds, playing cards, and picking flowers.³⁶ The entire family (12 children) lived in a crowded 16 by 12-foot room typical of Palestine's fellaheen. Totah's diaries described childhood full of good times but also of limited means. Looking back, he later referred to his home life as on a "low level" and "somewhat crude."³⁷ It may have been crude, but his family did have spoons. "Other families," he wrote, "ate with their fingers out of a shared bowl but we used wooden spoons, these were a sign of civilization. Only those who had claims on being educated indulged in the use of spoons."³⁸ Although seemingly close to his parents as a young boy, as an adult he rarely visited them. His daughter, Joy, explained that he may have been embarrassed at what he perceived as their "backwardness."³⁹ In his diary he wrote that his mother had plenty of love for him but that it was "unintelligent, untutored love."⁴⁰

³⁵ Mahdi Abdul Hadi, *Palestinian Personalities: A Biographical Dictionary* (Jerusalem: PASSIA, 2006), 201-02.

³⁶ Thomas M. Ricks and Khalil Totah, *Turbulent Times in Palestine: The Diaries of Khalil Totah, 1886-1955* (Jerusalem: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2009), 10. The pastime of picking wild flowers was an activity that many of the young boys participated in, even more so than the girls. Once the missionaries arrived they thought it an "unmanly" activity and discouraged the boys from flower picking.

³⁷ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 19.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 87.

³⁹ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 120.

⁴⁰ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 119.

Abdallah and Azizeh's children were born just as Palestine a tremendous demographic shift had begun. Europe's Jewish population were looking to move back to a land that they considered part of their historical right. By 1881 Jewish immigration to Palestine began in full force inspired by a modern national movement called Zionism.⁴¹ Before the immigration began Palestine's Jewish population (*Mizrahim*) had numbered about 25,000.⁴² In 1882, *A Friends Intelligencer* reported that a "monster emigration" was in the works and reported: "a few months ago we announced the fact that the colonization of Palestine was being energetically advocated by prominent Hebrews in Europe."⁴³ Facing persecution and death in Russia and other parts of Europe it had become increasingly clear that Jewish people were in dire need of a safe haven. The first *aliya* between 1882 and 1903, brought about 20,000 to 30,000 Russian Jews to Palestine.⁴⁴ Some of them believed that they had maintained ties to their historic homeland for more than 3,700 years and that a return to Palestine would protect against threats to their wellbeing. It would also fulfill a promise they believed to have been made to them by God. The Friends' view on this seemed to be one of little worry for the native population, rather they criticized the Sultan for questioning this immigration to Palestine. The *Intelligencer* described the Sultan as merely an obstinate child who was putting up a roadblock to this immigration. "Turkey's consent will have to be gained to any immigration en masse: but the Christian Powers

⁴¹ Zionism was a political program designed to bring thousands of Jews from around the world to their homeland in the Middle East in order reestablished Israel. Critics see Zionism as an aggressive and discriminatory ideology. Similar to Arab Christians and Arab Muslims, the Arab Jewish population also had concerns about the increase in immigration from European Jewish populations. See Walter Laqueur, *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).

⁴² Alexander Schölch, "European Penetration and the Economic Development of Palestine, 1856–82," in Owen, Roger, ed., *Studies in the Economic and Social History of Palestine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London, 1982), 10.

⁴³ "Colonizing Palestine," *Friends' Intelligencer* 39:14 (May, 1882), 221.

⁴⁴ *Aliya* refers to the act of Jewish immigration to the Holy Land.

of Europe cannot be expected to endure too long any exhibition of obstinacy on the Sultan's part."⁴⁵

Founder of Zionism, Theodore Herzl, wrote a largely fictional account of Palestine from his one brief visit to Palestine in 1902, "Those [Palestinians] who had nothing stood to lose nothing, and could only gain. And they did gain opportunities to work, means of livelihood, prosperity. Nothing could have been more wretched than an Arab village at the end of the nineteenth century. The Peasants' clay hovels were unfit for stables. The children lay naked and neglected in the streets, and grew like dumb beasts."⁴⁶ In his fictionalized account all of this changed once the Zionists arrived and made the "desert bloom." This thesis of modernization, one in which Zionists are bearers of higher culture and more civilized values, firmly took hold in the narrative for the right of return, and continues to garner support to this day.

Rumors Greatly Exaggerated

In the early 1880s the Sultan was facing many issues, immigration being only a minor one. In an effort to secure their Empire from economic and political threats from the West, the Ottomans had introduced a centralized governing system in the form of the Tanzimat reforms.⁴⁷ These reforms centralized power within the Ottoman bureaucracy, leaving many local leaders anxious about their role in the new system. Locals in Palestine protested against both Tanzimat policies and European economic influence.⁴⁸ Groups that had been under lax government control

⁴⁵ *Friends' Intelligencer* Volume 39, (1882): 609.

⁴⁶ Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland: Old-New Land* [1902] (Haifa Publishing Co, 1960).

⁴⁷ The Tanzimat reforms were a series of governmental reforms from 1839-1876 in which Ottoman rulers sought to centralize power through educational, political, and economic reorganizations.

⁴⁸ Joel Benin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 20.

began to feel the reach of the Porte.⁴⁹ The Ottomans phased out the *Millet* system, which had fostered autonomy and had given local religious leaders pockets of power in their own areas. This created tremendous anti-Ottoman sentiment especially within the Arab Christian population.⁵⁰ The Ottomans guaranteed certain rights to religious minorities, rights that ironically succeeded in limiting their freedoms. Instead of continuing to govern themselves, according to their own rules, religious groups were instructed to all follow the same set of secular laws. This ended up causing religious tension within this soon to be “dead” empire.⁵¹

Imagining the Ottoman Empire as a dying man fit neatly within the thesis of the rise and decline of civilizations, but it did not accurately depict what was happening. It seems appropriate to use the great Arab philosopher Ibn Khaldun and his own sociological construct to frame how Middle Eastern society might have viewed this change.⁵² According to Khaldun, civilizations expanded and contracted, rather than rose and fell, and the end of an era did not produce a permanent break, but rather produced change and flux, or a widening and a narrowing. An important part of the process of growth was a period of stagnation. From the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Persians, and Arabic-Islamic civilization, on until the Ottomans, one can see a succession of civilizations that widened and narrowed, changed and

⁴⁹ The Sublime Porte was the central location of the Ottoman government, the name referred to the Imperial Gate of Topkapi Palace, the seat of the Sultan’s government.

⁵⁰ See James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 48. and Fatma Müge. Göçek, *Social Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 29.

⁵¹ William Ochsenswald and Sydney Fisher, *The Middle East: A History* (New York: McGraw-Hill. 2003), 199.

⁵² Amin, *Eurocentrism*, 20. Samir Amin claims that Khaldun was the first to begin to articulate a scientific concept of history.

transferred; there were no instantaneous changes or magical transformations. Every generation contained part of the generation formed previously.⁵³

The Ottoman Empire underwent transformation and change rather than sickness and death. Arab calls for independence were a part of the emerging reality. In 1905 a Christian named Negib Azouri issued a demand for the secession of the Arab lands from the Ottoman Empire. *The Program of the League of the Arab Fatherland* urged a separation between civil and religious power and the creation of an Arab empire from the Tigris and Euphrates to the Suez Isthmus, and from the Mediterranean to the Arabian Sea. Although it contained its fair share of prejudices against Egyptians, Turks, and Jews, it openly called for freedom of all religions and equality of all citizens.⁵⁴ Many Palestinians resented the Ottoman centralized rule. In particular, local leaders, who had experienced relative autonomy until the mid-19th century, became extremely upset with intrusive of Ottoman officials.⁵⁵

The Effendiyya

An intelligentsia within the wealthy middle class had emerged in Palestine by the end of the 19th century.⁵⁶ Their increase in wealth and prestige derived from trade with Europe and had spawned a new class known as the *effendiyya*. In Arabic speaking societies the word came to mean a large landowning ruling elite including Ottoman bureaucrats and members of the modern middle class who adopted western style dress and manners. Abdallah and Azizeh's children

⁵³ Ibn-Khaldūn and Franz Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 115.

⁵⁴ Sylvia Kedourie, *Arab Nationalism, an Anthology* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1962), 24.

⁵⁵ Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem: Al-Hajj Amin Al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

⁵⁶ These families were important Palestinian clans who lived in Jerusalem. The families had become landed aristocrats by the end of the 19th century and along with the Khalidis, Alamis, Jarallas constituted the ruling elite of the Ottoman administration. The two families often competed and fought each other for political power. Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, 7.

joined this emerging middle class. Historian Joel Beinin has described this population as a “middle-strata of urban professionals educated in a western style [who] adopted European conceptions of modernity and progress.”⁵⁷ That they, like many of their peers, were mostly Christian and educated in missionary schools was of no coincidence. Under Ottoman rule Christians had been allowed access to trade networks and resources.⁵⁸ The Totah family’s emergence as part of the effendiyya was the result of their being Christian, which enabled access to trade and other European economic activities. This in turn afforded them an opportunity to pursue higher education. Many of these people were caught between their own economic interests to succeed as individuals, and a growing sense of communal and nationalist pride. Many of the already existing powerful families, such as the Nashashibi and Husayni families, held senior positions in the Ottoman government.⁵⁹ These wealthy and influential families sought to continue their influence, but were becoming increasingly barred from prominent posts under tighter Ottoman rule. Feeling neglected, many Arabs, not just educated elites, but fellaheen, including both Muslims and non-Muslims, took up a call to “awake from our slumber” and demanded an independent Arab state.⁶⁰

Although he always considered himself a very average Arab boy, early in life Totah experienced confusing and shifting margins of identity. He adopted multiple identities of belonging; he knew he was an Arab Quaker and a Palestinian, but he also absorbed American

⁵⁷ Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 71.

⁵⁸ Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) see page 40 for some description of the Ottoman State as the “Great bogeyman of Christian Europe.”

⁵⁹ See James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁶⁰ Thomas, Philipp and Birgit Schäubler, *The Syrian Land: Processes of Integration and Fragmentation: Bilād Al-Shām from the 18th to the 20th Century* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1998), 254.

culture and being an American boy also became a part of his aspirations too. Khalil's dual identity as Arab and "American" may be seen as a result of his family's emergence as part of a new bourgeoisie. However, Nazih Ayubi has written that "Syria was by no means a bourgeois society, but semi-feudal with some incipient bourgeoisie features."⁶¹ Arab Christians became incorporated into the capitalist world system with their knowledge of English and their missionary educations. The missionaries introduced the children to the "American Way of Life." Totah's entire generation struggled with a new western identity that had been fostered in the missionary schools.

Khalil was first educated at an Episcopalian School sponsored by the Church Mission Society (CMS) of England. It was there he learned hymns and Bible preparation, but he also learned about strict corporal punishment; the church missionaries were often brutal, striking him when he mispronounced English words.⁶² He stayed at CMS until he was old enough to begin more intense studies. The Greek Church and the Anglican Church missions had several schools, as did the Catholic Church. But the Totah family believed that the Protestant schools were more advanced than the Catholic schools. They opted for Khalil to attend the Friends Girls' School, which, in part because they were Quaker, was the only school that met their standards. Khalil was not happy to be the only boy at an all girls' school and waited anxiously for the Friends to open a similar school for boys.

Totah's life dramatically changed when that day arrived. 1901 marked the official opening of the Friends Boys' School (FBS). The people of Ramallah had waited a long time for it; in fact, many had begrudged the establishment of the girls' school thinking that the boys

⁶¹ Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 137.

⁶² Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 20.

should have one first. Most of the teachers came from neighboring schools and were excited to begin work with the Friends. There were also many teachers from America who had come to help ensure that the first year was a success. Although residents were very excited the cost of the tuition nearly drove them away. When the principal, American missionary Eli Grant, announced at a local gathering that the fee for attendance would be five napoleon, equal to about twenty dollars at the time, it caused a bit of an uproar. Someone in the crowd remarked, “We thought the Friends were here to do good,” they complained that it seemed nothing more than crass commercialism.⁶³

Khalil was able enroll in the school along with fourteen other young men including his brother Selim. His family had to pay the tuition for his younger brother, but Khalil worked off his tuition helping as a tutor. This was a lucky break for his younger brother, as the family could only afford to pay for one child at a time.⁶⁴ Many of the students in the class were from Ramallah. Their teacher was a local young man who had been educated in the Church Missionary Society’s Bishop Gobat and Preparandi Schools.⁶⁵

With the establishment of the Friends’ schools the Joneses venture in Palestine set in place a point of contact that would last to the present. It was Eli’s hope to visit one last time before his death. When he left China, Maine, on his final visit to Ramallah in 1883, his friends pleaded “I fear thou wilt never come back to us.” His reply, “Lebanon’s top is as near heaven as

⁶³ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 21.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 22.

⁶⁵ The Church Missionary Society (CMS) was founded in London in 1799 and was the main body of contact for the Church of England’s missionary outreach to Africa and the Middle East. Its chief educational institutions in Palestine were the Bishop Gobat School and the Preparandi. See *Church Missionary Society Archive General Introduction and Guide to the Archive*, www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/church_missionary_society_archive_general/editorial%20introduction%20by%20rosemary%20keen.aspx.

my native China is.”⁶⁶ Asked about his success with the Arabs, he replied. “I go down to their condition, but do not stay there; I endeavor to bring them up.”⁶⁷ This answer reflects a certain missionary cultural superiority that the Quaker schools inculcated and passed along to their students in the Middle East. During his final visit Eli Jones spoke with the governor of Palestine. As they parted ways the governor, as if sensing trouble, asked Eli Jones to please pray for Palestine and its future. Eli made it back to his South China home and died in 1890; some of the last words he ever spoke were of the Friends Mission in Palestine and its students.⁶⁸

Totalah and his cohorts were a decade removed from the generation of students that Eli and Sybil Jones had worked with, but they were as hopeful and eager as ever. Eli had once asked one of his students “what becomes of the water, as the Dead Sea has no outlet?”⁶⁹ There was a long silence before a girl replied “the sun drinks it up.”⁷⁰ With equal optimism young boys and girls of the Friends’ schools dreamed of a brighter future. Totalah began to imagine the light of this brighter future soon after he began attending the Friends Boys’ School (FBS) under the tutelage of a man who would be his lifelong friend and mentor. The moment he met Elihu Grant a new chapter in his life began.

⁶⁶ Jones, *Eli and Sybil Jones*, 276.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ The Dead Sea is an endorheic water body which means it is a terminal lake that has no outlet other than by evaporation.

⁷⁰ Jones, *Eli and Sybil Jones*, 276.

CHAPTER TWO: A RELIGION OF DEMOCRACY

*Take up the White Man's burden, In patience to abide.
To veil the threat of terror, And check the show of pride - Rudyard Kipling*

*I am the East, I am the cornerstone of the first temple of God And the first throne of
Humanity. I am the East, I possess philosophies and creeds. So who would exchange
them with me for technology - Ameen Rihani*

This chapter will focus on Totah's early education and his first year at the Friends' Boys School where he came to know its Principal Elihu Grant quite well. Grant's influence marked a great shift in Totah's thinking. In his early diaries he commended the missionaries for having helped reshape his world and helping him to see things in a new light. They cultivated within him new tastes and curiosity, which led him to discover who and what he wanted to be as a person. He wrote in his journal, "I fell in with them and under their influence at the right time... I owe more to Elihu Grant and Mrs. Grant than any other individuals in forming my tastes, arousing my ambitions, tempering my wild schemes and aggressive notions."¹ This was a welcome influence to him and marked a change in attitude towards his life in Palestine. He adopted their views and began to believe that the life he had been living was backwards and in need of modern influence. He had a driving passion to go to America for a better education. He wanted to see young Syrians rise up and contribute to the world, but believed first they had to learn how best to do

¹ Thomas M. Ricks and Khalil Totah, *Turbulent Times in Palestine: The Diaries of Khalil Totah, 1886-1955* (Jerusalem: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2009), 40.

that. He was willing to assume part of the burden of training himself in order to achieve the desired outcome. The Friends schools and the Quaker Mission directed and guided Totah's early life, which in some ways delayed his activism for Palestinian rights later in life.

In 1886, the year that Khalil Totah was born, the first trainload of oranges left the city of Los Angeles bound for the big eastern markets of New Orleans, Chicago, and New York.² These railways not only linked markets and materials, but also ideas and people. Economic transformation ushered in large-scale social and cultural transformations globally. California citrus proved a profitable resource once markets were able to meet the growing demand of consumers across the nation.³ Also in the year of his birth, in the town of Jaffa, some 50 miles from Ramallah, over one hundred thousand crates of oranges were exported to Britain.⁴ Similar to the California orange industry, orange export in Palestine was a lucrative business.⁵ Nine-tenths of all orange trade in Palestine was with Great Britain. This trade fueled rapid expansion of the citrus industry in Syria and, even though Jaffa would not have a railway for six more years, it too was already a part of a modern global economy. In 1911, Jaffa's citrus industry was shipping 870,000 cases of oranges abroad, which accounted for almost one-third of the port's export income.⁶ These oranges became as famous as the California navel orange and "gradually grew to be part of the external image of the country."⁷

² "The Way Now Open for Growers of Citrus Fruits to Get the Top of the Markets," *Los Angeles Daily Herald* (Los Angeles, California), 17 January 1886: 5.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ "Jaffa Orange," *Bulletin of Miscellaneous Information* 88 (1894): 117-19.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See Michael R. Bracy, *Printing Class: 'Isa Al-'Isa, Filastin, and the Textual Construction of National Identity, 1911-1931* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2011), 91.

⁷ Tamir Sorek, "The Orange and the 'Cross in the Crescent': Imagining Palestine in 1929," *Nations and Nationalism* 10: 3(2004): 269-291.

An extension of the land itself the citrus became its own symbol of indigenous growth and prosperity. The color orange eventually gained popularity in terms of Palestinian national recognitions and was used in the new national flag. The representation of an agricultural product as symbolic of national aspirations is important. The attempt to link a national self-image with a crop is “a sub-genre of a common phenomenon among modern nationalist movements – the extensive use of botanical and agricultural metaphors to describe the nation.”⁸ The use of citrus as signifier of Palestinian national aspirations is a theme that threads its way down through the stories and experiences of Totah’s life, and also many Palestinians today.

The Land of Milk and Honey

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, with the help of missionaries, young Palestinians had the opportunity to go to America to pursue higher education. A former classmate of Totah’s, Moussa Kaleel, later recounted “Palestinians were encouraged by opportunities that America offered. The United States had the highest growth rate of income per capita among industrial countries (4.3% per annum) between 1879 and 1913.”⁹ Yet between 1851-1915 there was also increasing prosperity in areas of Syria, and in particular Mount Lebanon, an area where many of the early Syrians in America originated. Historian Julian Cole Philips has developed a thesis that links missionary work to migration. In his opinion the missionary schools fostered an ideology of integration between the United States and Ottoman

⁸ The Jaffa orange is an agricultural product that has been closely associated with Israeli production. But Palestinians had already developed the Jaffa orange before Zionist colonization of Palestine. “In 1886 the American consul in Jerusalem, Henry Gillman, writing to Assistant Secretary of State J. D. Porter, called attention to the excellent quality of the Jaffa orange and the superior grafting techniques of Palestinian citrus farmers: ‘I am particular in giving the details of this simple method of propagating this valuable fruit,’ he reported to Washington, ‘as I believe it might be adopted with advantage in Florida.’ “The Jaffa Orange” *Palestinian Culture and Society*. apps.cndls.georgetown.edu/projects/palestinian-culture-and-society/exhibits/show/oranges-and-olives-of-palestin/maps-of-jaffa-environs.

⁹ Mousa J. Kaleel, *When I Was a Boy in Palestine* (Boston: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1914), 5.

Syrians as a “global” people.¹⁰ This identity helped to create a sense of belonging for Syrians and a burgeoning sense of internationalism.

Missionary support and educational opportunities may have been spurred emigration from Syria, but according to historian Philip Hitti, “seeking a better life was not the only motive for migration; a large number of young men fled conscription, (one of these men was Edward Said’s father, Wadi Said, leaving Palestine for the United States in 1911).” Hitti asserted that “every steamer heading to the Americas [this would include parts of South America as well] was full of young men seeking to avoid military service.”¹¹

The first Arabs to immigrate to America came around the 1880s. According to Hitti almost 90,000 people from Greater Syria arrived in the United States between 1899-1919. Writing in 1924 he observed, “It is safe to assume that there are at present about 200,000 Syrians, foreign-born and born of Syrian parents, in the United States.”¹² Most of these early immigrants settled in the urban centers of the east, areas such as New York, Boston, and Detroit. Until World War I, many of the immigrants came from Christian villages around Mount Lebanon. Most fled the economic hardships they were facing because of a decline in the silk industry which had been the basis of their economy.¹³ It seems that global consciousness and conscription aside, a large motivator for emigration from Syria was the pursuit of the American dream.¹⁴

¹⁰ Julian Cole Phillips, *Haverford College Quaker and Special Collections Guest Fellowship* (Lecture, March 16, 2016).

¹¹ Philip K. Hitti, *The Syrians in America* [1951] (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005), 51.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ “Immigration History of Arab Americans: The Arab American Historical Foundation Home.” *Arab American*. www.arabamericanhistory.org/archives/immigration-history-of-arab-americans.

¹⁴ “Syrian Americans.” *Countries and Their Cultures* www.everyculture.com/multi/Sr-Z/Syrian-Americans.html#ixzz4yDyhx3ab.

A majority of early Syrian immigrants were poor, uneducated, and unskilled. They considered themselves temporary settlers in America. Few were members of the educated class (Egypt was still the chief center of attraction for educated men). They were young men who believed that the streets of New York overflowed with gold.¹⁵ They were intent on getting their share and returning to their native villages in Syria or Lebanon, to build a house with a red tiled roof and enjoy life.¹⁶ As Syrians were leaving for America hoping for greater opportunity, equally hopeful young missionaries were excited to bring their message of Christian love to the shores of Palestine. They found excitement in the opportunity to create “Enlightened Arabs who would uplift their communities.” A metaphor they used was, “the leaven that shall rise the whole lump”¹⁷

A New Generation of Missionaries

Eluhi and Almy Grant carried on where Eli and Sybil Jones left off, they arrived in Ramallah in 1901 coming on horseback along the old road as transportation in that region was still rather limited. On Eluhi’s arrival to Ramallah he wrote, “I had seen pictures of the place and so knew it at once, though there was now added the charm of colors. The building sat in sweet Quakerly composure among numerous trees and vines. Tall, pointed cypresses, pines and

¹⁵ “Immigration History of Arab Americans: The Arab American Historical Foundation Home.” *Arab American*. www.arabamericanhistory.org/archives/immigration-history-of-arab-americans.

¹⁶ Enaya Othman, *Negotiating Palestinian Womanhood: Encounters Between Palestinian Women and American Missionaries, 1880s-1940s* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 4.

¹⁷ Elihu Grant, *The Peasantry of Palestine: The Life, Manners and Customs of the Village; Illustrated with Original Photographs* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1907), 197.

various fruit trees abounded, which once so delighted the gaze of a little girl in the village that she boldly declared that she knew where heaven was.”¹⁸

Grant was an ordained Methodist Episcopal minister and worked as principal of the Ramallah boys’ school from 1901 until 1904. He then worked as a Professor of Biblical literature at Smith College and then at Haverford College. Between 1928 and 1933 he also directed four excavations in Palestine at Beth Shemesh.¹⁹ One of his areas of interests was with the Palestinian fellah, which had begun with his FBS work. He had a very paternalistic perception of the Palestinian peasantry. In his book *The Peasantry of Palestine: The Life, Manners, and Customs of the Village*, written with Totah’s assistance, Elihu Grant wrote about native life and customs from a perspective that showed Western paternalism.

Women and boys work hard for from twelve to fifteen cents a day. From four to eight dollars a month secures a man servant who, if he is a clever one, will do countless services and become almost indispensable. He will try hard to meet the foreigners’ ideas and wishes and improve in his ability to anticipate them. It does not do to nag and annoy the native helper by too close and nervous application of Western ideals of work, accuracy and punctuality, for one gets oneself into a very unlovely state of nervous irritability and often wears out a really valuable servant by unnecessary trifles of supervision. The peasant is used to a certain ease and generosity of judgment and if wisely watched will accomplish a good deal of work in a very fair way.²⁰

In his dealings with the Quaker students and families Elihu showed care and respect for the people of Palestine. Khalil Totah took to him immediately and was eager to begin his studies. He was relieved that he would no longer have to attend the Friends Girls’ School which his father had forced him to attend while waiting for the Friends Boys’ School to open. During those first

¹⁸ An important Biblical city, Beth-Shemesh is located at the geographic meeting point of three different groups during the Iron Age (Philistines, Canaanites and Israelites) which made it an ideal site for excavation. Israel: Beth-Shemesh.” *Institute for Field Research*, ifrglobal.org/program/israel-bet-shemesh/.

¹⁹ Biographical note, Elihu Grant papers, 1873 – 1948
asteria.fivecolleges.edu/findaids/smitharchives/manosca397.html.

²⁰ Elihu Grant, *The Peasantry of Palestine*, 197.

years Elihu Grant and Totah spent a great deal of time together. Grant helped Totah learn English while Totah helped Grant with Arabic. Each desiring to know about the other's culture they often took walks and practiced their languages together. Grant introduced Totah to a typewriter for the first time, and it soon became one of the most important tools in his life. Grant himself was a writer and perhaps he recognized the burgeoning writer and educator within Totah. Elihu proved to be a lifelong friend, mentor and supporter of Totah's.²¹



Figure 1: Totah as a Young Schoolboy During his Early Quaker Years

²¹ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 101.

The missionary mind was a complicated thing, and even with his unique appreciation for the local culture Grant sought to replace local customs and habits with Western practices. Elihu demanded that the students adopt Protestant forms of worship such as reading the bible in the vernacular, which for Grant meant English. He did not just reform worship, but social and domestic practices as well. He called for an overall cultural conversion in their daily habits asking them to abandon “heathen customs” of celebratory festivals. He encouraged students to sit on benches rather than the ground, and to sleep on raised beds, eat with forks, etc. He recalled later that the local people demanded this and that they believed Euro-American habits to be better especially in the realm of hygiene and education. Grant believed, and so taught his students that a Western “Christian civilization” was the pinnacle of human advancement.²²

In order to inculcate Western ways of structuring life, keeping house, and organizing time, Grant made sure that the students’ days were no longer designed around play and communal activities. He discouraged the children from going out in the fields to pick flowers (as had been a favorite pastime), but to become more cognizant of the value of time spent on education and intellectual development.²³ The purpose of this was to model for the students the “correct” way to live a modern and educated life. Embedded within this was the assumption they were in such need of social and moral guidance that it extended to details of how to live a meaningful life. He encouraged them to live by the clock, to be industrious and not indulge in “lazy” activities such as picking flowers. For all the changes that he thought to incorporate for the better he observed some instances where life in Palestinian was perhaps better than in America.

²² Grant, *The Peasantry of Palestine*, 207.

²³ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 103.

Total worked with Elihu Grant on his book *The Peasantry of Palestine* and one can see Total's Quaker influence in much of Grant's analysis. In his book Grant commented that in Palestine humanism, rather than state bureaucracy, determined social progress and that this was not such a bad thing. He wrote, "there is a case for the proposition that the modern state is reactionary... the sociological tendency of peasant cultures towards horizontal non-state societies provided an interesting model of participatory democracy in sharp contrast to the bureaucratic domination and genocidal militarism of twentieth-century national states."²⁴ The rural population saw the Ottoman officials as imperialists and in their reaction against them Grant saw some things that were disturbing to him

an instinctive anarchism of the traditional Palestinian rural population.. the urban government could not establish its dictatorship over the rural dwellers. The province came near to a condition of anarchy. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes. . . . To the country peasant the chief functions of the government seems to be those of restriction and oppression. The fear of imprisonment, fines and confiscations keeps the peasants down.. . . The peasants looked suspiciously on every movement of every officer, refusing to believe that any government representative can have good intentions or do worthy actions. Government provisions or improvements are looked upon as gloves for the hand that is stretched out for more of the means of the villager...The tendency among the villagers is to settle their disputes so far as possible without resort to the government...Sometimes eight or ten men from a village will be asked to act as arbitrators in the quarrel in another village.²⁵

This communal practice of local political organization appeared as backwards and anarchistic to Grant.

Total was raised an Arabic speaker and had struggled with English under the tutelage of his former instructors, but with Grant he found that he picked it up easily. As soon as he mastered it he devoured books such as: *Life of John Paton, King of the Golden River, Landing of the Pilgrims, John Smith, Marco Polo, Basil Wood's Plan of Salvation, Tales from Shakespeare,*

²⁴ Grant, *Peasantry of Palestine*, 197.

²⁵ Ibid.

and *Robinson Crusoe*.²⁶ These books promoted a very Western centered worldview, exalting the hagiographic independent self-made man. Through these stories Totah began to see himself within a different framework. Suddenly the meaning of the word *effrenji* (European) came into focus for him, he understood it to be a positive sign of a higher-level education, as well as social and economic prestige.²⁷ Through his formal education and engagement with American teachers Totah became enamored with all things American. He heartily accepted everything he was told about life in the United States, about its promise of equal education, freedom of expression, justice, and upward economic mobility. He marveled at the stories his teachers told about how all children in America could be educated even if they were poor. That it was possible for everyone, no matter who they were to live a good life.

His love of education and a determination to “be somebody” seemed to stem in part from an earlier sense of low self-esteem. But he was determined that even if he was an underweight youth who had been forced to attend an all girls' school, his intellect differentiated him from his peers. He often worried about seeming backwards and uneducated to others and it pushed him in his studies. He also felt somewhat of an outsider to his peers in that his family was not part of the wealthier established elites. He dreamed of someday visiting America, but often worried that his “backwardness” would show.²⁸ However he did not simply want to escape to America and never look back. Emulating those he had trained under he accepted the idea of developmental stage for

²⁶ These readings promoted a strong belief in freedom of religion, and the independent self-made man with a focus on themes of perseverance, strength, individual survival and serving overseas to convert the heathens, “against the savagery and the superstition, despite trials and tragedies.” Through hard work and strong faith these adventurers and pilgrims survive.

²⁷ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 105.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

a nation. Totah knew early on that he wanted to go to America, get an education and then return to help his countrymen and women prepare for their independence.²⁹

A Seeker of Learning

He finally got his wish in 1906 when he was twenty years old. With the support and encouragement of Elihu and Almy Grant, Totah was able to attend school in the United States. They planned and paid for his trip, bought him a suit and prepared him for his journey to America. Totah had acquired a passport and it listed him as an *abib* (seeker of learning) which made him very proud. However, as much as he had looked forward to this day he was apprehensive and emotionally overwhelmed. He thought that his new suit was outdated in and it embarrassed him.³⁰ This was the first of many new and uncomfortable experiences he would have that first year.³¹

He had excitedly begun his journey to America with a large send off from the entire village. He recounted, in his journal, how his mother walked beside his carriage for the longest time before she finally said goodbye to him. He was headed for Jerusalem with the equivalent of twenty dollars in the pocket of his new, somewhat ill fitting, suit. He then left Jaffa bound for Port Said; on this leg of the journey he was joined by Khalil Sakakini who was on his way to Cambridge England to deliver a lecture.³² Totah spent the first night in Alexandria, it was the furthest away from home he had ever traveled, he spent the evening feeling homesick and crying. But Totah kept himself moving forward; on to the United States, to Massachusetts, and then Maine where he landed at Oak Grove Seminary in Vassalboro. Maine was worlds away from the sunny warm hills of Ramallah. But he took it in stride, he was an adventurer and everything was

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 118.

³¹ Ibid, 119.

³² Ibid, 120.

fascinating to him. His friend and former classmate, Mousa Kaleel, made the same journey to Oak Grove Seminary two years later; by that time Totah had left for Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Mousa too was enamored with his new life and had this to say about his first winter experience: “The forests and woods in their wild condition were new to me, and many are the miles I have walked, knee-deep in the snow, through the dense Maine woods. American life fascinates me.”³³

Khalil was equally fascinated with this new world, but found that acclimating himself to it was not an easy process. There were things that impressed him, such as the abundance of newspapers in America. He wrote “I devoured them, pestering all those around with deep intricate, technical questions- how they made the president of the United States and other political questions.”³⁴ He stayed with the Grants while waiting for the school year to begin. During this time he often felt odd and lonesome studying or reading all alone in his bedroom. In general he had a hard time adjusting to how differently people in America behaved. He observed that they lived in a world by themselves; did not go uninvited into each other’s houses to borrow things or just to simply talk.³⁵ The quiet on the trains and streetcars unnerved him; it seemed that talking to strangers was taboo, and he was unsettled by the solitude. It also bothered him that no one seemed concerned about conserving water, he was in the habit of always measuring water in the cistern and making sure there was enough. Social mores around women alarmed him, on a visit to a beach one day with the Grants he was shocked at the sight of “half-naked women” and

³³ Kaleel, *When I Was a Boy in Palestine*, 5

³⁴ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 128.

³⁵ Wasif Jawhariyyeh, *The Storyteller of Jerusalem: The Life and Times of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1904-1948* (New York:Olive Branch Press, 2014). This book is the published memoirs of Wasif Jawhariyyeh who was a musician that lived in Jerusalem from 1904 to 1948. He kept a detailed record of the life, culture, music, and history of Jerusalem. Like Totah his writings cover Ottoman rule, the British mandate, and the founding of the state of Israel.

thought he was “in the midst of Africa.”³⁶ Totah judged the rest of the world with a prejudice that was both Arab and American. He viewed the peoples’ of Africa as backwards and ignorant. He also ascribed these same backwards characteristics to Native Americans. He once declared that it was not as if the Arabs were like the American Indian or Australian natives who were still in the processes of becoming civilized. Arabs, he said, had already attained that status, “Such a people cannot be put in the class with primitive natives.”³⁷

While he held racist views against other cultures that he viewed as not as advanced as his own, he soon learned that he too was different. Try as he might to fit in, he was somehow not quite American enough. His skin was darker than most “white” Americans and he came to realize just how uncivilized the “civilized” world could be. Growing up in a Quaker system that had promoted the value of equality, the realities of life in the United States were a shock to him. Totah did not take kindly to being treated differently and it upset him very much. Once while traveling with an American Baptist they had visited the home of two English missionary women. The women refused to feed Totah in the dining room and he had to eat with the servants. “I shall never forget that awful rebuff. It wounded me deeply.” He experienced similar treatment while traveling on the first leg of his journey to the United States when forced to ride in the cargo hold by the ship’s steward and he was not allowed to eat meals with the white passengers. Traveling by boat to Fall River, New York, the crew would not allow him to eat until after everyone else had eaten and he had to sleep near the horses.”³⁸

Totah did not write much about these episodes, but it may have spurred in him an interest in race relations. He took the time to hear Booker T. Washington speak at a local gathering when

³⁶ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 129.

³⁷ Khalil Totah, “The Palestine Triangle,” *Asia Journal* (1937), 6.

³⁸ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 129.

he was in Indianapolis. Booker T. Washington was there to attend a colored Knights of Pythias meeting and while he was visiting offered to give a local talk.³⁹ His talk was aimed at encouraging black Americans to “get out on the farms;” to acquire land and become independent. He argued that as a “producer and a taxpayer, he [the African American] will be a valuable man in the community.”⁴⁰ This attitude was very similar to the attitude that Totah adopted in his role towards working to help his fellow Syrians. He wanted them to become independent, self-made men (and women) and he thought to use his own success as an example. He wanted Syrians to work their land, invest in property, basically bootstrapping their way to success.

Although Totah did not speak much about race or how he saw himself, his daughter Joy believes that he must have known he was much darker than most of his classmates in America and that he must have identified in some degree as a person of color, something that Palestinians today do not do.⁴¹ It seems while he was not quite white enough for some people, he was not black enough for others. As he was preparing to attend the Booker T. Washington engagement, an acquaintance criticized him and rudely asked why he was going to hear “a nigger speaking to niggers.”⁴² Totah wrote, “The race questions is fairly [visible] in Indianapolis, where there are quite a number of Negroes.”⁴³ He clearly saw himself as an outside observer to the situation, but

³⁹ Like white fraternal organizations the colored Knights of Pythias embraced friendship, charity, benevolence, and shared a mission to help suffering members. The white public charged that that black group merely mimicked the white organizations and was not a legitimate organization. Black members were encouraged to own businesses and real estate, and it helped black men develop leadership skills and develop networks. The company that supplied regalia to the white organization refused to sell items to the black organization. See Marilyn T. Peebles, *The Alabama Knights of Pythias of North America, South America, Europe, and Asia* (Lanham Maryland: University Press of America, 2017), 7.

⁴⁰“Racial Pride,” *Sullivan Daily Times*. August 23, 1911, 6.

⁴¹ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 48.

⁴² Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

in terms of the color line in America others saw him as a man of color, or at least darker than the “average” American.

Looking through the archives of travel documents and registration cards, he and his brother Selim often identified as white.⁴⁴ It is not clear if this is how they truly identified, or if it made travel easier with federal laws increasingly making United States immigration harder. His travel documents also reflected the ever-evolving status of his homeland. In a 1910 travel document his birthplace was listed as Turkey, he identified as white, and his native tongue English. Traveling to America in 1928 Totah identified as Syrian.⁴⁵ A 1937 passenger list listed Totah as Hebrew, but that may have been confusion on the part of the person writing the list as Totah was a very common Arab Jewish surname.⁴⁶ It certainly was not because it would have been a more positive identity for Totah to assume. Immigration legislation that passed in the United States in the 20th century was largely anti-Jewish, it limited the immigration quotas of eastern European nations with large Jewish populations.

In the early 20th century the concept of race continued to be re-defined as immigration laws reflected a need to address who was “white” in America. In 1921 immigration reform supporters wrote the following confusing definition into law in the “Emergency Quota and Immigration Acts” which stated:

⁴⁴ *Worcester Ward 8, Worcester, Massachusetts*; Roll: T624_633; Page: 8A; Enumeration District: 1905; FHL microfilm: 1374646.

⁴⁵ Year 1928; Arrival: *New York, New York*; Microfilm Serial: T715, 1897-1957; Microfilm Roll: Roll 4380; Line: 16; Page Number: 211 The National Archives at St. Louis; St. Louis, Missouri; *World War II Draft Cards (Fourth Registration) for the State of New Jersey*; Record Group Title: *Records of the Selective Service System, 1926-1975*; Record Group Number: 147; Series Number: M1986 Year: 1937; Arrival: *New York, New York*; Microfilm Serial: T715, 1897-1957; Microfilm Roll: Roll 6022; Line: 2; Page Number: 121.

⁴⁶ Year: 1937; Arrival: *New York, New York*; Microfilm Serial: T715, 1897-1957; Microfilm Roll: Roll 6022; Line: 2; Page Number: 121.

A white person has been held to include an Armenian born in Asiatic Turkey, a person of but one-sixteenth Indian blood, and a Syrian, but not to include Afghans, American Indians, Chinese, Filipinos, Hawaiians, Hindus, Japanese, Koreans, negroes; nor does white person include a person having one fourth of African blood, a person in whom Malay blood predominates, a person whose father was a German and whose mother was a Japanese, a person whose father was a white Canadian and whose mother was an Indian woman, or a person whose mother was a Chinese and whose father was the son of a Portuguese father and a Chinese mother.⁴⁷

In 1924 *Century Magazine* reported on the “exotica” of the New York Syrian quarters. Describing the smells, tastes sights, and “specimens of an anthropologist” with “lightly bowed legs and egg-shaped heads.”⁴⁸ When Syrians wrote about themselves it was often in defense of their integrity and their ability to make good in America. This was a typical argument of the day; an attempt to highlight to fellow Americans the “value” of Syrians. A letter published in *The Syrian World* in 1927 by Dr. Michael Shahid stated that “Syrians will never be accepted in America because of racial prejudice.”⁴⁹ Fearing the actions of the KKK, he urged Syrians to go back home where they would be safer than in America. In response to this letter Fayad Barakat wrote “in my humble opinion the Syrians in America should not fear any prejudice as long as they maintain their loyalty to their adopted country, attend to their own business and discharge their duties as true citizens.”⁵⁰ In 1927 the Reverend K.A. Bishara, Pastor of the Syrian Protestant Church in Brooklyn claimed that Syrians “inherently make the very best contribution to the general life of their great land of adoption. The Syrian is cosmopolitan naturally, mystical, intensely practical, has an intensive mind, tempered with morally upright law abiding common

⁴⁷ 1921 Emergency Quota Law (An act to limit the immigration of aliens into the United States) H.R. 4075; Pub.L. 67-5; 42 Stat. 5. 67th Congress; May 19, 1921.

⁴⁸ “The Syrian Quarters,” *Century Magazine* July 1924.

⁴⁹ Dr. Akram Khater “Syrians’ and Race in the 1920s,” *Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies* (Apr. 2016) lebanesestudies.news.chass.ncsu.edu/2016/04/27/syrians-and-race-in-the-1920s/.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

sense,” he wrote.⁵¹ This was an attitude that Totah exhibited throughout his life, he always seemed to feel he had to justify his existence, to prove his usefulness in order to be accepted. He spent a great deal of his life trying to prove his value and the value of his homeland.

In 1929 US Senator David Reed of Pennsylvania proposed an immigration bill seeking to limit migration of non-Europeans to America. The bill marked an attempt to keep America more “white” by keeping out Southern and Eastern Europeans. Senator Reed argued that “before WWI we got the trash of the Mediterranean, all that Levantine stock that churns around through there and does not know what its own ancestry is. It came here in large numbers from Syria.”⁵² Despite the notion that Syrians were accepted into American society, their position was often marginalized by discrimination. At this time Totah did not seem to fully grasp the level of discrimination he faced in the United States as an Arab.

A Syrian in America

Once he had adjusted to life in America Totah felt a sense of pride at having finally made it. On his arrival to Oak Grove Seminary in 1906 he seemed to be immediately at home in this Quaker community. Totah threw himself into his studies in order to prove that a Syrian boy could be just as good, if not better than an American boy. His academic successes and accomplishments were accompanied by a sense of fulfillment at being able to earn his own way. He clearly remembered shame in begging his father for money and did not want to have to ever do it again. His very first job was as a teacher of English to Arab immigrants. Later, between 1910 and 1911, he spent summers working in an envelope factory near Worcester, Massachusetts. When he left Oak Grove to continue his education at Clark University in

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² “Milestones 1921-1936,” *Office of the Historian* history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/ImmigrationAct.

Worcester he soon discovered that he had a talent as a travelling salesman. He then spent the rest of his summers peddling aluminum and kitchen products throughout New England, including remote areas such as Rumford, Maine. Sounding very much like a hard-working industrious Yankee, he wrote, “Never have I had so much money in my life, I felt big, manly and independent.”⁵³ He ended up spending an entire summer in Rumford Falls (he may have known about the town and sought sales there because, in 1908, his friend Khalil Sakakini worked in a local paper mill).⁵⁴ He made good money and wrote in his diary that it was an opportunistic time for a traveling salesman.⁵⁵ A photo of Totah carrying his valise containing the aluminum samples in 1909 has the words “laboring class” written along the bottom of the photograph. His feelings of economic independence, pride in supporting himself played in to the stories he had been told. Aluminum was a great commodity at the time and his mentors supported his work as a salesperson.

Alix Naff has written extensively on the peddler life of many of the early Arab immigrants to the United States. She says that this peddling way of life led to a rapid assimilation of Arabic speaking immigrants in the United States before World War I. They discovered “an entrepreneurial Eden in America.”⁵⁶ Many were Christian Syrians of the Eastern-rite sects and a small number, like Totah came from Palestine. Most came from the Hills of Lebanon, and called themselves Syrian as it was not until the 1920s that the term “Lebanese” referred to that particular area of Syria. During this time, Naff argues, “Syrians became aware of the ideals of

⁵³ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 5

⁵⁴ See Nadim Bawalsa, “Unpacking the Modern, National Self: The Diary of Khalil Al-Sakakini,” (MA Thesis 2010), 25. Sakakini started work at a factory in Rumford Falls, Maine in June of 1908 but quickly decided that the job was miserable. He wrote, “There is no difference between the factory worker and the machinery he works how ugly this city!”

⁵⁵ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 129.

⁵⁶ Alixa Naff, *Becoming American the Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 2.

freedom and individual liberty.”⁵⁷ I argue that many, like Totah, had been aware of these ideals from an earlier time.

As fascinated as Totah was with American life he continued to sing the praises of his homeland and its people. He remained tied to his language of his birth and wrote that Arabs, in particular Muslim Arabs, were God’s special favorites. The place of Arabic language within the educational system would become key in Totah’s struggles for an independent Palestine and in his developing nationalist ideology. Benedict Anderson’s theory on imagined communities tells us that nations are not organic or inevitable, but that people invent nations. In this way nationalism is a sociological construct brought into existence by people imagining themselves as part of a group.⁵⁸ Totah imagined Syrians as a modern people who were heirs to an intellectual and cultural Arabic history, his Arabness stemmed from an understanding of this past. He saw his people’s history as the embodiment of a superior cultural and intellectual heritage that the world needed. Of Syrians he wrote, “Their work lacks the system of the Western thinkers, but it is more far-reaching and often has a more natural basis... The pride of every Arab is his mother tongue for it links him to the glorious past of his race.”⁵⁹ His conflicted feelings showed in his diaries, while he was bound to the Arab language he was also ashamed of it in certain circumstances. He was aware that his accent was “conspicuously foreign” and felt indebted to Elihu Grant for helping him practice his pronunciation.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Naff, *Becoming American the Early Arab Immigrant Experience*, 13.

⁵⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁵⁹ Khalil Totah, *The Contribution of the Arabs to Education* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1926), 16.

⁶⁰ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 128.

To Make Democracy Safe for the World

In 1911 Khalil Totah graduated from Clark University. That same year Syrian poet Ameen Rihani wrote *From Syria to America*.

Pardon, dear reader. The stranger at thy gate, hailing from the Orient, holds out to thee a gaunt and tattooed hand... Wilt thou take it? The hand of a personified illusion, of an exiled dream, of an Oriental who makes himself thy guest. The only message he brings from his vine-crowned and pine-girdled Mother to bewitching and enriching America is that of love and longing and lacrimal. He came from the Mountains of Lebanon, from under the shadow of the Acropolis of Baalbek, to learn from the Yankees the way to do things, the way to rise and flourish and expand; or, as they put it, the way to get there and be it.⁶¹

Rihani's poetry was in his words, "the sincere expression of a soul just emerging from the abyss," it was also ironically an example of an orientalist portrayal of the "exotic East." Yet for all the welcoming Rihani sought in America he missed his homeland, "The writer has forsaken their cedars and pines, their vineyards and fig groves to walk in the shadows of sky-scrappers and watch the sun rise languidly from behind a mound of bricks or a smoking chimney, and sink a-blushing behind the grimy walls of gaseous Communipaw."⁶²

Rihani displayed an orientalist line of thinking in much of his writings, as much as he worked to dissolve the lines between East and West has also identified them. He saw the "Oriental" as personified illusion and it may have represented the "unrealness" that many Syrians felt about living in the United States during this time. Surrounded by the materialism of American life as they learned how to "get there and be it," they felt a loss of realness in their lives, a missing inner spirituality. Rihani is considered the founding father of Arab American literature his style of literary work melded the dualities of reason and faith, of East and West. "It

⁶¹ Ameen Rihani, *Myrtle and myrrh* [1905] (Washington, D.C.: Platform International, 2005).

⁶² *Ibid.* Communipaw (a native American name) was part of Bergen City, New Jersey between 1855-11870. It was the most convenient point for oil delivery in the State.

was the New World's bonfire of hospitality: the sun called to us, and we obeyed."⁶³ Rihani was both enamored and repulsed by the West, he felt pulled in to its lure of progress, but grounded to the soul of his native country. Like Totah, Rihani fully embraced his heritage as an Arab, he wrote that he was linked "by blood and by choice" to Syria.⁶⁴ He had hope for the future, but it was an ambivalent hope, a hope that contained a seed of anxiety about the direction of modernity and so-called progress. He was highly critical of the capitalist West.

The Book of Khalid published by Ameen Rihani in 1911 recounted the adventures of a young Syrian living in America. Khalid, like Totah, had come to America from a small Arab village and worked as a peddler, learning about America as he traveled. Parallels between Totah and Khalid are easy enough to draw, yet Ameen's Khalid was more a poetic dreamer than a liberal pedagogue. Totah on the surface seemed more in the camp of Woodrow Wilson than the philosophy of a Henry David Thoreau.⁶⁵ However, they both shared a secular humanist philosophy that formed a solid grounding for their ideology. Rihani's character Khalid spoke of the generous cities and bounteous fields of the West, he called America the paradise of the world. But he also identified the ills of class division in America and he saw the "monstrosities of wealth and power concentrated into industrial strength."⁶⁶

Ameen posed a question to his fellow Syrians, he asked them "are you better off here in America or back home in Syria? Is selling false holy land gewgaws to 'pious old dames of the

⁶³ Ameen Rihani, *Book of Khalid* [1911] (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2016), 13.

⁶⁴ H.I. Katibah, *The New Spirit in Arab Lands* (New York: H. I. Ibrahim, 1940), 59.

⁶⁵ Rihani put emphasis on the perfection of human self rather than society and the unity of man and nature. See Aida Imangulieva's analysis of this in *Imangulieva, Aida Nasirovna. Gibran, Rihani & Naimy: East-West Interactions in Early Twentieth-Century Arab Literature* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2010).

⁶⁶ Katibah, *The New Spirit in Arab Lands*, 59.

suburbs' the calling you are meant for?"⁶⁷ Khalid asked himself "why does American civilization produce so many bigots? So many philistines, pendants and prigs- we moderns what are we missing?"⁶⁸ Modernity was a problem, he saw people had sacrificed their lives for so called success: "millions of innocent children are torn from their homes and from their schools to be offered... at the sacrificial-stone of the Factories and Mills."⁶⁹

Rihani's novel was not unique, it was representative of a more generalized immigrant experience. In fact, Khalid's feelings mirror, somewhat, those of the fictional character David Levinsky, created by Abraham Cahan, the Russian Jewish immigrant who became editor of the *Forward*, the largest daily Yiddish newspaper in the world.⁷⁰ Jewish immigrants formed their own enclaves and literary centers often living in close quarter to one another and to Syrians in city centers. The late 19th and early 20th centuries in Europe were a tragic era for the Jewish people and more than 2 million European Jews escaped to America. Living close to the Syrian immigrants they often shared similar experiences in America and became critical of its economic system.

"Little Syria," as the Syrian Quarter on Manhattan's lower west side was known as became home to an estimated three-thousand residents from Syria. The "Syrian Ghetto," as the *New-York Tribune* called it was "not to be romanticized any more than the opium dens of Chinatown or the dive bars of Mulberry Street."⁷¹ Many had come to America expecting to find

⁶⁷ Rihani, *Book of Khalid*, 61.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 77.

⁷⁰ Ezra Glinter, "A Very American Abraham," *The Forward* 19 May 2010. forward.com/articles/128157/a-very-american-abraham/. Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1917).

⁷¹ "New York Tribune Illustrated Supplement," *New York Tribune* October 11, 1903, 40-43.

the wealth and good living promised them by American missionaries. They instead found poverty and discrimination as they struggled to earn a living for themselves in America. They did their best to work hard and survive despite a system that seemed stacked against them to begin with.

Similar to Cahan's critique of capitalism, Rihani was critical of American democracy and the capitalist system. Critiquing the Tammany system and its manipulation of votes, he called the "Boss" a "vulgar specimen of humanity with a Persian rug beneath his feet. A rug made by poor peasant weavers who weave their hearts into the rugs."⁷² The rug was either there to "bid us welcome or remind us of his power."⁷³ With his feet on the rug, tipping his cigar ashes the Boss sat in judgment of the East. The art of rug weaving, similar to the *Abaya* that Totah's father wove, was produced by hand with patience, craft, and care. This work often went unappreciated other than for the wealth and power it represented. This was especially true in America where the market seemed removed, even inhuman, often devaluing hand-crafted goods.

To the Boss the rug was an "illusion" about the East, it represented his own ideas about its "exotic" value which served to mask the real value. The thing in itself did not matter so much as the prestige and the idea of owning such a specimen.⁷⁴ Syrian Christian minister Abraham Rhibany wrote "Westerners often say that you never tire of looking at a rug, a piece of embroidery, carved wood, or beaten brass of Oriental make. No, you never do. The fruits of the Oriental's labors are the fruits of his soul...His leisurely labor is an extension of the soul and

⁷² Rihani, *Book of Khalid*, 79.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 105.

⁷⁴ Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture; 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 236.

transference of personality.”⁷⁵ In this way the beauty of the item itself reflected the person who crafted it. Americans may have seen the beauty represented in the item and have been captivated by it, but may not have known what they were seeing. Rhibany wrote that the Easterner was different from Americans in that, “He works to live and hates to think that he lives to work.”⁷⁶ Interestingly enough among Totah’s writings on the importance education he also had pages of entries on the different weaves and materials used in the making of the traditional rugs of the Middle East.⁷⁷

Arab intellectuals, along with many others, realized a key flaw in the American capitalist system. That true human potential could be hijacked by greed and corruption. They were troubled by the fact that this manifestation of materialism as a dominant power would kill democracy, “the flame of democracy, if left unattended, would die in the dark.”⁷⁸ This went directly against the tenets of Wilsonian liberal economic policy which took for granted that an increase in wealth was the key to democracy and peace. Arab intellectuals looked for ways to maintain democracy and peace despite excesses of wealth. A separation between spirituality and materialism was a key factor in their ideas about nationalism.

Rihani lamented that the dollar had become the national deity of America, but held out hope that change would come. More of a cynic than Totah, Rihani wrote that emigration had introduced to Syria three prominent features of civilization: wealth, modern ideas, and disease. “The lust of gain is one of the diseases that come from America...furious angels of equality

⁷⁵ Abraham Mitrie Rhibany, *Wise Men From the East and From the West* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922),128.

⁷⁶ Rhibany, *Wise Men From the East and From the West*, 129.

⁷⁷ This interest in woven items and garments seems to be a generational tradition as Totah’s daughter Joy has carried on the tradition of Bedouin weaving.

⁷⁸ Rhibany, *Wise Men From the East and From the West*, 129.

eventually show their horns.”⁷⁹ However for all his cynicism he believed that America could still redeem itself:

a new man will be born but not an American in the Democratic sense not of old world or new but of both, in him reincarnated the Asiatic spirit of origination, poesy and prophecy, European spirit of art, American spirit of Invention. To lead the world not only in material things but also in the higher things of mind and soul. America is in the false dawn now, mother of prosperity and spiritual misery.⁸⁰

As if paralleling Khalid’s journey, Totah soon realized that money was not the answer for everything. He wrote that the peddling life was not what he wanted for young Syrians. The peddler community reshaped Syrian understanding of life in America in ways that differed from the missionary experience. The teachings of missionaries had inspired visions of a bountiful and open America, but actual experience in America challenged and augmented those visions. Americans often looked down on Syrian peddlers and it took a long time for them to work their way up to ownership of property. They lived in Syrian enclaves and felt the push for assimilation within a culture that did not embrace who they were. Education as a means to an end took on new meaning for Totah. His goals first had been defined by the missionary enterprise and he had accepted it, but he was beginning to see that he needed to apply education in a different way.

A Most Important Asset

September arrived and Totah spent his time at Columbia University with all the angst and agony of a typical college student, “reading, loafing, and sometimes hating myself.”⁸¹ Totah wrote home to Elihu Grant in 1912 that he “No longer [had] the zest for studying he had when at

⁷⁹ Rihani, *Book of Khalid*, 303.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Diary Entry, November 18, 1916, Box 2, Section 1, Khalil A. Totah and Eva Marshall Totah Papers Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections Haverford, Pennsylvania. (Hereafter referred to as Totah Papers).

Brummana and Oak Grove.”⁸² His mind seemed to be focused on other things now that he had actually experienced the promised land. “The main solution to educational problems is economic giving boys with education work to keep them in their homelands. And just teaching them English is not enough.”⁸³ But he also knew that “we cannot keep them at home by merely preaching to them about high minded sacrifices for the homeland...I am losing faith in the policy of just teaching them English. Such a scheme seems to be solving the difficulties of the U.S. Immigration Bureau and not our own.”⁸⁴ He contended “Ramallah has a great chance to alter the education of the country. There is a problem in catering too much to the Syrian Protestant College and similar universities, noble and influential as they are, they are somewhat misfitting our boys to stay at home.”⁸⁵ He began to see that the American missionary enterprise’s effect was to make Palestinians less Palestinian and more American, encouraging them to embrace American ideals and not to develop their own national ideals. He understood that development was a process. It was not enough to go make money in America, increased wealth did not solve the problems of his country. In order to foment change he focused on what the school system taught young Arabs. The fellaheen formed the majority of Palestine’s population at the end of the nineteenth century and Totah knew that if Palestine was to remain free and independent those who worked the land had to have a support system and education in order to secure their future.

⁸² Letter to Elihu Grant, New York February 1, 1912, Box 2, Section 1, Totah Papers.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

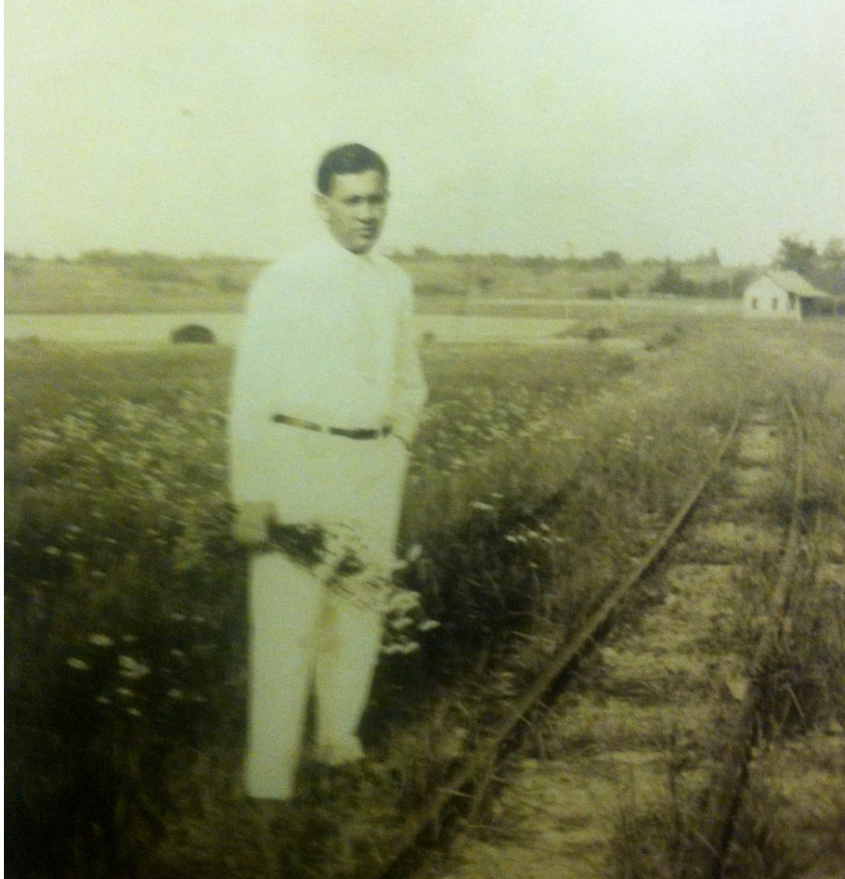


Figure 2: Khalil Totah Collecting Wildflowers in Maine, circa 1912

United States policy makers and missionaries had presented modernity as synonymous with progress, but both Totah and Khalid eventually saw that progress meant different things to policy makers than it did to emerging nationalists. The youth of Palestine had to figure out how to how to create a meaningful life within their own frame of reference. Life was not merely about economic growth; material things and liberal arts degrees were all well and good, but the people of Syria needed to find comfort and stability on their own land, supported by their own industry and work. Totah lamented “there are hordes of Beirut grads in US and South America and Egypt and South Africa...they need work that gives them a comfortable living, need to learn carpentry, shoemaking, farmer, better than peddling...I wonder if we can’t get boys to go into the olive,

raisin, fig and silk industries.”⁸⁶ He wanted the government to support indigenous industrialization, to let the Arabs work their land themselves and he was increasingly worried about the sale of land to Jewish immigrants. He knew change would not happen overnight, but he also knew if Palestinians waited for change without making it for themselves they would lose their opportunity.

Rihani and Totah both accepted the idea that change would come to Syria, and that change was not made in rebellion, but came from transformation. Rihani criticized rebellion, “Herein we Orientals differ from Europeans and Americans; we are never bribed into obedience... It might be said that the masses in the East are blind slaves, but in America they have become blind rebels...and what is the better part of valor when one is blind? Submission or revolt?”⁸⁷ Just like Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee model, which he may have taken away from the lecture he attended, it was Totah’s belief that violence and revolution would not work for Palestinians. He believed that the people needed to wait, to educate themselves and to work within the system for change. This was not simply passivity or collaboration with colonial powers on his part, but in his mind, it was the best way forward for autonomy. As Thomas Ricks pointed out, “His personal diaries, letters, and writings focused continually on the need for a united and independent Palestine, and yet his own patriotism and national loyalty were challenged publicly by Palestinians who saw his close cooperation with both British and American officials as suspect at best and collaborative at worst.”⁸⁸

Totah seemed weary, but the fight had just begun. In the autumn of 1912 he returned to Palestine and became the interim principal of the Friends Boys’ School at Ramallah where he

⁸⁶ Letter to Elihu Grant, New York February 1, 1912, Box 2, Section 1, Totah papers.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Thomas Ricks, “Khalil Totah, The Unknown Years” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 34 (2009): 51.

began work to bring his dream of an educated young Palestinian world to fruition. He envisioned a nation that could support itself through indigenous resources and production, and a nation that could also be a beacon of hope for the rest of the world. A mirror in which America could look across the ocean and see itself reflected back, a new city upon a hill.

CHAPTER THREE: A NEW PALESTINE

*Take up the White Man's burden, The savage wars of peace,
Fill full the mouth of Famine and bid the sickness cease - Rudyard Kipling*

This chapter will focus on the war years of 1914-1918, a period of concentrated change for Totah. His focus shifted from an outward concern for a universal just and humanitarian social order, to a particular concern with the fate of Palestine. It led him to challenge and question ideas he had been taught by American Quakers. He learned more about himself as a leader and an activist, particularly as he faced pressure to maintain a peaceful co-existence with both Arab Nationalists and British authorities. During this time the realities of his situation imposed their own structure around his thoughts on self-determination for Palestine.

The war that began in 1914 fostered a renaissance of Arab consciousness that, according to Albert Hourani, had its beginnings in Beirut after Muhammad Ali's conquest of Egypt in 1805.¹ Arab nationalist thought was hardly monolithic movement, but in general it centered on anti-imperialism. It also operated from a certain sense of Eastern spiritualism, which included Islam. Historian Rhashid Khalidi wrote that by World War I the Arab nationalist movement had attracted a wider constituency than has been recognized. An expanding modern middle class (what he called "the new intelligentsia") of journalists, teachers, professionals, and members of the military found ideas of Arab nationalism attractive.² The Arab world faced control from the Ottoman Empire and from Western colonialism. The major oppressor in Totah's mind was the

¹ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962). Totah translated the memoirs of Muhammad Kurd Ali in *Memoirs of Muhammad Kurd Ali: A Selection*, translated by Khalil Totah (Washington, DC: American Council of Learned Societies, 1954).

² Philip S. Khoury, "Continuity and Change in Syrian Political Life: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *American Historical Review* 96:5 (December 1991):74-95.

Young Turk regime whose forced conscription forever altered his life's trajectory. Totah had returned to Palestine in 1912, excited to begin his career teaching at the Friends school. A year and a half later he was drafted into the military. As a Quaker and a pacifist this was a great concern for Totah and caused him tremendous upset.

Turkey's war minister, Enver Pasha introduced universal military conscription in 1908. Christians had not previously targeted for the draft were suddenly required to serve. Totah's compulsory Turkish military training service of three months was a horrible experience. He was unable to avoid it as the Turks would hang him if he were to attempt to do so. Luckily the Quaker school authorities allowed him to stay on as principal, but the teachers had to work harder to make up for his three-month absence. It seemed that he had returned to a place where he no longer felt at home. His resentment for the Turkish regime grew to extreme proportions. In their yearly meeting minutes, the Friends Boys' School newsletter reported "At the end of January our Principal, Khalil Totah, was drafted for the three months military drill that is required of every able-bodied young man in the Ottoman Empire. Compliance was necessary and he was compelled to abandon his work. His great desire has been to serve his own people but circumstances here seem to indicate that he will be compelled to return to America."³ He explained the circumstances:

³ Minutes of the Yearly Meeting of Friends for New England: 1914 (Portland: Press of Southworth, 1914), 34.

In 1909 the Sultan Abd al Hamid's tyranny was ended and the Young Turks who replaced him made attempts at reforming the empire. One of the reforms was the drafting of Christians into the army, and that meant me. As the Turkish Government, however, needed gold as well as men, draftees could buy themselves out of the army at the price of 70 gold pieces, which was then the equivalent of about \$350. This large sum, my father paid, which released me from three years of military service. That enabled me to proceed with my educational career. But it was not as simple as that, for there was the matter of three months' active service with the colors.⁴

It was not “as simple as that” because, as Totah’s daughter Joy explained, “after one- and a half years into the job at the Friends School, an informer turned him in for having paid money to avoid military service and Father had to serve three months in the Turkish Army Reserves, unable to bribe his way out of that.”⁵

Two weeks into his service, on February 16, 1912, he sent a letter home. It was clear that the Turkish regime had an iron hold on all Syrians, not even the elitist of families could escape it. Even the influence of an American could not help this situation; “two weeks are already gone from my three months as a soldier. Selah’s own boy had to serve, even if Ed Kelsey [Totah’s mentor and teacher] were to be here he couldn’t do anything...the well- known Husseini family in Jerusalem couldn't get its own boy free.”⁶

The barracks were like a “pigsty and full of lice.” Most of the officers he encountered were Turks, and he was the only Syrian in his group. His captain (*yuzbashi*) was a Circassian named Mehemet Ali Bey who surprised Totah by treating him like an equal. Soldiers informed Totah that generally officers were kind in order to win affection and avoid being intentionally

⁴ Mahdi Abdul Hadi, *Palestinian Personalities: A Biographical Dictionary* (Jerusalem: Palestinian Academic Society, 2006), 180.

⁵ Joy Totah Hilden, *A Passion for Learning: The Life Journey of Khalil Totah, a Palestinian Quaker Educator and Activist* (Indiana: Xlibris, 2016), 51.

⁶ Letter to Haj Amin Al Husayni, July 20, 1936, Box 1, Section 3, Totah Papers.

shot by soldiers who might have a grudge against them.⁷ This period of military service created a certain cognitive dissonance for Totah. Having recently arrived back to Ramallah he was not back to the traditional family life he had expected. He not only found himself under modern strict army discipline, but he encountered people he did not normally interact with. He noted that he found himself getting along with most everyone, “Turks, Kurds, Syrians, Albanians, and Bulgarians- as well as Austrians and Germans.”⁸

The Terrible Turk

Having come from a rural area Totah underwent a dramatic intellectual and material transformation as he experienced a change in his lifestyle and social habits. He noted that pocket watches were beginning to be worn by the urban elites, which seemed to reflect a more regulated lifestyle. Coffee houses replaced home visits as meeting places. Women removed the veil and joined the workforce. He witnessed an emerging secular culture as nightclubs and bordellos also became legal.⁹ Larger changes were also in play as the war transformed Palestine into one major construction site. The Ottomans introduced many changes that have mistakenly been identified with British colonialism in this period.¹⁰ The Ottomans mobilized the Syrian and Palestinian labor battalions (*Tawabeer al 'amaleh*) to modernize communication and transportation systems. Water wells were drilled all over the country and linked to major urban centers. Railroads, telegraph lines, and telephones connected diverse regions.¹¹

Totah worried about the impact that increased travel to and from Beirut, Aleppo, and Damascus would have on Ramallah. He acknowledged open travel brought benefits, but also a

⁷ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 196.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Salim Tamari, *Year of the Locust: A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past*, 10.

¹¹ Ibid.

loss of the “old moral order” as exposure to the “degenerate influences of army life” eroded traditional life.¹² In his first work on the history of modern Palestine published in 1920, Totah discussed the changes brought about by these developments of war. He explained how beneficial interactions between civilians and the military created a window of opportunity. But he also admitted how confusing and unpredictable the changing world around him felt. He feared the new secular modernity and the loss of the old Ottoman order even as he resented the old order.¹³ However, good or bad, he believed that the war had ushered in a new era of nationalism to the Arab East.¹⁴ He saw its positive effect to be as “an active agency in breaking down Muslim fanaticism. It never dawned on some Moslem soldiers that Christians could be really human.”¹⁵ But he thought the new leaders no better than the old ones, that the state took everything but never gave to the people. “What then does self-government mean when you can’t read or write?” he asked in his journal. Totah had lived twenty years in Turkey before the constitution. He wrote that he had “searched diligently for reform.” but perhaps he expected too much as what he found was simply “a little postal reform.”¹⁶ His hatred of the Turks ran deep.

During the years he had been in the United States Totah had dealt with issues such as his academic studies, work and socializing. Having felt “green” when he had first arrived in America he later acclimated. His daughter Joy wrote that he felt he had joined the middle class, the “spirit of America.”¹⁷ When he returned to Ramallah he simply wanted to focus on his career as an educator. But events around him would not let that happen. Things were moving more rapidly

¹² Khalil Totah and Omar Salih Barghouti, *The History of Palestine* (Jerusalem: 1920).

¹³ Salim Tamari, *Year of the Locust: A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past*, 10.

¹⁴ Khalil Totah, “Young Turkish Farce in Three Acts,” *Journal of Race Development* 5:4 (April 1915):384-389.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 42.

than he had anticipated hence his shift in focus to keep young people home in Palestine, he knew that if too many left they might not have a Palestine to return to.

During his military service Totah could go home to Ramallah on Sundays. Sometimes he would go to visit Jerusalem for more excitement as Ramallah was a quiet suburb. Traveling from Ramallah to Jerusalem one night he wrote “I am going down to see an army of 750 American tourists pour into the city.”¹⁸ Palestinian writer Raja Shehadeh has said that it was fortunate for Ramallah that it was not mentioned in the Bible. Nothing divine happened in Ramallah. “What a stroke of luck for any town that wants to survive! Not to be named in any Holy Book!”¹⁹ The memoirs of musician Wasif Jawhariyyeh describe Ramallah as a quiet community especially when compared to the more cosmopolitan and decadent Jerusalem. According to Jawhariyyeh, Jerusalem was a hub of cultural activity. He recalled that all the notable men, those such as the Husaynis and the Nashashibis had mistresses.²⁰ There was music, poetry, dancing, and drinking into all hours of the night and Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Druze all participated. What went on behind the scenes in Jerusalem did not make it into Totah’s diaries, either he was not aware of it or he did not want to call attention to it. Being still a young man, he may have gone for the excitement, but he did not state so in his diaries.

Despite his Ottoman service, Totah tried to maintain a fairly normal life. One brother, Ibrahim, graduated high school in spring of 1913, and his other brother Selim planned to go to college in America the next year. He remained employed as principal of the Ramallah school and worried about who would teach the Ramallah students the next year. He wanted a young man from America, some “athletic fellow who is interested in our boys and in particular who will

¹⁸ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 43.

¹⁹ David Hare, *Berlin/Wall Two Readings* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 44.

²⁰ Wasif Jawhariyyeh, *The Storyteller of Jerusalem: The Life and Times of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1904-1948* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2014).

work for little money.” Things became complicated near the end of his service when he was arrested for wearing a civilian cap and overcoat in public instead of his army issued uniform. After this incident he was not allowed to leave the barracks for any reason until he had a trial.²¹ The entire process was slow and he tried to remain patient. He looked at it as “training for usefulness” and wrote “my soul sometimes rebels but it is a good experience.” As his patience ran low he wrote “thinking of leaving this country for good.” As soon as he was free, he made plans to go back to America for fear that the Ottomans might recall him at any time. He observed that it was easy to travel in those days, “it was simple to travel as passports, visas and quotas were unknown.” He decided it was the right time to go back to Columbia University and pursue his doctorate degree. Not knowing if he would ever be able to return to his hometown Totah left Ramallah. In a strange twist of fate, he boarded the *Franz Joseph* on June 15, 1914 and set out for the United States. Seven days into his voyage he wrote, “Lucky there is something we call hope. We are living on it.”²² He arrived in Maine on June 28 unaware that events in Europe had taken an historical turn that very day.²³

The Savage Wars of Peace

Totah had left Palestine just as the war began and as battles erupted all over Europe and the Middle East. It seems likely that he would have been conscripted had he chosen to stay. However, in the United States he still remained focused on the chaos of World War I. By October he was “doing the best I can fighting against discouraging circumstances.”²⁴ In November as Americans were gearing up for one type of turkey, Totah had his mind on another:

²¹ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 206.

²² Ibid.

²³ Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Habsburg Empire, was assassinated on the 28th of June, 1914. This event made headlines all over the world and marked the beginning of World War I.

²⁴ Khalil Totah Diary Entry, October 5, 1914, Box 2, Section 2, Totah Papers.

“Great excitement about war in Turkey...perhaps it is the end of Turkey.”²⁵ But Turkish war news was scant in America and he lamented “nothing decisive about the war. All sides are lying. All.”²⁶ Turkey was reported to have claimed a victory near the Suez Canal in January, but Totah still did not have much news to go on. Even more distressing for him was that he did not hear from his friends and family in Ramallah. He worried that they may have been injured, starving, or worse. The Ottoman government had shut down the post offices in Palestine and were confiscating the mail.²⁷ In Ramallah the Ottoman’s had taken his parents’ home for officers’ use; Turkish forces had taken the school to use as a stable. His family and friends remained front and center in his mind. Because he had walked out on his service he could not go back to Ramallah. He anxiously waited for the end of the Turkish regime in Palestine. On May 8, 1915, he wrote “great excitement in America about the sinking of the Lusitania.”²⁸

A month before he published a piece in the *Journal of Race Development* called “Young Turkish Farce in Three Acts.”

A paper constitution, French clothes and German guns, to the young Turks, appeared to possess a wand with which to transform Turkey from a nauseating cesspool of all that was rotten into a fresh spring bubbling over with constitutional life. By the mere recital of the formula ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’ Enver Pasha’s troupe managed to get an applause which, however, did not last long. Even the wretched population of Turkey itself was fooled with the rest of the world; but it did not take very long before all eyes were open. The whole thing was a farce.²⁹

He did not think anyone involved in the Revolution of 1908 was fit for office. “What a howling wilderness the imagination of those so-called reformers must be in pursuing the mad policy of Turkifying the whole Empire by force... if popular favor and editorial comment could control

²⁵ Khalil Totah Diary Entry, November 18, 1914, Box 2, Section 2, Totah Papers.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 52.

²⁸ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 206.

²⁹ Khalil Totah, “The Young Turkish Farce: In Three Acts,” *The Journal of Race Development* 5: 4 (1915): 384-398.

direct government action; if diplomacy were guided by moral sentiment and enlightenment, Turkey's knell would have been tolled long before the world tragedy was staged and Syria would have been under some respectable form of government." Many Syrians identified as Arabs and often remembered a common Syrian past. They found their Arab identity in their linguistic unity and to them the Ottomans were imperialists who prefigured Europe intervention. Just like the Ottomans the Turks were unfair and subordinated everyone else's interests to their own. Totah's opinion was that England cared more for Islam than Turkey. England was "so tolerant of Muslims it is often criticized. Bedouins hate everything Turkish. They want Egypt's government extended to them. The people in Palestine are always talking about the "Ingleez." They are crushed by Turkish tyranny and injustice and are praying for foreign interference." He was not only getting the news that the US reported, but he had been receiving letters from his colleagues back home. These letters stopped in March of 1915 and his journal entries became more frantic as the war escalated.³⁰ He was extremely concerned about his homeland.

In 1916 he said, "The fact is every Syrian hates Turkey worse than the devil himself. The Bedouins hate everything Turkish. They want Egypt's government extended to them, they hope for the day when an Arabic Muslim state would be re-established with Cairo for its Capital and the Khedive of Egypt for its Kaliph." At this time about a dozen Arab leaders had been court marshaled and killed by the Young Turks for demanding an autonomous Arab state. These were leaders whom Totah called "intelligent and illustrious and influential." They wanted to renew the glory of Baghdad and rekindle the "golden era of Arabian Ascendency." He believed that Cairo

³⁰ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 52.

had been the true capital of Islam, rather than Constantinople and that the Muslim world lost faith in the Young Turks and their Orthodoxy.³¹

A Second Lincoln

During this time, his daughter Joy wrote, Totah learned how to “survive as a loyal American.” Totah wrote that “It is the height of folly to express one’s self frankly.”³² Amid all this turmoil both back home and in America Totah wrote that he was impressed with President Woodrow Wilson who, in his opinion was like a “second Lincoln” for his “cool headedness, calmness, and human qualities.”³³ Wilson was elected to the White House in 1913, and in 1914 as World War I began Wilson managed to keep the United States out of the war. Totah wrote in his diary that “some” (he did not say who they were) likened the present condition to that of the Civil War. The idea that what was happening was like the Civil War is interesting in that Totah and others thought that the country faced a time of crisis that was similar, that Europe had fallen in to its own Civil War and the war was becoming a global struggle of good versus evil. The use of American history to frame current events was something that Totah and his colleagues often engaged in.³⁴

In May of 1915 Totah wrote in his diary, that “Wilson is calm and wants facts.”³⁵ He complimented Wilson on his human qualities and wrote that he would steer the country in the right direction. However, it is difficult to say if these were Totah’s honest thoughts. He also wrote, “independent thinking is taboo” and that people had to be either for or against the war. He felt those who were pacifist (like himself), or socialist should keep quiet as it was his

³¹ Khalil Totah, “Syria on the Peace Table,” *The Journal of Race Development* 8:2 (1917): 197-203.

³² Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 53.

³³ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 155.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

understanding that free speech was not to be permitted in America during this time. In the same entry he complimented Wilson on being the hero of the nation.³⁶ It seems that Totah above all wanted to be a good American citizen, were his diaries to be read by others he wanted to appear a respectable patriotic American.

Turning his attention from America to the situation in Palestine he advocated for British colonial control. In a paper he wrote in 1916 for the *Journal of Race Development* Totah argued that England was the most logical and competent to administer Palestine. British control of Palestine, “Fits into Britain’s plan of colonization perfectly as it will be a future safeguard to the Suez canal.”³⁷ It was a plan that would mutually benefit Palestinians for he believed Britain to be a “Great Mohammedan nation, [it] made good in India and Egypt...Palestine is Muslim by population and quite safe to assert it is pro-English.”³⁸ He complemented Britain for “its wonderful tact and firmness in handling the fanatic Muslim and half bake Nationalist.”³⁹ At this time he saw only the positive side of British “tutelage” for a short and temporary time, just enough for the “half-baked” nationalist to finish cooking. This tied in with belief that tutelage for Palestine was necessary and once they were done they would take control of their own state. Totah seems to have a keen sense of what is to come. It is interesting to think how he might have been able to better prepare for what was to come if he was not so inclined to see the positive side of foreign involvement.

Marriage and War

As events, overseas unfolded Totah married Ermina Jones, the niece of prominent American Quaker Rufus Jones. He had first met her ten years earlier when he arrived in

³⁶ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 29.

³⁷ Khalil Totah. “Palestine and the Allies,” *The Journal of Race Development* 6: 3 (1916): 315-323.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

Vassalboro in 1906. They married in South China, Maine on May 11, 1916. They set up housekeeping in Central Village, Massachusetts. Like many new couples living in America at the time, they had to deal with the challenges of continuing their education, a new marriage, and money shortages due to the war. He became a leader in the Society of Friends of Massachusetts and taught school there.⁴⁰ He remarked that the children “had no ambition for advancement and cultivation of higher things...They are not as eager to learn as are the boys in Palestine.”⁴¹ As with many things he encountered in America the reality did not always live up to his expectations. The actions of the students did not meet his assumptions of how Americans should behave. He completed his Master’s degree at Columbia University with his thesis titled, *Friends Secondary Schools in America*.

He planted his first garden that summer and as winter approached his friend and former neighbor from Ramallah, Dr. Fuad Shatara, came to stay with the couple.⁴² Shatara was a member of the Ramallah Young Men’s society and helped to organize its first demonstration in Brooklyn, NY on November 8, 1917. Five hundred Syrians attended this rally to protest the Balfour Declaration which had been made public six days earlier. In opposing the British declaration of support for a Jewish homeland protesters declared:

⁴⁰ Totah, *Syria on the Peace Table*, 197.

⁴¹ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 54.

⁴² Dr. Shatara, a childhood neighbor of Totah’s, became a naturalized citizen of the United States while at Harvard University. King Hussein appointed Dr. Fuad Shatara as the Minister to the United States. This appointment was said to be the first time an Arab envoy had been sent to a Christian country since the days of Arabian rule in Spain. Dr. Shatara like Totah tirelessly worked to help Americans understand the Arab cause. After the establishment of Israel his hopes were shattered. He committed suicide in 1948. The note he left for his wife said: “My nerves are frayed, my health undermined, and I cannot go on any longer.” “Leader of Arab League Commits Suicide in New York,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*. January 11, 1942.

Resolved that we protest against the formation of any government or body politic base on religious principles, by a minority, contrary to the principles of the majority. We further protest against the usurpation of the homes and property of a people weakened and impoverished by centuries of misery, by a race rendered more powerful and wealthy through contact with the western civilization thus applying might against right.⁴³

Shatara had written twice to Robert Lansing, Secretary of State under Wilson (of which he received no response back), with the sincere hope that, “our cause may not be left unchampioned at the forthcoming peace conference.”⁴⁴ H.I Katibah and Philip Hitti were also involved in this rally. Totah did not mention this protest in his diaries, but it seems hard to imagine that if Dr. Shatara had been staying with him they did not have some communication about the event. At about this time Totah wrote of his travels to Boston with a group from his church to hear Billy Sunday, an American evangelist known for his “fire and brimstone” speeches. Personally he was very disappointed with the famous evangelist: “his theology is antiquated. His thought and preaching is of the old school. He stirred no feelings within me whatsoever. He was anything but elegant and nothing to admire in his delivery but its force.”⁴⁵

Having left out the Syrian rally from his accounts might seem to indicate that he was more interested in his faith than in his nationalism, but a careful reading of his diary indicates that he purposefully left out entries which might have made him appear “Un-American.”⁴⁶ He had a need to impress upon others that he was indeed a “good” American may have been the cause for gaps in his entries. Not until things began to escalate and he was back in Palestine did he share more of his thoughts on policy and politics.

⁴³ Michael W. Suleiman, *Arabs in America: Building a New Future* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 228.

⁴⁴ Sarah, Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 104.

⁴⁵ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 161.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Totalah, like many others, had at first thought that the re-election of Woodrow Wilson in 1916 would keep the United States out of the war. Watching events from afar he could not help but worry about his hometown and the people he loved. Totalah quoted British Ambassador to the United States, James Bryce's thoughts that a possible solution might be that of shared international control in Palestine.⁴⁷ But in reality Totalah thought it all mere speculation: "No one knows the fate of Palestine. Some writers say it will be made an international religious museum. Others assert France or England will take it. We are at sea."⁴⁸ In a piece titled, "The Holy Land; Whose To Have and Hold?" Ameen Rihany offered a solution that Totalah thought naïve. Rihany said that no great power should occupy Palestine writing, "The spirit of democracy says that no one should conquer Palestine only liberate it. Let Palestine lead the way free from foreign intrigue and let Muslims, Jews and Christians form into a common national blood."⁴⁹ Totalah thought that Palestine must come under some form of international government. He reported that in the New York Times on August 24, 1917, "the German Chancellor asserted that Mesopotamia was to be England's share as decided in 1915-1916. And the rest of Turkey in Asia divided into English and French spheres. Palestine was to be internationalized and the other districts inhabited by Turks and Arabs."⁵⁰

By March of 1917 Totalah personally believed that the United States was going to join the war.⁵¹ He noted that Germany was sinking vessels left and right. He had received news that people in Ramallah were dying from plague and starvation; and he commented that his own life's work hung in the balance. He was tired of watching the ebb and tide of the Germans and

⁴⁷ Totalah, *Syria on the Peace Table*, 197.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 198.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 199.

⁵¹ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 167.

the Russians and Italy's neutrality was "aggravating" to him.⁵² When the United States finally proved him correct, Totah was relieved. President Wilson called Congress into extraordinary session on April 2 and four days later Congress passed a war declaration. There was still little news coming in from Palestine.

Khalil and Ermina spent Christmas of 1917 in New York with his sister Martha and many friends from Ramallah. They spoke anxiously about the welfare of the people back home and celebrated when Jerusalem finally fell to the British.⁵³ Ramallah fell the next month. Determined to do his part, but also remaining faithful to his Quaker pacifism, Totah became a non-combatant and served with the United States Forces in France as a YMCA service director in 1918. Since France controlled Lebanon and Syria by that time, he had to seek out the French consul general in New York for his travel documents.⁵⁴ This process irked him and he wrote "I do not see why France should issue me a passport as I am not a French citizen, but France has always been interested in Syrians, and this granting of passports is one manifestation of that interest."⁵⁵ The diaries covering his wartime experiences are filled with "warm comments, youthful admiration, and momentary sorrows with the men of the 79th Division of the US Army."⁵⁶ He spent the time working on his French, observing cultural differences, he found the villagers "too backward to associate with...too conservative for change," and thinking about Ramallah.⁵⁷ He helped the Red Cross with the refugees evacuating areas of destruction. It would be eerily predictive of what would happen to his own country in 1948: "The sight of whole

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 55.

⁵⁴ Thomas Ricks, "Khalil Totah, The Unknown Years," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 34 (2009): 51.

⁵⁵ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 165. Totah seemed to be a bit disgusted with France's purely economic interests in Palestine, he did not see this as on par with what he saw as the more "humanitarian" interested of Britain.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 167.

families leaving home with personal effects is saddening indeed. Woman dragging a troop of children. Tired, dusty, discouraged and perplexed.”⁵⁸ He reported horror stories from the front and witnessed the deaths of many more from disease, some sixty to seventy-five men a day. When the armistice was signed on November 11, 1918 he wrote “simply delirious with joy. War is finished.”⁵⁹

Return to Ramallah

He came back to the States briefly after the war ended. No longer a criminal avoiding military service, he prepared for a return to Ramallah. He spent Christmas in New York with many Syrian friends and remarked that it was very much like going to Ramallah, “so many of the Ramallah boys are in New York, eighteen boys are in the US army. There are some Muslims from Palestine too. The Ramallah folks in Brooklyn gave us a royal time. We were lavishly entertained, attended and joined ‘Ramallah Young Men’s Society.’ It is a good nucleus for future work in Palestine.”⁶⁰

Totah was proud to see other Syrians doing well in America. He took the time to comment in his diary whenever he encountered his peers: “Saw Hitti, a fellow from Beirut studying in Columbia.” Hitti “appeared to be doing well” in America.⁶¹ He was especially proud of all the Ramallah boys living in America. He wrote, “the Ramallah boys here are making good on the whole, nary of them are a disgrace to us. There are a few in New York who are publishing the Arabic magazine with our story in the vernacular.”⁶² He listed those educated in America like himself: “Fuad Shatara got his MS from Columbia last June, Selim George his PhD

⁵⁸ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 66.

⁵⁹ Ricks, *Turbulent times in Palestine*, 167.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 168.

⁶¹ Ibid, 169.

⁶² Rihbany, *Wise Men From the East*, 108.

from Cornell, Philip Hitti also received his doctor's degree from Columbia and is now an instructor there in the Oriental department."⁶³ Totah saw within this cohort the making of a strong Syrian educational force for the world; the members could not just shape American culture and policies, but could carry their expertise back to Syria. "The young Syrian blood is holding high ideals for the Near East."⁶⁴ Totah wanted to show America that they belonged there and that they were capable of contributing to America and to Syria. He was intent on showing that the Syrian people could take care of themselves.

He wrote to Elihu Grant asking, "I wonder if you have seen Rihbany's *Syrian Christ*?"⁶⁵ Syrian Lebanese writer and theologian Abraham Mitrie Rihbany published this book in 1916. It promoted the importance of understanding Syrian culture in order to fully understand the gospels. Totah lamented, "I wish I could get acquainted with Rihbany. I've only met him once for a minute or two. He seems to be a keen observer of life both Eastern and Western. His books read like a novel and he certainly succeeds in interpreting Syrian life in the best light."⁶⁶ Rihbany was certainly unlike Totah in his criticism of America, "To me the freeborn nation has potentialities which are oceanic in their magnitude and strength, but America has scarcely begun to realize her spiritual possibilities."⁶⁷ He saw America as a young somewhat blundering nation just getting on its feet. He thought it to be at a certain stage of advancement in which its higher ideals had not been realized, if it ever would be able to realize them. "I should say it is impossible for a people to produce something like the Twenty-Third Psalm and the Thirteenth Chapter of First Corinthians, and the Standard Oil Company and the United States Steel

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 169.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Rihbany, *Wise Men From the East*, 109.

Corporation, *at the same time*.”⁶⁸ Rhibany stated that he did not intend not to pass moral judgment on America, but that merely wanted to issue a warning that too much focus on material matters would take it away from the deeper matters of life, the spiritual existence of man. He wrote, “Great prophets of religion are born, not only of their parents, but of the soul of their race. What a people sows that also shall it reap.”⁶⁹

The United States would have to learn that material progress could inhibit spiritual progress, the American was stuck in his level of advancement and could not progress further: “The exchange of numberless commodities, the camera, the motion picture, the ball game, the gold game, the daily newspaper with its lurid ‘extras,’ the hideous advertising signs, the glaring lights, the automobile, that balm for all manner of nervousness, the humorous story, keep him roaming over the surface of life.”⁷⁰ The spiritual practices that America did engage in seemed to be “lunch-counter” religions. “Can anyone imagine such a scattered, troubled, shallow life producing an Isaiah or a Paul?” Rhibany asked.⁷¹ There could be no doubt that he felt the Western world was fostering the technical and commercial mind, at the cost of the spiritual mind. “Whether democracy will stand secure on such foundations remains to be seen,” he wrote.⁷²

Rhibany may seem divisive, and he was certainly a product of his time, but like Totah he stumbled on to a few key ideas that are important to examine. Intellectuals understood that the international system promoted only business and economics, not moral or spiritual ethics. This is what Wilsonianism lacked. Its focus on material matters took it away from a universal democratic

⁶⁸ Rhibany, *Wise Men From the East*, 111.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁷² *Ibid.*

ideology. Intellectuals, like Totah, Rihbany and others, realized that the League of Nations was established for the purpose of stabilizing international business and that “war and peace negotiations [were] being used as a cataclysmic means for the opening of new markets and greater extensions of business.”⁷³ For the Westerner it seemed economic matters took precedence over all others matters, including humanitarian. Rihbany saw the ludicrousness of capitalism: “The rivalries of production and more production and the producing nations in the last fifty years nearly wiped out the world. The idea that if we have more energy than we need to sustain life the surplus should be used for further production is absurd. It is an ideal not worthy of mankind to pursue.”⁷⁴

For all his appreciation of American democracy Totah was more of a realist and did not delude himself in thinking that anything good might come of the post war peace. He knew that the controlling members; Britain and France had already made a deal and that no matter what happened at the conference it had already been decided. Of the United States he wrote it didn’t matter what it thought because, “America [was] helpless at the peace table.”⁷⁵

In The Interest of the Powers

In 1917, two years before the peace conference Totah wrote “The mighty voice of imperial interest thunders in the midst of official silence.”⁷⁶ Totah contributed this piece for *The Journal of Race Development*. Between the years of 1915 and 1917 Totah contributed three articles to this journal which was published out of Clark University between 1910 and 1919. The preface to the first edition stated that the journal “offer[ed] itself as a forum for the discussion of the problems which relate to the progress of races and states generally considered backward in

⁷³ Rihbany, *Wise Men From the East*, 134.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Totah, *Syria on the Peace Table*, 202.

their standards of civilization.”⁷⁷ The journal’s title although jarring today reflects the centrality of race as a category in studies at the time. After 1919 the journal was renamed the *Journal of International Relations*, it later became *Foreign Affairs*.⁷⁸

Amateur reporters and journalists were speculating about the end of war peace settlement while, “premiers and ministers are silent. Heads of state deem it wiser to say as little as possible, but the mob (meaning the imperial powers who would be at the table) has already settled the fate of Syria a hundred times over. Totah wrote that surely Russia will get Armenia, France Syria, and England Mesopotamia and Palestine.”⁷⁹ He knew that security and material interests, not humanitarianism, was the one factor that would determine the course of the outcome. “Ponder well and long the trade route that Britain must keep open at all costs,” he wrote, “An artery that must be protected. Syria is only an incident. It is a bridge that joins East and West.” Totah knew that the British could not allow Syria to end up in hostile hands therefore the fate of Syria was clear to him, he did not invoke any high moral pleas to Wilsonianism but rather seemed very much a realist in his approach. That did not stop him however from looking forward to a British ascendancy in Palestine as for him that would ensure the end of Turkish rule.

In our case it is not the interest of Syria that will loom large in the minds of those who will sit around the peace table. Britain has no interest in the human side of Syria. In 1799 they allied against Napoleon with Turkey, in 1840 they befriended Ibrahim Pasha, in Crimea they fought side by side with Muslims to check Russia, in 1878 they saved Constantinople from ‘slavs.’ Great Britain could have done more to stop the Armenian massacre to relieve Syrians, but she had higher interests of keeping Russia at bay. Now

⁷⁷ George H. Blakeslee, “Introduction,” *The Journal of Race Development* 1: 1 (1910): 1-4.

⁷⁸ Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2017), preface. According to Vitalis by founding and supporting one of the new discipline’s flagship journals, the *Journal of Race Development*, Clark played a key role in the birth of the field of international relations in the two decades preceding World War I.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

that Turkey is against it Britain will do its part to rid the interests of humanity by annihilating her.⁸⁰

In what became a quite accurate prediction he speculated that the British would begin with taking Suez and taking as much of Palestine as it could and then penetrate as far north into Syria as the other powers allowed. “The British cabinet may be silent, but the facts speak loudly” he wrote.⁸¹ It was his sincerest hope that Syria would not remain in Turkish hands, but worried after that what might happen.

Britain may get it all.. a new Arabia of Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia, this would be beneficial to all involved as long as each had some measure of autonomy. But can England have so much and none for France? Unlikely. There will be disagreement as to the disposition of Palestine. So rather than arise ill will the Powers will choose internationalization for Palestine. Zionism is another option. Jewish influence is high in Britain and America ...Zionism is unpopular with both Christians and Muslims in Syria but unfortunately this will not weigh much at the peace conference.⁸²

“It is useless to attempt the presentation of the Syrians’ wishes and opinions regarding the future of their country, for they will not be considered. The *interest* of the *Powers* only matters. Suffice it to say for Syrians, that they will not shed many tears in bidding a final farewell to their old friend and benefactor- the terrible Turk.”⁸³

In 1919 The Paris Peace Conference converged at Versailles and the “big four” (United Kingdom, France, the United States, and Italy- Russia was out at this point) met and divided the former Ottoman territories into parcels similar to what Totah had envisioned. Although Totah had not called it a mandate, the treaty itself contained the language to form the legal basis for the Mandate system, Britain did end up with control over Palestine. As Totah had hoped Turkey did

⁸⁰ Totah, *Syria on the Peace Table*, 203.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

not end up with Syria and the “tutelage” of the inhabitants of the former Ottoman territories would be “entrusted to advanced nations” such as Britain and France.⁸⁴

You Can Live ‘Civilized’ If You Want To

Totalah did not look to Wilson or the United States for leadership in this matter. His idea was that Britain would “help” Syrians rid themselves of the Turks and this would allow the opportunity for Palestinians to establish their own leadership. He believed that Britain was capable of “good” governance. He seemed to buy into a colonial ruling ideology that Britain, France, and the rising United States were the cutting edge of progress and since the Arabs lagged behind they needed a bit of preparation to be on their own. A period of tutelage would allow the Arabs to catch up to the “universal march of history.” He concluded that the Turks had paid “no heed to the light of history and steered into the rocks.”⁸⁵ He was prepared to help Syrians steers back on course and seemed willing to allow continued colonialism to achieve this.

Totalah believed that reform and progress would come in the form of education although the kind of education and what standards would gauge its progress remained sticking points for him. Totalah formulated an ideology of an internationally inclusive global civilization of which Syrians and Palestinians would be in charge of their own education and growth. Once civilized reforms were in place in his country, prosperity, security, and equality would necessarily follow. He was a product of his upbringing in Christian schools. Such thinking reflected his background.

When World War I officially ended and the Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919. Historian Erez Manela argued: “it became clear in the spring of 1919 that there would be no new Wilsonian world order based on rights to self-determination, the colonial world was

⁸⁴ Andrew J. Crozier, “The Establishment of the Mandates System 1919-25: Some Problems Created by the Paris Peace Conference,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 14: 3 (July, 1979): 483-513.

⁸⁵ Totalah, *Syria on the Peace Table*, 203.

convulsed in revolt, with many nationalist leaders, feeling betrayed by Wilson and the U.S.”⁸⁶ It was clear that Totah did not feel betrayed by Wilson as he had not even factored Wilson into his predictions about the peace settlement. He did not expect self-determination for Syria at the time but expected it in the future. In some ways he felt that the Syrians had their hands tied, and since their fate was already decided it was time to plan for the future, and that future would rely heavily on access to education. Still at this point for Totah, education was the panacea of the times. In theory Totah was attuned to the larger colonial ambitions, but also amenable to colonial rule in his homeland. The paradox may seem glaring to an outsider, but to him it made sense. He was keenly aware of the positives and negatives of the situation. On a large scale he was against imperialism and colonialism, but having no power to disagree he believed that if he ‘played by the rules’ he would be rewarded.

⁸⁶ Erez Manela, *Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007),153.

CHAPTER FOUR: AN ERA OF HOPE AND PROSPERITY

*Take up the White Man's burden--No tawdry rule of kings,
But toil of serf and sweeper, The tale of common things. - Rudyard Kipling*

This is a great age. Things are being done and history is being made. - Khalil Totah

In 1919 poet Khalil Gibran lamented that Syria had found its freedom from Ottoman rule only to find that European powers would not allow Syrians to decide their own fate. He wrote “our good friends the missionaries are working for Turkey and would have us where we were in 1914...and some of them have the ear of President Wilson.”¹ Wilson was a good friend of Howard Bliss who was a prominent Protestant missionary and Syrian Protestant College president. Wilson heartily supported the missionary enterprise in the Middle East. Missionaries involved with the peace conference found themselves in a difficult place as negotiations dragged on and their support for the Arab cause did not provide for clear easy answers.² Gibran saw that the missionaries might not have Syria’s best interest at heart, that perhaps they were too busy trying to force a certain kind of “freedom” on the Arabs. The peacemakers in Paris did not hold the same belief in justice that the Syrians did, and did not understand that the “destiny of small nations lay within themselves... We are indeed busy protesting,” he wrote.³

This Chapter will cover the period of time in Totah’s life in which he struggled with his beliefs about the benefits of the British mandate and its “tutelage.” Wilsonianism had lost much of its glow across the Middle East but Totah continued to remain loyal to the idea that Palestine

¹ Suhayl Badr Bašruṭī, Joe Jenkins, and Kathleen Raine, *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet: A New Biography* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 196.

² For more information see Joseph L. Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy, 1810-1927* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

³ Bašruṭī, *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet*, 196.

would one day take its rightful place as an independent nation. This came to an abrupt halt once he realized that the British would not address the issue of increased Jewish immigration and land sales. He was also very disturbed at the British lack of interest in education for the natives of Palestine. Over time he increased his advocacy for the rights of native self-rule in education. This led him on a path towards advocacy for Palestinian nationalism.

Nationalism might have been the political idea of the day, but how far had it caught the imagination of the Arabs? Gibran had envisioned a new world concerned with human and national ethics and justice, a world that offered input for Syrians and the Arabs as a whole. The major decisions made by Britain, France and the United States at Versailles lacked any sense of justice as leaders imposed artificial borders and carved up the Middle East for their own interests. New borders may have changed things on the surface but underneath Syria was still united and whole. Gibran wrote, “Everything is different. Everybody is different...no matter what happens in Paris, I, among many Syrians, shall go on fighting for my country.”⁴

Syrian writer and historian H.I. Katibah wrote, “Democracy had long ago crossed the Mediterranean and had been sweeping the East like wild fire independently of Western influence.”⁵ He believed that under the Mandates the allied powers had betrayed the Arabs and in turn betrayed democracy, but the people of the East would continue to look for ways to contribute to and build a better world. With Britain and France showing their true colors, it was left to America to be reasonable and take the hand of the East, together they could work towards the mutual goal of a peaceful world. Under Wilson’s watch the peace settlement had provided a veneer of international legitimacy for divisions of land under the League of Nations, through

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Katibah, *The New Spirit in Arab Lands*, 66.

which “civilized” nations would offer benevolent “tutelage.” Wilsonian idealism was nothing more than traditional realpolitik of the great powers as they did not even go through the motions of pretending to consult the inhabitants.⁶ It certainly was not representative of the people.

Katibah surmised that, “Wilsonian idealism had died away in the West, and last hope of the East in Western democracy has set behind the horizon of darkening materialism.”⁷ Great Britain and the allies were busy plotting “as men by the millions were laying down their lives with the happy smiles of simple faith that they were making the world safe for democracy.”⁸ For Katibah the story of the betrayal of the Arabs was one of the most sordid chapters of the war. The British made promises to the Arabs they could never keep and this irresponsibility contributed to the rise of radicalism and reactions across the Middle East. The Arabs came to the realization that they would have to be the ones to lead the way towards democracy, as representative of “the people.”

Totalah was more optimistic, than Katibah. He had known that the British were going to rule Palestine with or without the consent of the indigenous population, but he held out hope for a benevolent rule. He wrote “After the war, the way was again open for me to serve the land of my birth. With a British regime I thought the Holy Land was facing an era of hope and prosperity. So I returned to Palestine and took the position of principal of the Men's Training College in Jerusalem.”⁹ Like Gibran, Totalah felt that he had been born of a heritage that keenly understood and experienced certain truisms that were fundamental to all times and ages. He saw Eastern culture (in terms of the Middle East) as the originator of peace and justice and equality. The East was the rock of all ages, the cradle of civilization. The West had technology and

⁶ Katibah, *The New Spirit in Arab Lands*, 59.

⁷ Ibid, 60.

⁸ Ibid, 59.

⁹ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 167.

science and power, and America in particular offered the potential of a prosperous future for all. With help from the East, America could meld together the best of both worlds. The eyes of the world were on Palestine as Britain's internationally sanctioned civilizing mission began.

A Lesson in Patriotism, published in 1919 was designed especially for use in American schools. It described for the average American citizen a glowing close-up of Palestine under the British mandate

the land is under British rule and will likely remain so, and it is thus assured of law, order, and progress. The Turk is gone forever, and under British rule there are no race riots, no crime-waves, and no political corruption or grafting. There are no vested interests, and little likelihood that there will ever be any. It is a land undeveloped, with a great future in the sense of opportunities for all...life is primitive but you can live 'civilized' if you want to.¹⁰

British officer and son of Herbert Samuel, E.H. Samuel arrived in Palestine with all the hubris of a young dictator. Upon later reflection he realized that his efforts to reform were not always productive.

I was someone from the twentieth century back in the eleventh century, with all the powers of a feudal baron. The peasants might be miserably poor and illiterate; but they were mine. I began to reform everything, to introduce new methods, new ideas. Some were disastrously wrong. Modern plows were too heavy and if broken local repairs were not to be had. Deep ploughing was a mistake as it opened up too much soil and dried out. Upon seeing rocks in the fields, clean your land I yelled at 'my lazy serfs' it will be so much easier to plow. but removing them actually damaged the crops as dew condensed on cold surface of the rocks. Heaven protect all peasants against well-meaning reformers.¹¹

Struggles For Unity

At the peace conference, Woodrow Wilson had approved the King-Crane Commission at the insistence of Howard Bliss. King -Crane was a commission of inquiry led by President of

¹⁰ "Education in Americanism," *The Literary Digest* January 4, 1919,184.

¹¹ Edwin Samuel, *A Lifetime in Jerusalem: The Memoirs of the Second Viscount Samuel* (Jerusalem: Israel University Press), 76.

Oberlin College Henry Churchill King and Chicago Businessman Charles R. Crane. They traveled to Palestine and Syria to meet with local representatives to ascertain opinions about the mandates. During that time Bliss was “the most influential American in the Middle East.”¹² The King-Crane commission reported the desires of the indigenous population of Syria for an Arab nation united with Palestine, governed by a constitutional monarchy. If the western powers would not accept this, Syrians would accept a temporary United States mandate. Bliss asked that Greater Syria be allowed to articulate their preference for a supervising mandatory, he hoped that the job would go to the United States. Dr. Henry King and Charles Crane had found that the Arabs wanted the United States as a mandate and an independent Syrian State under King Feisal. The report was completed in 1919 but was not released to the public until 1922, as it was “not compatible with public interest.”¹³

Releasing the report was in the public interest of the Arabs, but not in the interest of British and French officials. Historian Ussama Makdisi underscored that the King–Crane commission had been sent to Syria in 1919 to survey what the people of that region desired, not what European officials wanted. The commission “laid out in extraordinary detail precisely what the people of Syria, including Lebanon and Palestine, desired in their overwhelming majority.”¹⁴ One might assume, given the prevailing rhetoric about self-determination, that what the people wanted should become the law of the land, but this did not happen.

Ignoring the report, Britain and France met in San Remo, Italy in April of 1920 to formalize a Middle East settlement. Britain claimed Transjordan, Palestine and Iraq while France

¹² See Lawrence Davidson, *America's Palestine*. See also Andrew Patrick, *America's Forgotten Middle East Initiative: The King-Crane Commission of 1919* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2015).

¹³ “King-Crane report on the Near East,” *Editor & Publisher* 55:27 (New York: Editor & Publisher Co., 1922), 28.

¹⁴ Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced: The Broken Promise of U.S.-Arab Relations: 1820-2001* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 140.

claimed Syria and Lebanon. Feisal remained in control of Syria, but his days were numbered. Again in August of 1920 the powers met in Sèvres, France - the United States did not attend - and the Allies signed a treaty with the Ottoman government, which divided Ottoman lands into European spheres of influence. The treaty lasted less than a year until the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the leader of the Turkish War of Independence, signed this treaty thus making Turkey a republic and establishing its present-day borders.¹⁵

As the European powers met multiple times to dispense with the Ottoman lands, the Arab Syrian Congress elected Faisal Ibn Hussein as king of Syria and his brother Abdullah Ibn Hussein as king of Iraq. The French, using military force, pushed Faisal out. On July 24, 1920 Yusuf Al Asma led a Syrian revolt against the French at the famed Battle of Maysalun. Maysalun lives on in history as a symbol of Syrian resistance, even though it ended in failure with 150 Arabs killed and 1,500 wounded.¹⁶ Syrians lost the battle and remained under French control. This event marked a watershed in Totah's thinking, causing him to reframe his focus from a Greater Syrian nationalism to a particular Palestinian Nationalism. With the loss of Syria to French control it became imperative to him that he work with the British to secure a free and independent Palestine.

Ramallah came under the British Mandate and then eventually became part of Transjordan in 1921. Totah remarked in his journal that he never did get used to calling his place of birth Jordan, which it later became, and that it would always be Palestine to him. "It is not easy for one who was born and reared in Palestine to call it Jordan. It neither sounds nor seems right. I find it exceedingly difficult to adjust to the new situation. One cannot just discard all his

¹⁵ Patrick, *America's Forgotten Middle East Initiative*, 178.

¹⁶ Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 97.

previous being and turn into a new person.”¹⁷ Prince Abdullah Hussein, Faisal's brother agreed to become Emir of Transjordan after giving his word he would not attack the French in Syria.¹⁸ The Emirate of Jordan was a British-controlled territory from 1921 until 1946 when it became the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan.¹⁹ Faisal eventually became king of Iraq (under the British mandate) in 1921. In later years Totah wrote about the leadership of these men and expressed his disappointment in the way things had turned out. He was not impressed with the sons of Hussein and believed them to be puppets without real power. He referred to the kings as “two Hashemite school boys on the thrones of Iraq and Jordan.”²⁰ It was his conclusion that Arab countries had suffered divisions because of British-French rivalry on the one hand and Arab egotism on the other. A certain display of solidarity with the common man against elite powers would show through now and again in his writings: “The Arab masses desire unity but their kings, prime ministers and rulers stand between them and their goal.”²¹

Hajj Ameen Al Husayni became Grand Mufti of Jerusalem in 1921 and gained control of a large network of supporters; his religious authority allowed him to gain strong political sway in Palestine.²² In the early years the Mufti urged restraint to his followers and showed a willingness to cooperate with the British in seeking a solution to the question of Jewish immigration. Totah and Husayni were worlds apart in their secular and religious values and in how Palestinian society should look, but they had much in common in their fight for Arab control. The Husaynis and the Nashashibis were two powerful Jerusalem clans who had gained prestige and notoriety

¹⁷ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 159.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See Mary C. Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999). This is an in-depth study of King Abdullah and his role in the creation of Jordan.

²⁰ Totah, *A Passion for Learning*, 55.

²¹ Khalil Totah, *Dynamite in the Middle East*, 10.

²² Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem: Al-Hajj Amin Al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 66.

under the Ottoman government. They continued to vie for power under the British mandate. Although Totah supported the Nashashibi clan, he did not hold out any strong grievances against the Mufti and the Husayni clan. The Nashashibi developed the Arab National Party as an alternative party. They were typically more conciliatory with the British and the Zionists. They favored political, rather than violent, opposition to the British mandate and Zionism. Even though the Husaynis showed moderation in the beginning, they often called the notables of the Nashashibi clan traitors. Yet in the early years of the British Mandate there were no clear policy differences between them; both the Husaynis and the Nashashibi wanted all of Palestine for the Arabs and they opposed all Jewish immigration.²³ Allegiances were in flux at this time, there was no uniformity in leadership. Arab identity was complex and there was much overlap during the mandatory years.

The United States Weighs In

In 1922 the League of Nations officially assigned mandatory power over Palestine to Britain. That same year the U.S. Congress passed a resolution to uphold the controversial Balfour Declaration. President Warren Harding signed the Lodge-Fish Joint Resolution of approval to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Supporters defined this joint congressional resolution as an act of “historic justice “as it solidified American support of the Balfour Declaration. It was perhaps more of a tactical move aimed to protect nativist claims against Jewish immigration to the United States.²⁴ The resolution read:

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Jonathan D. Sarna, *The Jews of Boston* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 263.

Palestine of today [1922] ...was peopled by the Jews from the dawn of history until the Roman era. It is the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people. They were driven from it by force by the relentless Roman military machine and for centuries prevented from returning. At different periods various alien people succeeded them, but the Jewish race had left an indelible impress upon the land. Today it is a Jewish country. Every name, every landmark, every monument, and every trace of whatever civilization remaining there is still Jewish. And it has ever since remained a hope, a longing, as expressed in their prayers for these nearly 2,000 years. No other people have ever claimed Palestine as their national home. No other people has ever shown an aptitude or indicated a genuine desire to make it his or her homeland.²⁵

Seemingly oblivious to the fact that over a million Arabs called it home and had indicated a strong desire to keep it as their homeland, Senators Hamilton Fish and Henry Cabot Lodge introduced the resolution. “Most members of congress saw little harm in the resolution, and much political advantage. They had upset ethnic groups with immigration quotas in 1921 and by supporting Zionist demands they could make some gains at no cost or involvement to themselves.”²⁶ Palestinians on the other hand viewed the Balfour Declaration as illegal and unjust.

Concerned about the perceived adverse effects of growing immigration in the United States, various forces in US society had pushed for immigration restrictions. A 1921 article in the *New York Times* said “Severe restriction of immigration is essential to prevent the deterioration of American civilization, according to students of race and biology now taking part in the Second International Eugenics Congress at the American Museum of Natural History.”²⁷ President Warren G. Harding had signed the Immigration Act of 1921, also known as the Emergency

²⁵ United States Congress House Committee of Foreign Affairs. *Establishment of a National Home in Palestine: Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Sixty-Seventh Congress, Second Session, On H. Con. Res. 52, Expressing Satisfaction At the Re-creation of Palestine As the National Home of the Jewish Race*. April 18, 19, 20, And 21, 1922 (Washington: Government printing Office, 1922).

²⁶ Rafael Medoff and Edward I. Koch, *Jewish Americans and Political Participation: A Reference Handbook* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2002).

²⁷ “Eugenicists Dread Tainted Aliens.” *The New York Times* (Sunday, September 25, 1921), 27.

Quota Act in May of that year. This was the first federal law in United States history to limit the immigration of Europeans. It reflected growing nativist fears that people from southern and eastern European countries would not adapt well to American society and even threatened its existence.²⁸ An even more restrictive Immigration Act passed in 1924. These immigration acts had reverberations across the globe. For instance, in the mid to late 1920s, due to political and economic crisis, Polish emigration steadily increased and the acts passed by the United States blocked immigration to America which, in turn, increased Polish-Jewish immigration to Palestine.²⁹ As Jewish immigration steadily increased in Palestine the reality of the situation hit home and the local intelligentsia began to formulate a strategy to combat the problem. The strategy included the dissemination of information via newspapers and magazines. The fellaheen were beginning to actively resist increased immigration to Palestine, they were not necessarily anti-Jewish, but were concerned with their own economic and social stability as Arab intellectuals began to ramp up their efforts to get the message out.

My Mirror, My Sword

In September of 1920 Buolos Shehade, a Christian from Ramallah and a close friend of the Totah, established the magazine *Mir'at Al Sharq (Mirror of the East)* in Jerusalem. Totah himself contributed to this paper and published six articles prior to 1939. He did not write about politics, only about education and church. It eventually became one of the most significant Palestinian nationalist papers.³⁰ Historian Zachary Foster has argued that “Throughout the early-

²⁸ The law limited the total number of immigrants from any specific country already living in the United States in 1910 to three percent a year. This meant that, since they already had a higher population, more Northern Europeans would be admitted annually than eastern and southern Europeans.

²⁹ Edgar Marshall, *Israel: Current Issues and Historical Background* (New York: Nova Science Publisher, 2002), 110.

³⁰ Zachary J. Foster, “Arabness, Turkey and the Palestinian National Imagination in the Eyes of Mir’at al-Sharq,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 42 (2010): 61-79.

mid 1920s, the Arab World and Turkey proved to be potent sources of inspiration for Palestinian nationalists.”³¹ He viewed this discursive turn to the East through Boulous’s newspaper *Mir’at al-Sharq* as it paid close attention to the events unraveling in Egypt and Syria. “The paper frequently looked across the Sinai desert to Egypt for cues on how to reconcile what appeared to Boulous to be a fractured national movement in Palestine; how to improve Palestine’s Education Department; and how to develop the cultural institutions of the nation.”³² In many cases Egypt was a critical case study for the paper’s discussions on Palestinian issues.³³

With a circulation around some 1,000-1500 copies in the 1920s the paper was also front and center to the Husayni-Nashashibi family rivalry, which dominated the mandate period. *Mir’at Al Sharq* was anti- Husayni and pro-Nashishibi. Foster has written that in an attempt to discredit the Husayni-dominated national leadership, the paper frequently looked to Egypt, Syria, Turkey and elsewhere with examples of more successful national movements. The paper also turned to Egypt for cues on education. *Mir’at al-Sharq* published an article by Totah, then in a key position as director of Education Department for the Jerusalem Municipality, on the state of education in Egypt.³⁴ “Totah lamented the neglected state of the Palestine education department compared to what was happening in Egypt. He wrote that Palestine needed to “sidestep the indolent and nargilah-smoking village sheikh and embrace Egypt’s modern technologies.”³⁵ During the time that Totah advocated for better education in Palestine, the country experienced widespread riots as tensions rose with increased Jewish immigration.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ See Ami Ayalon, *Arabic Print Revolution* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

³⁴ Foster, “Arabness, Turkey and the Palestinian National Imagination,” 61.

³⁵ Ibid.

Between 1920 and 1921 Palestine witnessed an increase in strikes and riots against the British mandate and Jewish immigration. An influx of some 10,000 Jewish immigrants between December 1920 and April 1921 caused severe tensions to rise. A riot started in Jaffa in April of 1921 between radical leftist and centrist Zionist groups and soon involved the native Arabs. Forty-eight Palestinians and forty-seven Jews were killed and 219 people wounded. “From Jaffa, Palestinian rioting spread to rural areas, fueled by wild rumors of Jews killing Arabs. Several Palestinians were killed by British soldiers in an effort to defend Jewish settlements.”³⁶

In response to the upheavals the British sent the first of what would be many commissions to Palestine. The Haycraft commission quite accurately determined, “The fundamental cause of the Jaffa riots and the subsequent acts of violence was a feeling among the Arabs of discontent with, and hostility to, the Jews, due to political and economic causes, and connected with Jewish immigration, and with their conception of Zionism.”³⁷ Though the report ultimately blamed the Arabs, it identified their grievances and identified the ways in which Arab interests had been ignored over the interests of the Jewish immigrants. This seemed a hopeful start, but nothing would come of it.

The actions of British officials often provided impetus for the growth of the Palestinian national movement. Arab Congresses, newspapers, and political parties all opposed British rule. This opposition later included armed resistance, demonstrations, assemblies, strikes, and letters and articles in the press. One of the more significant areas of resistance and opposition came in the realm of education.³⁸

³⁶ Samih K. Farsoun, *Palestine and Palestinians* (New York: Avalon ,2007), 84.

³⁷ “Palestine Disturbances in May,1921” *Reports of the Commission of Inquiry With Correspondence*, (Great Britain: Colonial Office, 1922).

³⁸ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 62.

Dar Al Muallim

Total had become quickly disillusioned with the British and hoped that the United States would step in and set things right in Palestine, but in the meantime he was willing to continue to work with Mandate officials. His upbringing and the lessons he had learned as a youth still guided his actions. He would continue to prepare the Arabs until they were ready and he assumed, based on what was happening with the other mandates of Syria and Iraq, that it would not be too long. Total had secured a position as assistant principal at the Men's Teacher Training College (Dar Al Muallim) in Jerusalem. This college was set up by the British in order to train teachers for Palestine public schools. The Men's Training College was renamed Arab College in 1927 and considered one of the most prestigious public colleges in the country. However, the British mandatory government left Palestinians out of the planning process and did not consult with the local population on any administrative issues related to the school. "The British government expected the Palestinians to listen like good children. If they [the teachers] did show too much independence they were demoted or dismissed."³⁹

Total's friend and fellow nationalist Khalil Sakakini, one of the more prominent Arab intellectuals of the time, had been the principal of the college. In his position as principal Sakakini attempted to use education as a means to resist British imperial power. Historian Kamal Moed has traced Sakakini's journey as he made education the spearhead of the national struggle. He wrote that in 1918 Sakakini escaped from prison in Damascus – imprisoned for helping the Hebrew poet Alter Levine, a suspected American agent- after which he had joined Faisal in the Arab revolt.⁴⁰ He worked behind the scenes in the first Palestinian conference of 1919 by

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Kamal Moed, "Educator in the Service of the Homeland: Khalil al-Sakakini's Conflicted Identities," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 59 (2004): 58.

supporting the annexation of Palestine to Greater Syria. Even when he was working within the British Mandate he continued to confront it. He tried but did not succeed in convincing the Mandate government that an education system needed to be set up to serve the Arab population with independent curricula and no foreign influence.

Sakakini resigned the principal ship of the Arab Teachers Training College in a protest against the fact the British appointed a noted British Zionist, Herbert Samuel, high commissioner of Palestine.⁴¹ The curriculum of the schools had a strong influence over daily living activities, often organizing time, setting the standards for modern dress and appearance, as well as marketing American consumer goods, e.g., appliances, automobiles and other household items.⁴² Education had become more accessible, opening a new world of possibilities to students, but in the wrong hands it was also a tool of colonial manipulation. Totah replaced Sakakini as principal and he took this role very seriously. He intended to do his part to educate the students to be free, independent, contributing members of society. In return for tuition, room and board the boys were to teach for four years after they graduated. Under Totah's direction the students and teachers made "positive and lasting contributions to Palestinian life and culture."⁴³ Totah worked with Iraqi poet Marouf al-Rasafi, one of the major poets of his time, who was deeply involved in the political life of the Arab world. Together they created songs for the school. Rasafi composed the lyrics to go with European music which Totah chose; one patriotic poem he put to music used the French Marseillaise. They published a songbook with these especially composed songs.⁴⁴ Totah thought the songbook to be a contribution to Arab progress and he had hoped that

⁴¹ Kamal Moed, "Educator in the Service of the Homeland: Khalil al-Sakakini's Conflicted Identities," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 59 (2004): 58.

⁴² Nadim Bawalsa, "Sakakini Defrocked," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42, (2010).

⁴³ Joy Totah Hilden, "Totah and Ziadeh: Mentor and Student," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 32 (2007):94-102.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

the book would make students “wish to seek knowledge...implant in them the love of the homeland...and provide a refreshing recreational activity to recharge their minds.”⁴⁵

During his tenure both Totah and Ermina taught classes. She also served as housemother and housekeeper. Since there were no textbooks on Arabic history in the school Totah decided to write one. Increasing access to reading materials had been an important goal for him. He dedicated one room in the school as a periodical room and made many newspapers available.

Former student Nicola Zidaeh recounted:

One day in 1922 I was reading a newspaper al-Sharq, which was edited by his friend Boulus Shehadeh, and Boulous had written on the front page, “The fall of the ministry of Lloyd George. This may mean the end of the Balfour Declaration.” I was reading it [and] I would have believed it, why not? All of a sudden, Khalil Totah was behind me, looking and said... “Boys, listen, this is the wrong thing. This is wrong. The fall of the ministry or cabinet, in England doesn’t change the policy of the state. The Balfour Declaration was not the policy of the cabinet of Lloyd George. It’s a state policy. There is nothing changed.”⁴⁶

Totah understood that surface changes were not enough. A government might come and go but the policy that supported it would remain intact. He wanted the future leaders of Palestine to see the bigger picture.

Harold Bowman, the first minister of education for the British mandate wrote that, “In Palestine, we were fortunate in beginning with a tabula rasa”⁴⁷ Unfortunately for the British that was not true, the Arabs were not simply blank slates that they could write upon any story that they wished to tell. Education is one of the major ways in which the modern state tries to create new identities. The problem is that they were not starting with tabula rasa. The Arabs already had

⁴⁵ Rachel Beckles Willson, *Orientalism and Musical Mission: Palestine and the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 181.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ami Ayalon, *Reading Palestine: Printing and Literacy, 1900-1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 19. According to Totah’s student Nicola Ziadeh Harold Bowman never had a liking for Totah. Bowman was a man with a military background, limited in concepts, and he felt that if students and Totah went against his recommendations as it reflected disobedience to the government.

identities, it's just that this identity did not fit what the British needed. The Colonial powers would have preferred that Palestine did not have a history at all.

In his attempt provide to the school with a history textbook, Totah co-authored his first book, *History of Palestine* in 1921. Much to Totah's dismay the newly appointed High Commissioner banned the book for its "offensive" reference to Zionism. The book stated that "Sir Herbert Samuel endeavored to make the Arabs see the Jewish point of views as regards to Zionism and failed."⁴⁸ As late as 1937 the book remained banned. Herbert Samuel was the first British high commissioner of Palestine and he had been one of the architects of the Balfour Declaration.⁴⁹ He proposed that his government should conquer Palestine in order to civilize it.⁵⁰ Totah's mentor Elihu Grant believed that Samuel's administration had been "fairly launched."⁵¹ Grant then appears to have agreed with the idea of "civilizing" Palestine and this must have presented Totah with a recurring problem, the paradox of admiring and respecting the very people that stood in the way of Palestinian progress.

Arab History

One can imagine the conflict within Totah's mind as to what he perceived as the benefits of British control and the realities of living with it. The mandatory government discouraged anything to do with Palestinian culture and the teaching of Arab history. This ultimately had the effect of stirring educators to action; a fight for education became a fight for Palestine. Nationalist educators worked to disseminate their ideas via poetry, dance, music, and history in order to claim their rights as a nation. Their work concerned the rights to have a national

⁴⁸ Thomas Ricks, "Khalil Totah Unknown Years," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 34 (2009), 51-77 (65).

⁴⁹ Jawhariyyeh, *The Storyteller of Jerusalem*, 88.

⁵⁰ Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2001), 8.

⁵¹ Elihu Grant, *The Peasantry of Palestine: The Life, Manners and Customs of the Village; Illustrated with Original Photographs* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1907), 244.

narrative of their own. The teaching of history, poetry, music and other cultural topics was a nationalistic endeavor and as such it was dangerous.⁵² This educational effort was not a new development. Decades earlier the Ottoman government had deemed Arab history as subversive and dangerous to the Empire.

In *Olinda's Dream* the story about his grandmother's life, Dr. Farid Hourani recalled stories about his grandfather, Isam. Isam was a political activist who lived in Ramallah in the late 19th century. He and other like-minded educated men often camouflaged their political talks as history lessons to evade Ottoman government restrictions. Isam was eventually shot by an Ottoman emissary and subsequently left with a tragic brain injury which stopped all his activities. The study of Arabic history had become a political act, intended to inculcate a sense of belonging, of historical place, and continuity with the past. As Samuel's ban on Totah's book had shown the act of studying history in a particular way was subversive. This tradition carried on to the next generations of Syrians. Totah did not always agree with strikes and violent protest, but he did believe in waging struggles for reform, and education was the perfect platform from which to wage this struggle.

The British refused to let an Palestinian narrative exist either within or outside the textbooks, they sought to eradicate any concept of Palestine as a nation. A young man attending schools in Palestine as late as the 1940s remembered that "all of his textbooks came from Egypt and that he never read about Palestinian history in any of them as the Mandate government would not have allowed books of that kind."⁵³ The mandate government did not encourage any native activity; in particular poetry, music and dance. Palestinian teachers would hold poetry

⁵² Farid Hourani, *Olinda's Dream Palestine and Lebanon Remembered* (Philadelphia: Xlibris Corp, 2000).

⁵³ Efraim Karsh and P. R. Kumaraswamy, *Israel, the Hashemites, and the Palestinians: The Fateful Triangle* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 95.

contests and dance recitals on their own. The Department of Education did not encourage this in the way that they seemed to do with neighboring Arab states. Without support these events were only solitary events, not national contests or collective performances.⁵⁴

This gets to a core idea embedded in “modern thinking” the idea that education can be a dangerous thing in the hands of the “wrong” people. This line of thinking is often tied to racism, for to believe that a certain group of people are better off ignorant serves the agendas of those in power. For the British authorities it was best to have Arabs taught about the wonders of Western culture and how they too could become part of the natural progression given enough time. In keeping that time of attainment just out of reach, they offered enough hope to keep them reaching. Education in the wrong hands can be dangerous and prove a challenge to the system. Totah was beginning to see just how far the British mandate system would go to keep Arabs from learning about their own national aspirations. In America these very same questions were being asked by whites as they anxiously worried “Does the negro want to live in your street? Why is he moving north?”⁵⁵ The answer seemed to be education, “Is education making him burn with a desire for ‘social equality?’ The new negro problem is no longer political. It concerns all of us now.”⁵⁶ An educated public might want things such as human rights, justice or even democracy. Just as access to equal education in America would prove to be a powder keg for Jim Crow opponents, the Arabs in Palestine fought their own battle for the rights to equal and fair education. Totah argued that the Arabs paid their fair share of taxes, and that the money should go towards schools and their own education and not to sustaining the British military. He also

⁵⁴ Ibid, 97.

⁵⁵ W.O. Saunders “Black and White Won't Mix But,” *Colliers, The National Weekly* March 29, 1924, 16.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

wanted large tracts of land to sold to agricultural schools so that young Arab children would learn farming and sustainability.⁵⁷

In Palestine, schools became key in the dissemination of nationalist ideas. “The vocabulary of nationhood and independence came into the area from the West; the Palestinian teachers and their students filled these words with meaning.”⁵⁸ Sakakini had urged teachers to mobilize their students. He said, “if each of us is a nationalist and he tried to struggle to spread nationalist spirit to his students, we will mobilize for the country a free, courageous, honorable, and educated army.”⁵⁹ His ideas about nationalism were grounded in a secular humanist view, “And what is nationalism?” he asked, “If nationalism means that the human must be healthy in the body, strong, energetic, straight-minded, of noble values, affable, and kind, then I am a nationalist. But if nationalism means favoring one ideology over another, or contradicting one’s brother if he is not from one’s country or ideology, then I am not a nationalist.”⁶⁰ Sakakini was an interesting character, like Totah he kept a daily journal on his thoughts and activities under the mandate. He often vacillated between his love of America and his love of Palestine. As the two became increasingly hard to hold at the same time, he began to express some psychological trauma. Historians have accused him of being irrational, temperamental, and an extremist, but in reality his thoughts reflected a man who was going through an extreme psychological identity crisis. As one historian wrote,

⁵⁷Palestine Royal Commission, “Testimony of Dr. Khalil Totah,” (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1937), 48.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Kamal Moed, “Educator in the Service of the Homeland: Khalil al-Sakakini’s Conflicted Identities,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 59 (2014): 58.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Sakakini's conviction that nationalism was the pursuit of knowledge and humanity, while harboring his own dreams of leaving Jerusalem one day for America, signals a perplexing psychological dissonance that merits investigation. Consequently, stamping the label of "nationalist" on this character, with its modern and anachronistic implications, as several historians have done, is reductionist.⁶¹

Sakakini was nationalist in the sense that he put Palestine's concerns above all else and saw his love for America as emanating from his love for his country. Totah thought that the Arabs could be like Americans, that in time once Westernized they would have their spot in the sun. This consequently left him fighting against the British at home and using his influence as a teacher to raise the consciousness of the students. He often argued with them to stay in the classroom and not take to the streets in protest. Grievances against the Balfour Declaration often compelled students and teachers to protest and, at times, there could be no stopping them. While students were busy protesting the declaration, American politicians were deciding whether America would or would not support this "much hated" declaration.

Advocating for Palestine

In 1922 the members of the Senate and House of Representatives voted to show their support of the Balfour Declaration, resolving that "the United States of America favors the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which will prejudice the civil and religious rights of Christian and all other non-Jewish communities in Palestine, and that the holy places and religious buildings and sites in Palestine shall be adequately protected."⁶² Totah's brother Selim and his good friend Dr. Fuad Shatara both testified in the United States against this action. Representing the Palestine National League of America, Selim argued for US support of Palestine inviting the committee

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "Establishment of a National Home in Palestine" *Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Washington Tuesday, April 18, 1922* (Washington: Government Print Office, 1922).

members to remember all that the Palestinians had sacrificed during the war. He also invoked the very American ideal of no taxation without representation to call attention to the fact that the Arabs in Palestine were in the majority, paid their taxes, were upstanding citizen but had no rights under the current mandate. Selim argued:

Nothing has been said so far regarding what part the Palestinians played during the late war. I want to show you a few facts about what my own people in this country have done during this war. One hundred men — and I can verify that from the Government records — one hundred men of my own town people, from Palestine, joined the American forces. Yes, sir. You gentlemen and your forefathers have fought for the idea, and that is taxation with representation. We are asking for the same principles. By the operation of the Balfour declaration a majority of Jews will be established in Palestine, and after a while by their majority they will govern the native people. Would you stand for things like that in California if the Japanese should come in and after 20 or 30 years become a majority and establish a republic of their own? Not for a moment. How would you expect 93 percent of the people in Palestine to stand for that? You fought for it. What we are trying to do right now is to plead that they be given a chance. That is what we are asking for.⁶³

He used the “Nativists” arguments of many Americans in order to plead his case for Palestine.

The committee members did not appear responsive to his arguments. Representative Ambrose Kennedy from Rhode Island asked Selim, “They [Jews] want to get a home. You do not want to let them. Is not that the idea?” Selim replied, “The natives have a right to limit immigration as this country has a right to control immigration.” Arguing from the civilizational theory Mr. Kennedy replied, “but we are an organized government. There is no one over there.” He explained to Selim that the Jews had turned sterile lands into fertile lands and in the end it would benefit everyone, Arabs included. He completely ignored Selim’s testimony that Jaffa had become one of the most prosperous cities in the region due to native Arab cultivation of grapes and oranges. But since Selim touted economic progress under native control he wanted figures and statistics to prove it. Selim was asked to give the committee an idea of the extent of

⁶³ Ibid.

economic development in Palestine. Committee members replied that they seriously doubted that there had been any economic development in Palestine in the last 30 years. Selim replied “My father lives on a farm and develops that farm, raises his own wheat and tomatoes, grapes.” Kennedy asked him, “His father before him did?” To which Selim replied, “Yes.” It seems no matter the answers given the “progress” that the committee was looking for would not measure up to the standards that they had set for “proper development” Speaking of the Totah cultivation of family land for generations Kennedy replied, “Well there is no great development in that.”⁶⁴

In its report the committee expressed a favorable attitude toward the establishment of a Jewish national home and summed up the meeting by saying, “There is a strong religious and humanitarian appeal in this recognition accorded to the Jewish people that goes beyond its purely material aspects and the discharge of such obligations assumed by the allied governments as expressed in the Balfour declaration of November 2, 1917.”⁶⁵ In the end it did not matter how much or how little progress was to be made, ultimately the committee felt that religious claims and security needs justified that Palestine be a homeland for the Jews. The committee expressed no interest as to what the existing population should do and what might be their religious and humanitarian rights. This line of thinking could mean only that in their minds the Arabs were less deserving of rights.

In March of 1925 Arthur Balfour arrived in Palestine for a visit to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His visit provoked widespread anger all over Palestine, strikes and demonstrations followed. Totah’s students, and some of his teachers, joined the strike, but he chose not to:

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

[M]y attitude to Arab strikes, which are too frequent and usually futile, was negative. I preached strenuous toil for the Arabs and not strikes, if they wished to stand up to the Zionists. I told them that every day's loss of work was permitting the Jews to get ahead of them by just that much. I would not join in the noisy mob in the streets nor march with the demonstration. The students went to such extremes of violence that my college was temporarily closed. The mob was after my scalp as a traitor to the Arab Cause. Like Pontius Pilate, the British authorities let me down in order to appease the crowd who cried, 'crucify him, crucify him!' That was my reward for sticking to my principles, for faithfulness to real Arab interests and incidentally for loyalty to Government orders which were issued to its officers in writing forbidding the strike. But of course, that was not an unusual performance on the part of the British politicians or politicians of any other country either.⁶⁶

For Totah and other teachers in Palestine, November 2 (the date the British had announced the Declaration) had become a hard day to manage. Arabs observed it as a day of mourning and protest. As a result the British government pressed educators to keep their students from going on strike. Once again perhaps Totah drew on the lessons of Booker T. Washington. He seemed supportive of the idea that oppressed peoples within the system should focus on self-improvement instead of seeking revolutionary changes to the larger system itself. Totah preferred self-help and schooling in an effort to confront colonialism; as a result he often appeared too accommodating to hardliners on both sides.

Totah had kept his position as principal for six years until this "fated visit."⁶⁷ After the events of that day he was asked to resign his post at the Government school. British officials wanted to demote him and give him a position within the education cabinet. There seemed to be confusion on both sides. Many of his fellow Arabs did not understand why Totah had opposed the strikes since he did not side with the British, and even though he did not march with the students he was held to blame for his students' behavior. The British education secretary Bowman made the call to transfer him, but Totah saw this as a demotion and refused the

⁶⁶ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 57.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

position, he also refused to leave his post at the college. British authorities were forced to confront and dismiss him in person. Nothing stirred him up more than the feeling he was being wronged by the very government he had done his best to support. When the events were over he resented that fact that he had been treated in a very demeaning fashion. For him it was an eye-opening experience and a lesson in just how tight a grip that colonialism had on his county. At that moment he decided that it was time to return to America. Totah and Ermina left Palestine for New York where he enrolled in Columbia University's Teacher College.⁶⁸ He seemed less enthusiastic this time around to be returning to America and perhaps felt less "American." "Many trials for a foreigner like me going to America," he wrote in his diary.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 71.

CHAPTER FIVE: “THE BALFOUR DECLARATION OR ARAB FRIENDSHIP”

*Take up the White Man's burden And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better, The hate of those ye guard-* Rudyard Kipling

This chapter will look at the deteriorating situation within Palestine between 1926 and 1939 and Totah’s position on the unfolding events. His experience as the first native principal of the Ramallah schools led to a direct conflict between himself and Quaker officials. This conflict reveals something about the larger theme of “Wilsonian nationalism” in Syria. The chapter will focus on Totah’s growing frustration with the British power structure in Palestine, his struggles with racism, and his never-ending push for educational reform in Palestine.

In 1925 MGM released *Ben-Hur*, “The Picture Every Christian Ought to See!”¹ This and later films, such as *Quo Vadis* (1951) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956), helped cement the idea in American minds that Arabs were outside “others” with their primitive economic, social and justice systems; they were foreign to American society.² These films provided Americans with an interpretive lens with which to view Arabs. Historian Melani McAlister has concluded that these biblical epics “made representations of the religious history of the Middle East central to a discourse of U.S. ‘benevolent supremacy.’”³ In an act of apparent benevolence the Friends Mission board decided to cede a certain amount of control of its meeting house and schools to

¹ James J. Bloom, *The Jewish Revolts against Rome, A.D. 66-135: A Military Analysis* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2010), 252.

² See Melani MacAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 2. Also “Cultural and Political Images of American Jews in the Mid-Twentieth Century,” in Volker Depkat and Jurgen Martshukat (eds.), *Religion and Politics in Europe and the United States: Transnational Historical Approaches* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2013) and Michelle Mart, *Eye on Israel: How America Came to View Israel as an Ally* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2006).

³ MacAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U. S. Interests in the Middle East*, 8.

native control. This was something that native board members had been demanding for years, they had concluded that if the schools and mission in Ramallah were to truly to help the indigenous population, they must be under native guidance.

Devolution

In 1925 Totah received a fellowship from Columbia University's Teacher College to complete his doctoral dissertation. He received his PhD from Columbia University in 1926 and published his dissertation. "The Contribution of Arabs to Education" portrayed the Arab world of the seventh to the thirteenth centuries as a great cosmopolitan civilization. Totah lauded the fact that the Arabs not only gave to civilization a great repository of educational material, but that they acted as a great unifying enterprise, joining peoples across Europe and Asia, from Spain to Persia. He asked that America acknowledge the great contributions that had been made by Arab civilization, especially in the realm of peace through education. In his mind no one was better suited to teach Arabs and Palestinians about their own civilization than an Arab like himself.⁴

Even as he worked to articulate the importance of education in Palestine, Hollywood movies and news reports in America continued to undermine what little effect he may have had. They perpetuated the stereotype of the backwards and violent Arab. *Time Magazine* reported that "Syria was snatched from Turkey during the War, handed to France as a Mandate in 1922. Thereafter bloody work began for the French Foreign Legion. Years of pumping machine gun bullets into Syria's more savage tribes finally brought peace in 1927."⁵ As French machine gun bullets "brought peace to Syria" Totah began his own campaign to wage peace in Palestine through educational reform.

⁴ Khalil Totah, *The Contribution of the Arabs to Education* (New York City: Teachers College Columbia University, 1926).

⁵ "Syria: No Yo-Yo!" *Time Magazine*, Monday, Jan. 30, 1933, 52.

The American Friends, like good colonial parents, had determined that it was time to place a native in charge of its schools. This was to be under its supervision, of course. School officials used the term *Devolution* to describe this process. Devolution was a method whereby they would turn education over to local control. This meant placing nationals in positions of responsibility. Shortly after he received his doctorate Totah received a letter from the American Friends' high commission in Indiana asking him to become principal of the Boys' School in Ramallah. The commission wrote to Totah:

For some years past our Board has held before itself the idea of a self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating work on each one of its mission fields. Your appointment is a splendid step in the realization of this ideal. You will have many things to teach us here in America.⁶

In public statements published in the United States, the Friends Commission congratulated themselves for their “forward” thinking in allowing natives to have positions of influence over their own education.⁷ They praised Totah for being a “fine Christian gentleman.”⁸ They also praised their current president, A. Willard Jones for his courteousness in turning power over to an Arab: “Both the Board and the Mission were deeply moved by this fine act of Christian humility and courtesy.”⁹

Totah spent his entire tenure at the Ramallah Boys' and Girls' schools, from 1927 to 1944, fighting for the right to design his own curriculum and run the schools as he saw fit; ways that supported Palestinian rights and culture. By the end of his tenure Friend officials had aggressively backed down from their support of devolution. The right to run the school without outside American influence became a central issue, which divided Totah from his fellow

⁶ Letter to Khalil Totah, Spring 1927, from Willard and Christina Jones, Box 1, Section 2, Totah Papers.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Society of Friends, “Nebraska Yearly Meeting, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of Nebraska Yearly Meeting,” (Nebraska Yearly Meeting, 1920).

⁹ Ibid.

American Quakers and culminated with his retiring from the position as principal in 1944. In his letters of appeal one can see the mirroring of a wider American response to Arabs in power and the question of Arab “fitness” for self-rule, not just for their own schools and education, but also for country and nation.

Totalah accepted the job as principal on good faith and returned to his hometown of Ramallah in 1927 with plenty of hope for the school’s future. Unfortunately, things in his personal life took a turn for the worse. Only a year after his return to Ramallah his wife Ermina took her own life. It was their twelfth wedding anniversary. She seemed to have been depressed for quite some time and he reported to a friend that she had not been sleeping well. Even though she had recently returned from a trip to Italy intended to cheer her up, she remained deeply troubled. He had thought maybe she missed home and had offered to give up his career and return to America with her, but she refused.¹⁰ Her suicide was devastating to Totalah and the Quaker community in Ramallah. He spent the next year in mourning and trying to focus on his career. Eventually he remarried a young American Quaker from the Midwest. Eva Rae Marshall had arrived in Ramallah during his first year as principal to fill the role of head teacher at the girls’ school. With the tragic passing of Ermina only a year earlier his interest in her was a great surprise to everyone who knew him.¹¹

Eva was raised in Iowa in a Quaker missionary family. On her arrival to Ramallah she had initially considered Britain a “good colonizing country” as it sought to raise the standard of education; but she soon recognized that the “natives are quite discontent, and some think the

¹⁰ Eva Rae Marshall Totalah and Lyla Ann May, *From Prairie to Palestine: The Eva Marshall Totalah Story: Autobiography of Eva Marshall Totalah and Letters from Palestine 1927-1944* (Indiana: Xlibris Corporation, 2012), 30.

¹¹ Eva Rae Marshall Totalah and Lyla Ann May, *From Prairie to Palestine*, 30.

poor people are more downtrodden than during Turkish rule.”¹² She quickly formed an interest in Totah and attended all of his Sunday night talks. One talk, “What am I to do with my life?” particularly moved her. She was thoroughly impressed by Totah’s passionate plea to the students to give their service to Palestine. He urged them to find work that they loved and to throw themselves into it with their hearts, not just take a job for money. She came away thinking that the Palestinians must be the ones to make their nation for themselves and that, “none of us from outside can do what the people themselves can do.”¹³

Early in their relationship, before it became public, Totah traveled to America to raise money for the school. Eva had written many letters back home expressing her interest in Dr. Totah and was eager for her family to meet him.¹⁴ He wrote them himself and tried to convince them of his fitness for marriage and to dispel any fears they might have about the nine-year age difference between he and Eva. He also sought to dispel any fears they might have had about his worthiness. Totah seemed to always find himself having to justify himself to Americans. Whether he was defending himself, or his fellow Arabs, he continuously fought to be seen and respected as a human being with worth. No longer the young eager boy willing to become what his American tutors wished him to be, he found that as an adult man he still had to convince Americans that he and other Arabs, were “good” people.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Marshall, your letters have made me happy and I am sending them along to Eva to ease her mind. She doesn’t want you to be displeased or unhappy about her marriage. It is a strenuous life I am leading; speaking to schools, colleges and interviewing people. Last Sunday, it may interest you to know that I preached at Pres. Elect Hoovers in Washington at a Friend’s Meeting. It was quite an honor for me. He had six secret service men with him, two sat in the seat behind him and nobody else was allowed to sit there. The other four men were scattered in other parts of the room. Next week I speak at an educational society in one of the hotels in New York City. Following

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Eva Rae Marshall Totah and Lyla Ann May, *From Prairie to Palestine*, 203.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Sunday I am booked in Baltimore and so it goes...don't think I am an old man even though I am nine years older than Eva. I can hike 20 miles a day. We both love the same music art etc. and both get a great kick out of life. You have a fine daughter keen on contributing to the land, which did so much for the world and civilization.¹⁵

A month later he wrote again, "Dear Mrs. Marshall I can't tell exactly when I will be coming." He warned them, "I eat anything and everything under the sun."¹⁶ Meanwhile Eva had sent her parents a letter from Palestine urging them to accept Totah and make him feel part of the family. Totah, she wrote, was capable of making his own bed and that his favorite dish was Boston baked beans.¹⁷ Eva's mother initially had reservations about what she viewed as an interracial marriage, but her father was more than happy to welcome him into the family. He even saw to it that on his visit Totah would speak at the local high school where "everyone was enthusiastic to see him."¹⁸

Khalil returned to Palestine in the spring and brought to Eva a trunk of her clothing from home, which she greatly appreciated as she had missed being able to dress as she was accustomed to. They were married on May 19, 1929 on the Mount of Olives overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁹ In her diary, Eva described it as a beautiful moment, with birds singing, the smell of citrus in the air and the feeling of inspiration being on holy ground.²⁰ Yet there were many dark things ahead as 1929 was also the year of the Wailing Wall riots.

The Western Wall (Wailing Wall) riots broke out between Zionists and Palestinian Arabs in the summer of 1929. This took place in response to a dispute between Muslims and Jews over access to the area: For the Jews, the wall represented one of the last traces of the Temple of

¹⁵ Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Marshall, Haverford, January 17, 1929, from Khalil Totah, Box 1, Section 1, Totah Papers.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Totah, *From Prairie to Palestine*, 231.

¹⁸ Ibid, 85.

¹⁹ Ibid, 231.

²⁰ Ibid.

Solomon. Muslims considered the wall to be the location of the gate through which the Prophet Muhammad arrived during The Night of Ascension. This competition over the Western Wall highlighted the depth of the conflict between Jews and Arabs. Demonstrations on both sides, paired with rumors and attacks, led to riots that left nearly 250 Arabs and Jews dead and more than 500 wounded. This traumatic event in Arab-Jewish relations exacerbated suspicions, heightened mutual anxieties, and reinforced stereotypes.²¹

In that same year the school children of the Government School in Nablus, a city about 30 miles north of Jerusalem, went on strike to protest the deteriorating situation in Palestine.²² Government officials had some of them stripped naked and beaten, resulting in Palestine-wide school strikes. Totah's efforts to mediate his students from participating kept the Friends Schools from striking.²³ Eva reported that it was the students' "respect and love for Khalil that kept them from blowing off."²⁴ Totah did not want the boys to get hurt and asked them to find other ways to fight back. A British officer had warned Totah that "if your children go out into the street they will be shot."²⁵

²¹ International Commission for the Wailing Wall, *The Rights and Claims of Moslems and Jews in Connection with the Wailing Wall at Jerusalem* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1931), 6-23.

²² Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 130.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Totah, *From Prairie to Palestine*, 231

²⁵ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 130.



Figure 3: “Our Flower Trip Won the Cup,” FBS Boys circa 1927

When the conflict in Palestine finally let up in September of 1929 it seemed that the British were only willing to look at the immediate cause of the riots and not the roots. They first sent out the Shaw Commission to investigate the conflict. The commission was comprised of Sir Walter Shaw, Sir Henry Betterton, and others from the Colonial Office. The Associated Press (AP) reported, “Besides inquiring into the causes of the riots between Jews and Arabs the commission, will recommend steps to avoid a recurrence.”²⁶ The commission concluded that the main source of tension was a landless class of discontented Arabs, along with widespread Arab fear that continued Jewish immigration would result in a Jewish dominated Palestine.²⁷ Instead of acting on the report, the British decided to send yet another commission of inquiry to Palestine in 1930. The Hope-Simpson Commission led by John Hope Simpson conducted its investigation and published a statement of policy known as the Passfield White Paper. The Commission

²⁶ *Detroit Free Press*, Sunday September 15, 1929, 8.

²⁷ “The 1929 Riots, August 23 to 31, The Shaw Commission of Inquiry. Re. Causes and Guilt of the Riots,” *The Library of Congress*, www.loc.gov/resource/matpc.03047/.

declared that Palestine had a limited absorptive capacity and proposed restrictions on further Jewish immigration.²⁸ Simpson's report recommended that immigration should not exceed the ability of the country to absorb the new arrivals. Lord Passfield issued the Passfield White Paper in October of 1930 supporting the recommendations of the Hope Simpson Report. During this time the Quaker Mission in Ramallah played a mediating role between the British and Palestinians, and they often called on Totah, as the lead Quaker representative, to help in the matter.²⁹ After 1930 Totah became more involved in Ramallah's political problems associated with increased Jewish immigration to Palestine and the escalating anger of Arabs in Palestine. He became frustrated with the British publishing one study after another always wondering what on earth could be wrong in Palestine?

Zionist supporters campaigned against the Passfield white paper. Palestinian Arabs, in turn, became more alarmed and intensified their organizing efforts. In July 1930 the AP said,

[T]he Wailing Wall commission had talked with the Moslem grand mufti till after midnight to try to bring about an Arab-Moslem agreement over the Wailing Wall. ...the mufti apparently rejected the overtures, giving always the same answer: 'There isn't room for a compromise between Jews and Arabs. The wall belongs to Moslems of the whole world, and Palestine Arabs don't want Jews at a Moslem Mosque' ...The noted Moslem scholar, Ahmen Zaki Pascha, chairman of the former legislative council of Egypt, presented the Arab case reading a declaration submitted by the Arab delegation in which it said that Palestine was not recognized as a "Jewish national home." Zaki then went into Palestinian history...according to the Bible... neither Jews nor Arabs were original owners of the country, but the Canaanites. He submitted documents, which he said, were from Christian travelers declaring the Jewish practice was to mourn and not to pray at the Wailing Wall and he said that statements of other Christian writers that the Jews prayed at the wall might have been made because travelers mistook mourning for praying. Jews, he declared, were turning persecutors of the only people who had never persecuted them.³⁰

²⁸ Philip Mattar, *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians* (London: Routledge, 2014), 205.

²⁹ Maia Carter Hallward, "The Ramallah Friends Meeting: Examining One Hundred Years of Peace and Justice Work," *Quaker Studies* 18:1(2008):76–95.

³⁰ *The New York Times*, Friday, July 18, 1930, 8.

Arabs all over Palestine intensified calls for national rights particularly around land rights issues, which were at the core of the disturbances. Use of the land, and Arab historical connections to Palestine were the platforms from which they defended their rights.

Although Totah had been invited to attend the Wailing Wall Commission, he refused because he worried about the school in his absence. Like the Balfour declaration of 1917, the commission's report referred to "the non-Jewish population of Palestine." An expression that seemed in essence to relegate the native population to non-persons. Again, as in 1919, schools everywhere went on strike, but Totah persuaded his teachers and students to continue with classes. He worried about their safety. Eva Totah wrote to a Penn College classmate:

Following the Sir John report on immigration and Land Settlement in Palestine, the Government issued an official paper declaring its policy to limit immigration and try to relieve the fellahin. The Jews set up a great howl, but the government seems to be approaching the real problem and we are hoping for better things for the poor little country.³¹

It was difficult for Totah to keep his students from striking. They were keenly aware of rising nationalism in other parts of the world and they wanted to be a part of the Palestinian national movement, they also thought of themselves to be part of a larger world. Just as Totah had been grappling with the changing situation in his homeland for decades his students were grappling with modernity in their own way. He noted that they were "in a process of adjusting themselves to modern conditions... desperately attempting to reconcile Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, with Einstein, Edison, jazz, the moving pictures, free love, and bolshevism."³² These young Arabs increasingly referred to their education as *siyasatal tajhil* - the policy of making

³¹ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 130.

³² Ibid.

ignorant.³³ The British colonial administration deprived the Arabs of education that contained any national content or contemporary history.³⁴ Officials thus deprived them of learning their own history.

The Jewish schools in Palestine were mostly self-supporting, but even the mandate supported Jewish schools had freer reign in their studies.³⁵ In 1946 Noah Nardi published *Education in Palestine* in which he explained that Jewish education in Palestine was intended from the start to play an important role in the realization of Zionism. Its function, in the most general terms, was to prepare the student to become a useful member of the Palestinian community. Under the heading “Aims and Objectives in Jewish Education” Nardi wrote

The child must be imbued with a love of Palestine and a desire to live in it and be satisfied with whatever it can offer him. He must be taught to understand Palestine not only in a narrow territorial extent, but also in relation to the millions of Jews who live outside of it and look toward it as the center of their national life and culture.³⁶

Nardi encouraged the student to develop a strong national character and to be a “builder of the National Jewish home.” He also encouraged a peaceful approach to international problems and a proper respect for other cultures and people, and, in particular to learn to understand and cooperate with his Arab neighbor.³⁷ Totah critiqued this report stating that the survey was limited. Whether intentionally or not, the title was misleading, it should have been call “Zionist Education in Palestine.” He wrote, “When the Arabs are 70 per cent of the population and when their pupils outnumber those in the Jewish schools, one wonders why out of 255 pages only 8 are given to Arab education.” Totah’s students had no such lessons as the kind Nardi praised to teach

³³ Philip Thabet Issa, “Abu Maher Al Yamani and the Unheralded Palestinian Leadership in 1950s Lebanon” PhD dissertation, University of Texas, 2015, 48.

³⁴ Abdul Latif Tibawi, *British Interests in Palestine; 1800 - 1901: A Study of Religious and Educational Enterprise* (London: Oxford University Press 1961), 196.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Noah Nardi, *Education in Palestine* (New York: The Zionist Organization of America, 1946), 199.

³⁷ Ibid.

them about their role in Palestinian society.³⁸ Nardi fired back with a letter to the journal arguing that Totah was too much of an Anti-Zionist to be fair. “Dr. Totah, instead of dismissing the book as Zionist propaganda, would have done better had he accepted the challenge made in the book to the Arab leaders to lower the high percentage of illiteracy prevalent among the Arabs.”³⁹

During these trying times it was hard for Khalil and Eva to maintain a normal family life, although they did their best they could. Though he was a Quaker he was also a Palestinian nationalist. He knew firsthand about the grip that colonialism had on Palestine. This caused great stress in his daily life. He loved his bayara (orange grove) and would pack the family up and go there when he needed to get away. His farm property was just north of Gaza today, was a refuge from the cares and tensions of his job and the political situation. He often enjoyed trips to the orchard and the beach with his children and he maintained a small camp for overnight stays.⁴⁰ But this was not enough to keep the troubles of the world at bay. After years of inquiries and commissions, the British seemed powerless to address the real problem at hand as they had no easy way to deal with it.

The Modern Middle East

Totah and his peers spent a great deal of time trying to “sell” the Palestinian Arabs to the American public. Ameen Rihani doubled down on his speaking engagements across the United States in order to present the Arab case to the public. According to historian Aaron Berman, “Ameen Rihani’s travels helped make Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, an American celebrity. He

³⁸ Khalil Totah, “Review of Education in Palestine by Noah Nardi,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 246 (1946): 150-151.

³⁹ Noah Nardi, “Letter from Noah Nardi,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (1946): 248.

⁴⁰ Tibawi, *British Interests in Palestine*, 197.

skillfully portrayed him as a pragmatic and modern political leader.”⁴¹ Rihani had tried to encourage an alliance between King Faisal of Iraq and Ibn Saud to foster a Pan-Arab nationalism. Certainly these were not radical Arabs who fit the American stereotype. Rihani, like Totah, was not a revolutionary, in fact he believed revolution to be a socially destructive force. He thought it only initiated by “political opportunists who then gained power at a time of chaos and served to only reproduce the exact inequalities they had tried to fix.”⁴² Totah and Rihani, like many of the Arab intellectuals of their generation looked for a moderate peaceful solution to the Palestine question.

These moderate actors have often received a bad reputation for abandoning the fellaheen, even turning against them during the Palestinian uprisings, but this was not always the case.⁴³ Large scale conflict escalated in reaction to continuing Jewish immigration, land sales, and British violence. The conflict consolidated feelings of anger and despair among the Arab public, both fellaheen and effednya. Academic studies have highlighted a growing gap between urban and rural Arabs, the fellaheen and effendiyya, but Totah’s journals show a different side.⁴⁴

Much had changed in Palestine by the mid-1930s. The politicization of the Arab community around Jewish immigration and against British colonialism had strengthened the leadership of both Emir Abdullah Hussein in Transjordan and the Grand Mufti Haj Amin in

⁴¹ See Nijmeh Hajjar, “Ameen Rihani's Humanist Vision of Arab Nationalism,” on Ameen Rihani and the link between Pan-Arab nationalism and Binationalism in Palestine.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Khalil Totah and Harry Viteles, Ed. “Palestine: A Decade of Development” *The Annals for the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 164 (1932): vii.

⁴⁴ See Itamar Radai, “The Rise and Fall of the Palestinian-Arab Middle Class Under the British Mandate, 1920–39,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 51: 3 (2001):487-506. The main thesis is that the Palestinian middle class did not fully incorporate into the Palestinian-Arab National Movement and that there was estrangement between the middle class and the national leadership, as well as members of lower strata, especially the villagers.

Palestine. The intellectual classes, Jewish, Muslim and Christian, continued to push for the recognition of Arab accomplishments. Totah edited a book in 1932, "Palestine: A Decade of Development," and contributed a piece on education in Palestine. Other notable contributors included the historian George Antonius with a piece titled "The Machinery of Government in Palestine." In this piece he concluded that the British approach to Palestine was too "primitive for people that have been ready for representative government generations ago. Palestine is a country which is not a colony like Sudan, it is a mandatory territory. The tutors are failing."⁴⁵ Ameen Rihani wrote, "The Proposed Arab Federation," revisiting his long-held vision that the Arab states could be a federation of states similar to the United States.⁴⁶ In his own piece Totah criticized the mandate government's education system as inadequate; he contended that the British were holding the reins too tightly and not allowing Palestinians to teach the subjects they thought important or to use the books they wanted. For instance, Totah thought that the students could use more practical training for jobs at home and could benefit from lessons in art and music. He praised the private Muslim schools and said they were the "bulwark of Arab patriotism."⁴⁷ He complained that the British only approved educational materials which taught students to servants to imperialism. He said that the Department of Education was "foreign and hostile" to Arab school children.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Khalil Totah and Harry Viteles, Ed. "Palestine: A Decade of Development" *The Annals for the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 164 (1932): 55-61.

⁴⁶ Other contributions included: "Constitutional aspects of the mandate for Palestine" by S.D. Myres, "The Balfour Declaration" by Aouni Bey Abdul Hadi, "The proposed Palestine Constitution" by Jamaal Bey Husayni, "Local Autonomy in Palestine" by Isaac Ben-Zwi, "Local Self-Government--Past and Present" by Omar Bey Salih al-Barghuthi, "Palestine Legislation "Under the British" by Mogannam E. Mogannam, "Economic Problems. Palestine Agriculture" by Frank Adam, and "The Economic Effects of Jewish Immigration in Palestine" by W. Preuss. Harry Viteles, et al., "Palestine, a Decade of Development," *American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1932.

⁴⁷ Khalil Totah, handwritten notes dated 1930, Box 2, Folder 9, Totah Papers.

⁴⁸ Thomas Ricks, "Khalil Totah, The Unknown Years" *Jerusalem Quarterly* 34 (2009): 51.

It was not just within the schools but everywhere that revolutionary momentum continued to foment all across Palestine. In October of 1933 the Arab Executive Committee called for a general strike to protest Britain's pro-Zionist policies. The protest was especially directed against British rule and demanded an immediate halt of Jewish immigration, as well as the establishment of local government based on population. Disturbances broke out in many of the main towns and the British cracked down once again. A Joint Resolution from the Palestinian political parties to the British High Commissioner on November 25 requested a cessation of Zionist immigration and land acquisition.⁴⁹ In a 1933 Memorandum on Palestine, Totah wrote, "I feel that we are on a volcano that may erupt at the least provocation. When Palestine is stirred up so too is Syria, Iraq, Transjordan, the transference of land from Arabs to Jews is creating a class of landless Arabs."⁵⁰ In terms of the political events Eva reported that, "we feel quite in the center of things geographically." Their friends and colleagues from all parts of the world often stopped by or stayed with them for visits. They also regularly entertained the British high commissioner, the mayor of Ramallah, as well as students, teachers and travelers.⁵¹

The Friends' Committee requested that in 1934 Totah travel with an American Quaker from Lebanon, Daniel Oliver, to an annual Friends Meeting in London. He was to meet with British Quakers and plead the case for Palestine. The Quaker organization also arranged for him to meet with government officials to discuss "The Question of Palestine." Together Oliver and Totah shared their concerns over the need to reconcile Jewish and Arab interests in Palestine. Oliver told the British Quakers that the situation in Palestine was tense and dangerous.⁵² Oliver

⁴⁹ Khalil Totah, handwritten notes dated 1930, Box 2, Folder 9, Totah Papers.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 99.

⁵² Ibid.

and Totah then met with British Colonial Minister P. Cunliffe-Listo, but they did not find him very sympathetic toward their cause. He spoke a bit with them and talked admiringly of Ramallah and of High Commissioner Wauchope (then governor-general of the British Mandate of Palestine). He told them that it was his opinion that the British government must have the upper hand to do what it saw fit. In general, his attitude implied that he really did not care what they came to discuss. Totah wrote:

I expressed fear of a Jewish majority. He replied, 'not the least danger from that.' I mentioned Simpson report; he said, 'Palestine government opinion was more important.' I asked him if the government believed there was room for more immigrants he said 'yes'... We spoke government controlling sale of land he said, 'if you prohibit sale of land from Arab to Jews you would have to prohibit it from Jews to Arab.' I answered that that was impossible as land bought by Jews became inalienable. He spoke of resettling landless Arabs- I replied that prevention was better than a cure.⁵³

The colonial Minister dismissed them as if they were uneducated about the issues and implied that they be good children and learn from the British the way to do things. He did not give them a chance to speak about the political and economic inequalities in the country, nor did Totah bring up the fact the Eva had told him that British officers often harassed Arab women as they gathered water from the wells.⁵⁴ This is a topic that Eva had specifically asked Totah to address as it upset her greatly and she often structured her day to accompany the women so as to protect them from British harassment.

The two Quakers also met with representatives of the House of Commons. Totah was struck by how little they knew of the Palestinian situation; he believed they would be "converted" if they knew the facts. He asked them "would you rather have the Balfour declaration or Arab Friendship?"⁵⁵ Their answers seemed to imply they wanted both. By the end

⁵³ Khalil Totah, handwritten notes dated 1934, Box 2, Folder 9, Totah Papers.

⁵⁴ Totah, *From Prairie to Palestine*, 155.

⁵⁵ Khalil Totah, handwritten notes dated 1934, Box 2, Folder 9, Totah Papers.

of his visit Totah felt completely let down and discouraged, feeling that the meetings were of no use. He knew that members of Parliament did not have enough information about Palestine to make an educated decision on the matter. “No use seeing people who did not matter and who could not shape policy in Palestine,” he wrote.⁵⁶ Upon his return to Palestine he developed a list of “Things Arabs Need to do;” this included: an Arab agency in London to inform public opinion and to follow the press closely. “A good newspaper in English is essential for the Arabs,” he wrote.⁵⁷ Totah thought that it was simply that people did not see or understand the Arab cause. He had not yet reached the conclusion that maybe they did see, but did not care. He continued to remain loyal to his idea that if he could prove his worth and the worth of his country that the rest of the world would change their opinion and support them.

Over the course of the 1930s diverse Arab political parties began to unite to press their case to the British commissioner in Jerusalem. Even if not in agreement about leadership roles, they collectively sought “an end to Jewish immigration and land purchase and the establishment of a democratic government in Palestine with government elections.”⁵⁸ The British Parliament denied this request. Eva, pregnant with her and Totah’s first child, had her own opinions about the failing British government: “Certainly if terrorizing could stop the Arab revolution the British have it fixed up beautifully.”⁵⁹ She had witnessed the British intimidating children in order to keep them from striking, she heard them threatening to shoot at random and observed the use of fear tactics to keep a brutal peace; in the end this caused violence to escalate on all sides.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Lois Harned Jordan, *Ramallah Teacher: The Life of Mildred White, Quaker Missionary* (Indiana: Print Press, 1998), 52.

⁵⁹ Totah, *From Prairie to Palestine*, 156.



Figure 4: Totah's oldest child Nabil with Totah's mother Azizeh circa 1934

Totah saw parallels between the British regime and how the Friends administrative board treated him in his position. This also had implications for wider questions of Palestine self-rule. In order to tackle this issue, he drafted a paper entitled "Rethinking Mission: Which is Relevant to the Situation in Palestine, 1934." In the paper he argued first and foremost for independent native control of the mission, "The time comes when these centers must be left to develop according to the genius of the place."⁶⁰ Another cause of the difficulty he identified was "the natural reluctance of the missionaries to withdraw from the fields of labor to which they have devoted the best years of their lives. This reluctance is all too likely to result in the rationalizations that the Christian nationals are not yet ready for responsibility, although to a disinterested observer,

⁶⁰ Khalil Totah, handwritten notes dated 1934, Box 2, Folder 9, Totah Papers.

competent native leadership seems available.”⁶¹ One national put it more bluntly, “We [sit] in the council room, but there [are] too many missionaries looking in at the windows.”⁶² It appeared that “The missionaries seem prepared to correct but seldom to inspire. In reports and letters [they] often unduly blackened the picture of his environment.”⁶³

Now or Never

In 1935, Shaikh Izz al-Din al Qassam, a Muslim preacher, religious teacher and social reformer, led a Palestinian guerilla group in a revolt against the British forces. A well-known radical preacher and agitator, he founded the Black Hand movement in Palestine, an anti-Zionist and anti-British group.⁶⁴ He died fighting the British in Palestine on November 19, 1935; his martyrdom in part triggered the Great Revolt of 1936 to 1939.⁶⁵ The Arab Revolt of 1936-1939 was a spontaneous and popular reaction against Zionism, as well as British imperialism.⁶⁶ The Mufti, in an effort to unify the factions within the Palestinian elite, attempted to coordinate a general strike, but in October of 1936, after the deaths of 1,000 Arabs and 80 Jewish citizens, the Arab Higher Committee terminated the strike. H. I. Kahtibah wrote, “The time of reckoning is near, and the avengers of the wrongs of imperialism are first its victims at home.”⁶⁷ Having been “tutored long enough the natives were ready to rise up...for it is the nationalists of the East today, who are taking up the task of the thorough and wholesale democratization of their own

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, 132.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Katibah, *The New Spirit in Arab Land*, 125.

people.”⁶⁸ On June 25, 1936 Totah published a report for *The American Friend* on “The Present Crisis in the Holy Land”

The port of Jaffa is closed Jews are heavily guarded but still Arabs strike, Arab shops are closed up tight. Change from simple striking and demonstrating to guerilla warfare. Armed Arab bands are covering main roads chief activity is cutting telephone and telegraph lines, destroying bridges, attacking solders and generally irritating the Government, bloodshed is not on a large scale but is sufficient to make them nervous. Most significant aspects of the situation is the decision of the Arabs to pay no taxes as from May 15th until their demands are granted. A Moslem sheikh who knew no English, could repeat the popular formula, “no taxation without representation.”⁶⁹

The fact that these Arab “others” knew to ask for representation and refused to pay taxes challenged the colonial myth of the “uncivilized savage.” Using the American battle cry of “no taxation without representation” reframed the rebel activities. The Palestinian rebels emerged to pose an ideological challenge to the colonial powers and they used the language of American patriots to give legitimacy to their cause. These kinds of decrees posted on buildings and mosques made the British uneasy. Philosopher Homi K. Bhaba says it is often true that while “elites were granted sufficient pardon to ape the colonizer” when rebels did it, it posed a threat.⁷⁰ That this rebel activity had escalated and was not a single event as continuous disturbances had been building for years, did not lend credibility to British leadership skills.

It does not speak well for “Pax Britannia” as far as Palestine is concerned. The roots of the trouble lie deep in the soil of the World War and its attendant evils, Balfour, Versailles treaty and the so-called system of mandates. The British tried to be referee to Jews and Arabs but they are failing. The Arabs are sure that there are enough Jews in Palestine, too many and are determined to call a halt. Jewish leaders say they want a million more Jews to settle. The British are vague and intangible. They say that the “absorptive capacity” of the country will decide. The Arabs know they cannot face British troops but what they want. The Arab attitude seems to be “now or never.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Khalil Totah, “The Present Crisis in the Holy Land,” *The American Friend* 6: 25 (1936).

⁷⁰ Homi K Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993), 13.

⁷¹ Letter to Palestine Watching Committee from Khalil Totah, Friends House London, May 11, 1936, Box 1, Folder 3, Totah Papers.

It seemed that the British government would give in and meet the Arab demands or they would have to crush the Arabs.

In a letter to London's Palestine Watching Committee Totah wrote on May 11, 1936, "Palestine's disturbances began three weeks ago, complexities of the problem prevent me from writing sooner." He described the seemingly unbridgeable chasm separating Arabs and Jews:

It is so difficult to say something which is really worthwhile and which will lead somewhere. The fact is that Palestine is suffering from a strike for three full weeks. No end in sight. Bloodshed and violence at first has subsided. Arab transportation is at a dead stop. Jewish busses run in convoys with police escort. School life in Palestine is very seriously disturbed. Most government schools are closed and so are many Christian boarding schools. Ram-Allah we kept open for the first week but difficulties with food forced us to send pupils home.⁷²

He went on to report:

The road from Jerusalem to Galilee is practically deserted except for armored cars and some police traffic...The harbor at Jaffa is dead...while Haifa is open. Arab leaders seem to have come to the conclusion that it is of no use facing the authorities with violence. They are unarmed and helpless against the well-organized military force. They are resorting with what they have left, striking and civil disobedience. Last week an Arab conference representing all Palestine and presided over by the Grand Mufti solemnly decided to continue the strike and refuse to pay taxes until the Government meet their demands: stopping Jewish immigration, stopping sale of land, and the formation of a legislative council. The Government is given a week- May 15th...The fundamental reason for this outbreak is the ever-present resentment of the Arabs against the British policy of filling Palestine with Jews. In Mandatory Syria a promise of self-government from the French was made after a 50-day strike. In Egypt anti-British demonstrations in November 1935 brought about the resumption of negotiations between the two countries for a treaty of independence.⁷³

Totah hoped that based on what was happening in Syria and Egypt the rebel demands would be met, "no doubt the successful strike of about 40 days in Damascus against the French Government has influenced Palestine."⁷⁴

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

The arrests in Damascus of Fakhri al-Barudi and Sayf al-Din al-Ma'min (two National Bloc leaders) led to a general strike in Syria in January of 1936. French troops killed four protesters the next day and killed two people during a funeral procession the day after. The death toll steadily increased until the French government declared martial law in February of 1936. This led to a series of negotiations. Representatives of the French and Syrian governments signed a treaty that called for the end of the mandate within three years. Events such as these raised Palestinian consciousness. The Arabs had given up hope of negotiation with the British government. They saw Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and other Arab countries getting a semblance of political justice from the British and the French so they thought why not Palestine and by the same methods of strikes, non-cooperation, and civil disobedience. Why not Palestine? It was a question that any country might ask. Totah wrote,

Our recommendations were the same three demands now presented by the Arab conference to the British Government. To my mind the government has made a start on two of the three. The high commissioner Sir Arthur Wauchop has committed himself to the rest of a legislative counsel. Although it seems sickly with loopholes and qualifications. The third point- that of immigration is theoretically settled, the absorptive capacity of the country is left to the discretion of the high commissioner. I wonder if this could not be left either to a neutral committee or to a British-Arab-Jewish committee. An opportune time for the watching committee to do something. Both government and Jewish leaders in London should be approached. Jewish people should seek to be friends with Arabs and understand surrounding Arab countries.⁷⁵

It was not as if the people were asking for something foreign and radical. The problem was not just Jewish immigration it was the rights for the Arabs to retain their land and their economic security. No one seemed to understand the Arab side. In "The Palestine Triangle" Totah wrote that huge sums of money were being poured into Palestine by the United States and Europe and that "Zionism is becoming the handmaiden of civilization on the fringe of Asia. Marshes are

⁷⁵ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 31.

being drained and sand dunes being converted to citrus orchards. There is no doubt that the Arab side is the least known and understood in the West.”⁷⁶

Totalah knew that “the ordinary America has seen Jews, while an ‘A-rab’ is a curiosity. He is thought of as a nomad of the desert.”⁷⁷ Although anti-Semitism was widespread in the U.S. in the 1930s Totalah wanted the public to see the Arabs as equal to the Jews and that in the eyes of the Arabs the “sin” of Zionism was that it sought to detach Palestine from the surrounding Arab world. Arab nationalism was simply a national desire to be part and parcel of the Arab community. The United States supported partition but Totalah did not think that partition was a viable solution for the Arab-Jewish struggle. “It is a temporary and tragic escape from the difficulty it will not bring peace to the Holy Land. Designating divisions do not solve problems of the near east.” The Middle East had already been divided and subdivided to point of absurdity. The more “frontiers, custom barriers, currencies, and nationalisms, the more seeds for future friction and war.”⁷⁸ For his part he supported a bi-national state and believed that Zionism had within its ranks reasonable men. Totalah thought that the Zionists would be best off to go with the Arab movement and help direct it rather than go against it. In an Arab federation there would be room for Jews. He was friends with Judah Magnes who was at the time the most well-known Jewish supporter of a binational state in Palestine. Magnes was founder and president of the Hebrew University from 1925 until his death in 1948. Magnes died a few months after the establishment of the State of Israel, in 1948.

As far as Totalah was concerned the problems had been identified, it was time for solutions. The Zionists would have to acknowledge that the mandate had failed and that a Jewish

⁷⁶ Khalil Totalah, “The Palestine Triangle,” *Asia Magazine* 37:11 (1937), 759.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 760.

national home could only be built by excessive repression. It was imperative that they disavow the Balfour Declaration and “abandon the Chimera of a sovereign Jewish island state in the midst of an Arab sea and exchange European support for Arab friendship.”⁷⁹ In terms of Arab Jewish cooperation the citrus industry offered a great example of what friendly relations could look like. If Jews and Arabs worked together there would be no boycotts, mutual economic politics would better serve both. “But,” he wrote, “As long as the Arab-Jewish question is unsettled the Near East will be exposed to disturbance and bloodshed.”⁸⁰

Total straddled the middle-line of a hard situation, he was one of the few who expressed interest in a bi-national state and sought a moderate solution between Arabs and Jews. Although it was an unpopular view he remained committed to compromise. Total wrote to British colonial administrator Harold MacMichael that the “turn of events in Syria and Iraq give British a golden opportunity to balance its accounts with the Arab world.” He reminded the administration that the border between Syria and Palestine was artificial. The British could now “redeem the wrongs of the Versailles Treaty” and set straight the making of a frontier that was an eternal source of anger and bitterness.⁸¹ He also wrote to the Mufti of Jerusalem stating that he trusted “that the Higher Arab Committee and the Grand Mufti will help to bring the present strike to an end.”⁸²

Total was worried that the strikes were becoming too violent and would lead Palestinians down the wrong path. He wanted less violence and more reliance on thought and reason. He believed in protests that were not violent and confrontational. On May 26, 1936, he received a reply from the Central Committee in London that the Arab leaders “seem to have been badly advised” and that the “Jews are certainly bringing prosperity. Better for you to remain there and

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 33.

⁸¹ Ibid, 34.

⁸² Ibid.

talk some sense into them.”⁸³ He wrote to British Commissioner Arthur Wauchope, “the Arabs are bewildered, disillusioned, and apprehensive about their situation. It is my humble opinion that the Near East will not enjoy the fruits of a peaceful life until something radical happens to the present policy of Britain and France as regards to the Arabs.”⁸⁴

Total knew the truth, which the British were avoiding, that they would have to deal with the roots of the disturbances in order to find solutions. The unrest in Palestine was affecting everyone across the spectrum. Everything seemed to be coming to a head in 1936, all of Palestine was rising up in protest against British repression and Jewish immigration. The British and Americans insinuated that it was only the wealthy land-owning classes agitated for revolution.⁸⁵ Total knew it to be more than that. He also knew that the Arabs were not simply acting out of a “natural” aggression, but that the social and political situation had become untenable.

The War, the Versailles Treaty, and the Mandates for Syria and Palestine have within them the germs of this fresh manifestation of bloodshed...It is not just the effendi class agitating it is an inner consciousness of the whole population that is resentful...It seems futile to accuse the effendis, Italy, Germany, and Russian and what not of agitating and stirring the Arabs of Palestine against Britain. It is uncharitable and untrue to call the Arabs “lawless” criminal” savage etc. When the Jews revolted against Roman imperialism they called themselves patriots. But when the Arabs do it against Zionism it is a crime. Europe believes the Arab to be the aggressor but the Arab is fighting aggression. Which is sanctioned by the mandate. The Arabs are driven to this as their arguments protest to London and Geneva and numerous delegations to London are fruitless.⁸⁶

In June he received a very short note back from Commissioner Wauchope, “I read your letter with interest. These are sad days for lovers of peace. I trust the day is not far when peace

⁸³ Ibid, 35.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 36.

⁸⁵ Khalil Total Notes Dated June 2, 1936, “Britain’s Last Account with the Arabs,” Box 1, Folder 3, Total Papers.

⁸⁶ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 36.

will prevail. I thank the Quakers for their part.”⁸⁷ Totah wrote to Friends in America ten weeks into the conflict: “on account of censorship I have not been able to tell you about the situation. The truth of the matter is we are in a state of war.”⁸⁸ By the end of 1936 a relative calm had settled across Palestine after the Arab High Committee had suspended the general strike. On November 28, 1936 Totah wrote in his diary that “if the Arab is given a fair deal he will be peaceful.”⁸⁹ Lord Peel arrived in town to investigate. He seemed baffled “I did not realize how deep-seated was the Arab fear of Jewish over lordship and domination.”⁹⁰

A State of War

Once again the British sent a commission and issued a report. Lord Peel wrote a 418-page account that recognized the premise of the mandate as untenable. He recommended that the mandate be terminated and that Palestine become separate Arab and Jewish states. Stating “half a loaf is better than no bread,” Peel recommended partition. Such a settlement would affect hundreds of Arab villages. Some 225,000 Arabs were within the new proposed boundaries of the Jewish state and some 1200 Jews resided inside the Arab partition line.⁹¹ The Arab Higher Committee opposed partition as a violation of the rights of the Arab inhabitants of Palestine. Zionist leadership accepted it, even though they were not happy with it. The transfer clause provided a major reason for support as it would remove the Arab population from key areas.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 40.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ “Reports of the Palestine Royal Commission presented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the United Kingdom Parliament by Command of His Britannic Majesty,” (Series of League of Nations Publications, July 1937), 389.

Conversely Arabs did not support it for exactly that reason, they did not agree with the transfer plan and pushed to keep fighting for a fully independent country.⁹²

Total testified at the Peel Commission in 1937 about Arab education in Palestine. Woodrow Wilson's friend and prominent American Zionist Dr. Stephen Wise had complained to influential American Quaker Rufus Jones about having Total testify at the hearings. Dr. Wise sought to use his influence to persuade Jones to call Total off, seeming to think that the Quaker establishment was able to dictate Total's actions; Jones however refused.⁹³ Total understood that control of Palestinian education was an important vehicle for self-rule. He informed the commission that the Arabs in Palestine felt they should have the same control over education that the Iraqis and Trans-Jordanians did. Total explained that Palestinian national sentiment was being suppressed and that education was colorless and a form of British indoctrination on the students. Again, he argued for the need to have cultural activities in their education such as, music, crafts and dance, as well as technological and agricultural studies.⁹⁴

Total also believed that land and agricultural reform would raise the standards of the fellaheen. British committee members criticized him for suggesting that they invest in agricultural schools for the rural Arabs, who made up two-thirds of the population.⁹⁵ He wanted Arab tax money, which was being spent on the British military and "security," to go towards these schools. This he claimed would add to the Arab national culture in the broadest sense. The committee asked rather mockingly, if this line of thinking was an indication that the Arabs would

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ "Hearings Before The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry Washington, D.C. on Friday January 11, 1946" (Washington: Government Publishing Office),128. In this hearing Total spoke of his appearance before the Royal Peel Commission and his distrust of Zionist tactics in Palestine, he evidenced Wise's "strong protest" sent to Jones because "a Quaker like me" should appear before the Royal Commission.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid,129.

like to be free to rule themselves. One incredulously said to Totah “What really is at the back of your mind is you want an Arab government.” Totah’s answer was an emphatic, “Yes!”⁹⁶ British leaders did not see that the Arabs had anyone who was “fit” to lead.

In his testimony before the Peel commission, future first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion stated that even moderate Arab leaders like Auni Bey Abdul Hadi (leader of the Independence or *Istiqlal* party, a left of center Arab party) were unfit to lead, that they had feelings of intolerance inherent in their upbringing, and they lacked ambition. “I admit that there is opposition among the Arabs to Zionism...it is due to many causes. It is a national feeling. It is a belief of their leaders that this is an Arab country, and should not be changes. It is dislike of foreigners. It is intolerance, which is inherent perhaps in them...it is different levels of culture.”⁹⁷ Gurion believed that the Jews were “undoubtedly a higher civilization than the Arabs.”⁹⁸ Gurion further criticized Arab leadership stating, “they do not care to improve the conditions of their people.”⁹⁹ It is interesting that back in February of 1931, Judah Magnes and Auni Bey Abdul-Hadi had both endorsed the Passfield White Paper and shared common thoughts on a binational state. Ben Gurion met with Auni Abdul Hadi in Dr. Judah Magnes’ house in July of 1934 for talks of cooperation, stating that, “I thought that I could come to terms with him it would be worthwhile to get a man who was not biased...who really cared about the future of the Arabs.”¹⁰⁰ The meeting with Abdul-Hadi ended without solution. Ben-Gurion had ended it with the statement “We are here; we will come whether you like it or not.”¹⁰¹

Of the popular Mufti, Haj Amin Husayni, Ben-Gurion said,

⁹⁶ Ibid, 131.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

He is not constructive but purely political and wants power. Only a minority of Arabs oppose and the rest are uneducated and unorganized. Jews bring Palestine European culture and maintain standards, we can raise the standards of the fellaheen. Zionism is not an experiment but a historical necessity, but we do have to take the 800,000 Arabs into account. What causes the strife? Maybe it is Jewish emigration, but we are here and we are coming.... if there were no Jews in Palestine the Christian Arabs would have been massacred on many occasions. We are creating a higher civilization.¹⁰²

According to this testimony Ben-Gurion and other Zionists believed they were creating a higher civilization for the inhabitants of Palestine. They used a clash of civilizations thesis to explain the rebellions, an outgrowth of a clash of two cultures; one uncivilized born in the desert aggressive and treacherous, the other that of farmers and peaceful citizens. They ignored that increased immigration created civil unrest and revolutionary solidarity among Palestinian Arabs. They also ignored the previous commissions; the Haycraft of 1921, and the Shaw and Hope-Simpson of 1930. All of the reports included the causes of Arab rebellion to be immigration and land sales.

In 1937 an Arab rebel gunned down a British officer, thousands were jailed and British troops occupied cities and stepped up executions claiming that “terrorism called for extreme measures.”¹⁰³ Eva recounted in letter home that they were learning self-reliance as Ramallah was shut down with no one coming or going. People in America with connections to Ramallah sent money to help, but it either wasn’t enough or it didn’t always get through. One of the villagers told her “if it gets any worse we will have to eat each other.”¹⁰⁴ Overall conditions deteriorated with real poverty and suffering all around. An Arab National League delegation led by Ameen Rihani petitioned Secretary of State Cordell Hull, requesting that the United States not discriminate between one group of its citizens and another in reference to Palestine and that it

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ Khalil Totah, handwritten notes dated 1937, Box 2, Folder 9, Totah Papers.

¹⁰⁴ Totah, *From Prairie to Palestine*, 122.

will turn a sympathetic ear to the voice of the Arabs of Palestine.¹⁰⁵ There is no record of Hull's response to Rihani, but he did confer on the Palestine situation with a committee comprised of prominent Zionists including Dr. Stephen Wise, Rabbi Jacob Sonderling, Laurence Berenson, and Herman Koppleman.¹⁰⁶

In 1937 Totah published his article "Quakerism in Palestine."¹⁰⁷ While his focus was on the educational outreach of Quakers, that article also addressed the larger theme of native control. It had been seventy years since Eli and Sybil Jones had planted the seeds of Quakerism. Totah was happy with the contribution the Quakers had made to educational work, mentioning the education of girls in particular. But it did seem to him that seventy years later, "Quakerism is a comparative failure."¹⁰⁸ He counted only 150 members in regular attendance. What is "Quakerism without Quakers?" he asked.¹⁰⁹ There had been no new converts, but it was his opinion that the "new intelligentsia" would benefit greatly from such a community if it were allowed to thrive. Totah argued that it was impossible to transplant an idea if it did not become part of the culture. He no longer championed the merits of outside leadership, but instead called for indigenous leadership within the church, schools, and country. He said, "Unless Quakerism becomes indigenous and takes root in the soil, its future existence is precarious."¹¹⁰

While trying to keep the "peace" in Palestine, British authorities lost control of the country, they sent a total of 30,000 troops to crush the rebellion. The British blew up the houses of those they suspected of harboring rebels and imposed fines on villages suspected of

¹⁰⁵ "Hull Hears Arab Plea; Delegates Present Their Side in Issue With Jews in Palestine," *New York Times*, February 2, 1937, 12.

¹⁰⁶ "Hull Completing Palestine Study," *New York Times*, May 23, 1939, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Khalil Totah, "Quakerism in Palestine," *Bulletin of Friends' Historical Association* 26: 2 (1937):79-86.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

supporting the rebellion. The level of death and destruction of the peasants compelled those who had defended the British to now decry the “cruelty of the English.”¹¹¹ The Arabs were ready but without organization and leadership and no monetary support they fell apart. When the final crisis came the Palestine Arabs were without leaders; due to years of colonial rule by Britain their leaders had been exiled, imprisoned or murdered.¹¹² Hatred of the British by the average Palestinian was escalating. In later years, looking back at this time, Totah saw a missed opportunity for action. He asked Aouni Bey Adbul Hadi why the Arabs did not prepare like he had seen the Jews prepare; the latter had about 30,000 men and women that had received up to date military training. Hadi asked Totah if he was crazy, he stated that it was impossible to get Arab volunteers to train when “anyone advocating for the Arab cause would be assassinated.”¹¹³

Liberty Caps and the Keffiyeh

Despite the odds against them the Arabs continued to protest. Totah observed the transformation in and around Ramallah. He witnessed a rising tide of activism across religious and socio-economic lines. Status and class lines between the urban and rural population, between peasants and the middle class blurred at this time.¹¹⁴ Totah often heard from British officials that the villagers, unless encouraged by elites, did not have it in their own heads to rebel. Yet Totah recounted how in and around August of 1938, at the height of the Arab uprising, in about one week’s time, the whole Arab population changed its headwear from *tabarka* (more commonly known as the Fez) and other hats, to *igals* (a hat that marked its wearer as rural and typically

¹¹¹ Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, 112.

¹¹² Khalil Totah, *Dynamite in the Middle East* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), 202.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: the 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Fayetteville, Ark: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 32.

judged by the upper class as backward). He saw the change and likened it to the liberty caps of the French and American Revolutions.¹¹⁵ The transformation seemed like magic to him,

The ighal [Keffiyeh] of the Arab today is surely a liberty cap, but conceived in an original and native fashion. By making court judges, big government officials, important merchants and the entire professional class and in fact everybody, wear an ighal the rebels have made a grand sweep in the direction of democracy.¹¹⁶

Through his work in education Totah had contact with many different families from local business owners, tradesmen, school children, parents and laborers; not simply those in his circle of Christian Arab intellectuals. Totah differed from many in his inner circle of academic peers in that he had come from a poor rural family. Many who worked in Palestinian education were members of Palestine's landed elite, but he was the son of a wool merchant, his father owned only a small amount of land and was not part of the Palestinian gentry. At times he felt snubbed by the progressive elite, the landowning or commercial class; and at times did not feel that he belonged in their world. American Quaker missionary Nancy Parker wrote of the two classes in Ramallah,

There are two classes of people in Ramallah; the educated business class, who speak English and send their children to the Friends Schools and live in large, stone houses with bathrooms and brightly upholstered furniture. Then there are the "falaheen" who live in old, old stone houses and wrest a living from the unyielding land...the peasants walk miles to their strips of stony land in the valleys.¹¹⁷

Ramallah had recently become the center of political troubles and if there was one thing that could unify a people, no matter their background, it was reaction against violence and

¹¹⁵ Axelrod Alan, *The Real History of the American Revolution: A New Look at the Past* (New York City: Sterling, 2009). The liberty cap was used during the French Revolution as a symbolic for those who wanted to be citizens and not merely subjects. It was also an emblem of liberty used by the Sons of Liberty during the American Revolution; many who fought for the Patriot cause wore red knitted stockings sometimes with the motto "Liberty" or "Liberty or Death" on the band.

¹¹⁶ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 33.

¹¹⁷ Nancy Parker McDowell, *Notes From Ramallah, 1939* (Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 2002), 11.

oppression. As the British continued their policy to rid Palestine of its rebels they uprooted Orange groves and vineyards, destroyed Churches and Mosques, and used Arabs as human shields by driving them ahead on inspection vehicles to root out explosives.¹¹⁸

On her trip to the Middle East in 1938 Nancy Parker noted that she felt a sense of unease in the air. On board a ship headed to Palestine where she was to serve as a teacher in the Quaker school she met a young Jewish man who told her “there is something awful going on in Germany.”¹¹⁹ On arrival in Haifa the passport officials told her to go back to America; nobody could enter Ramallah at that time. She was able to find a man who had connections with the Friends School and he helped her through customs. She went by Arab transport. “We were asked to take off our hats and put on Arab headdress. It is safer to be an Arab here, even though the British are on the side of the Jews.”¹²⁰ On the way to Ramallah she noticed entire towns that had been bombed by the British. “In one village a hundred and seventy houses had been bombed.”¹²¹ Once she arrived in Ramallah she noted how the British looked upon the indigenous people as wayward children deserving no respect for lifestyle and culture. She spent her first night in Ramallah listening to the crack of gunfire. “In the past week Ramallah has become a rebel town, having thrown over British rule.”¹²² Post offices and all telephone communication were shut down, as was all transportation. The British stopped anyone they wished to search at random and if they found any weapons the offender could be put to death. The violence that Nancy had witnessed escalated to a boiling point. The British colonial powers required permits for traveling; they saw villages as hotbeds of revolutionary activity. Totah called it all out guerilla warfare.

¹¹⁸ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 233.

¹¹⁹ McDowell, *Notes From Ramallah, 1939*, 6.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

¹²¹ *Ibid*.

¹²² *Ibid*, 8.

British military actions included searches of homes, confiscation of arms and even murder. Totah wrote in November 1938 that, “too many Arabs are being assassinated for no reason.”¹²³

By 1939 things had come to a crisis at the Quaker schools. Internally they faced financial problems as Totah tried his best to meet budget cutbacks. He also attempted to focus his students on getting their education while quelling the need for violent resistance within their ranks. “The boys caught up in growing nationalism, were eager to demonstrate in the streets. The staff had their hands full convincing the boys the best way to serve their country was to concentrate on education.”¹²⁴ Totah had a reputation for his strict control and this often rankled the Americans who worked under him, they felt him too harsh and uncompromising at times. Quaker administrator Edward Kelsey wrote to the leadership back in America alluding to Totah’s strong personality. “Things have come to a crisis here. And I suppose that I will get the blame or credit. They [British officials] are trying to tie Totah’s hands. Friends want him to stand pat and do nothing, might as well try to chain a volcano.”¹²⁵

British Archaeologist Nelson Glueck’s diaries document his travels throughout the Middle East during this time. He was on a search for ancient settlement sites in 1939 and he happened to be staying near Ramallah.¹²⁶ As an outside observer he hoped for some sort of settlement.

¹²³ Khalil Totah Letter to Merle Davis, October 12, 1940, Box 1, Folder 4, Totah Papers.

¹²⁴ Hilden, *A Passion for Education*, 170.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Nelson Glueck, *Dateline: Jerusalem: A Diary* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1968).

For some reason or other there has been a sudden flare up of the troubles during the last few weeks. One would like to venture the hope, however illusory all hopes for improvement have been in the last two and half years, that this is the last flare up before a long period of peace. The London conference is to be held within a few days. Representatives of the Arabs, Jews, and the British Government are to participate. Peace might come to Palestine as a result of its deliberations. May it come speedily!¹²⁷

Peace did not come speedily as Glueck had wished. The schools were on lock down, gasoline was rationed, and Totah was unable to secure a visa to Beirut to get books for his students. The situation drew closer to chaos and all British subjects were advised to leave. American diplomats seemed woefully ignorant of the situation at hand, thinking that the Arabs had not yet made up their minds as to what they were facing. Christian T. Steger, of the American Consulate in Jerusalem, wrote to the American Secretary of State that in regards to this situation, “Arab feeling has not yet crystallized.”¹²⁸

The Hate of Those You Guard

Unfortunately, Arab feelings had crystallized and young Arabs were beginning to unify against both British and their Jewish neighbors by turning towards the fascist Nazi regime in Germany as an ally to their cause. Ramallah resistance youths were distributing leaflets to Arab neighborhoods encouraging their neighbors to, “fight the British, love Hitler, join his forces etc.”¹²⁹ In an attempt to forge an alliance against Britain and to side with what he considered would be the winning side, the Grand Mufti met with Adolph Hitler in 1941. He wanted a “kind of German Balfour declaration for the Arabs.”¹³⁰

In April 1941 Rashed Ali Gailani, succeeded Nuri al Said as prime minister of Iraq and led a successful coup against the British. British forces which eventually deposed him and he

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers*. Letter Dated September 4, 1939.

¹²⁹ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 141.

¹³⁰ Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem: Al-Hajj Amin Al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

fled to Nazi Germany, where he remained in exile in Saudi Arabia until 1958. The British reinstated Nuri al Said as prime minister as he favored the British during the global conflict.¹³¹

While Nuri al Said was waiting on his return to Iraq he sought refuge in Ramallah.

Nuri Said ex-premier of Iraq is arriving in Ram Allah and Americans [and British] are clearing out of Syria. It is difficult to get a visa to Egypt at present, 50 or 60 Americans are leaving Beirut for Palestine. Ram Allah is getting filled with refugees from Beirut, Haifa and Jaffa. Rumor has it that Rashid Ali Kilani and Mufti escaped. I am told that the British are warning villagers in Palestine that if a shot comes from a village it would be demolished.¹³²

Total continued to offer help in the form of shelter to those in danger during this time whether they were American, British, Jewish, or Arab. The counsel at Jerusalem wrote to the Secretary of State in America Total was one of three representatives that American Consul General might consult informally for any emergency that may arise when evacuating American Jews from Tel Aviv and Haifa. The other two contacts were Dr. Judah Magnes and A. L. Miller (General Secretariat YMCA Jerusalem).¹³³ Unfortunately Total's work as a neutral figure garnered him suspicion all around.

The Ramallah Friends school itself had become suspect to prominent Americans and Zionists such as Dr. Stephen Wise and Moshe Sharrett (the second Prime Minister of Israel, 1954–55). Zionists painted Friends officials in America as suspect in helping Palestinians build their expected state. Total was a major leader in the community and seen by Sharrett as a danger, as he was connected to Quakers around the world.¹³⁴ Broader colonial struggles greater impacted the Quaker mission in Ramallah, attendance had been in decline for months. The Quakers had originally been around 170 members strong in Ramallah, but under the current

¹³¹ Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1947-1951* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 179.

¹³² Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 179.

¹³³ *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers*. Letter from The Consul General at Jerusalem(Wadsworth) to the Secretary of State, June 9, 1938.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

political circumstances, and rumors of its ties to Arab nationalism, the meeting lost 120 members practically overnight.

American Quaker women also criticized Totah’s leadership style and said that he was becoming a dictator. They were struggling over seemingly simple matters such as the graduation programs. American Quakers did not want bilingual program sheets as they thought Arabic looked “ugly” next to English.¹³⁵ Back home at Quaker headquarters in Richmond officials were worried about the rise of Arab Nationalism. Totah was known as the “hometown chief Quaker” and his increased popularity made them nervous. They were afraid he and his supporters would want to cash in on this popularity to support the nationalist cause. They stopped the process of devolution in its tracks, and began to look for ways to dismiss him.

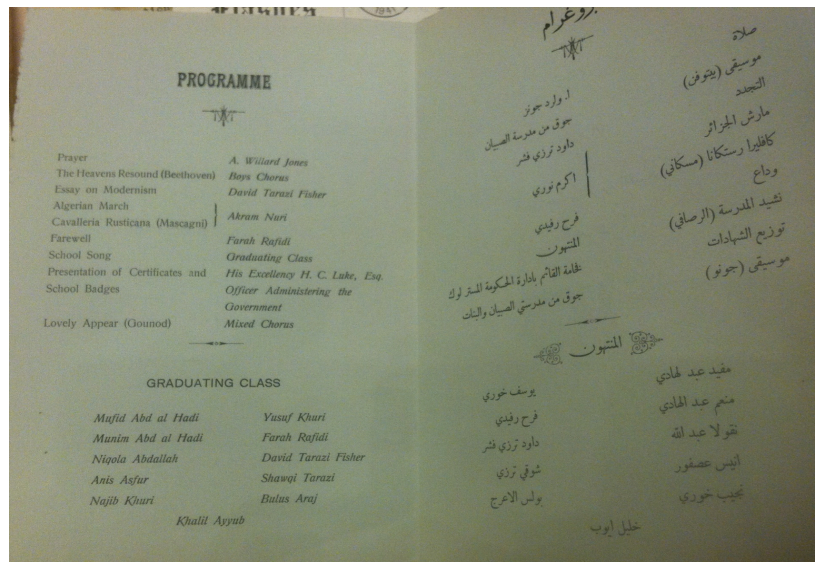


Figure 5: Bilingual Graduation Program, FBS circa 1939

These events eventually contributed to Totah’s declining health, his blood pressure was high and he spent days in bed. Things were falling apart at the school; the Quaker administration was trying to control him and keep his power in check. They felt he was taking on too much, and

¹³⁵ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 320.

did not feel comfortable having a native with that much control. He was upset that the American staff was constantly rebuking him. He wrote to the Friends committee stating that, “missionaries are faithful, fine and devoted but they are foreign to the life, aspirations, and heart-burnings of the country.”¹³⁶ Friends in America did not support him and accused him of being too emotional, their treatment of the situation led him to resign in 1941. A letter from the Friend’s Committee in response to his resignation accused him of being too emotional, unstable, and nervous.¹³⁷ His wife Eva wrote to the committee in defense of her husband: “the problem is missionaries are not acting Christ like and are driving potential converts away. This is one reason Totah resigned... their examples so contradict the Christ whom they preached about that their presence was a stumbling block.”¹³⁸ Their inability to see Arabs as equal had caused bitter feelings, “Better than thou attitudes are injurious. Arabs are humiliated at being under American missionaries and want to be their own missionaries.”¹³⁹

Joy Totah wrote that upon her father’s death her mother disclosed that racism had led to his difficulties and eventual their move to America. Eva wrote in her letters home that “American staff came with built-in, unconscious racism; ignorance of local customs and history; unwillingness to work under a “native” man; and feelings that anything different from home is inferior.”¹⁴⁰ Totah wrote, “I have some trouble with Americans who, consciously or unconsciously, feel that they are here to be obeyed, to rule, to run things and generally bully me around and maintain a sort of missionary imperialism.” Attacking him for his support of Arab nationalism, Merle Davis bullied and chastised Totah reminding him, “Very much of your life,

¹³⁶ Khalil Totah Letter to Merle Davis, October 12, 1940, Box 1, Folder 4, Totah Papers.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 176.

except your place of birth, is American- your wife, your education, the salary which has supported you, and the buildings which have housed the institutions you have directed.”¹⁴¹ Davis challenged Totah's sovereignty over his own life, his efforts to gain independence for himself and his school led to charges that he was ungrateful to those who had “helped” create him.

A flurry of letters and telegrams from prominent Muslims and Christians defending Totah and asking that he remain at the schools flooded the Quaker offices. A telegram from Auni Abdul Hadi, at that time a member of the Supreme Moslem Council, expressed his discouragement over the Board’s action towards Totah; his own three sons had gone to FBS. He wrote that Totah “guided the school during some of the most difficult periods in the history of Palestine. Unfair to remove him now.”¹⁴² J.G Cadora then Mayor of Ramallah wrote that the Secretary of the Arab Cultural Society Qassim Abdid-Hadi was displeased to hear that Totah was leaving his post. Both Muslims and Christians agreed that Totah was a valuable resource for Palestine and their children’s educational future. They declared that conditions being what they were, the country needed someone like him to stay. This strong show of community support was not enough, the Quaker Missionary Board refused to make amends with Totah and accepted his resignation. He left feeling as though his tenure had been a failure. He had cast his lot with the American Quakers in order to make a better world for his students but in the end, just as they had done to Jacob Hishmeh some 70 years prior, they used their influence to force him out.

Totah’s friend and fellow educator H.I.Katibah wrote in his book *The New Spirit in Arab Lands*, published in 1940, that “We have cast our lot with democracy, in spite of all its shortcomings.” Katibah saw the double standard inherent in the democracy of the West. The

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Khalil Totah Letter to Merle Davis, October 12, 1940, Box 1, Folder 4, Totah Papers.

same qualities that made a white man a patriot made an Arab a terrorist. The calls for democracy in the East would never receive full justice, “It would be alright for Patrick Henry to say, ‘give me liberty or give me death,’ but when the same impassioned cry escapes the lips of a Koomar Lal or an Ahmad Mustafa it becomes automatically a heresy.”¹⁴³ The United States had missed an opportunity to work with the Arabs in part because of racism. Arab nationalism on the inside had never been modeled fully after Wilsonian idealism, but rather had been concerned with the ideas of rational men and women who believe in the soundness of human nature to discover a rational form of democracy

We are forced to the paradoxical conclusion that it was not the Arabs who were learning the lessons of democracy from the French and British but that they are relearning it from the East as to what it really was about...Democracy had long ago crossed the Mediterranean and has been sweeping the East like wildfire independently of Western influence. The allied powers betrayed democracy itself, even the United States did not appreciate the aptitude that Syrians had for democracy...The materialism of the West got in the way of the true practice of democracy. Laissez faire is too extreme causes too much upset in other countries. There is and was a middle way the extreme polar opposites were not working, things were disorganized. A plea to stop before it is too late...Midway between the extreme of laissez faire which has characterized our disorganized democracies, and total control, lies the middle path of guided and self-disciplined democracy, socialism or whatever name it may go by, which would prepare the way to a world community of free nations. Let all men and women who believe in the soundness of human nature and the workability of universal peace. Reason has not abdicated and the heart of man has not turned to stone.¹⁴⁴

Merle Davis wrote to Alice Jones and admitted that devolution was a failure and that a lesson had been learned in appointing Khalil Totah to too many official responsibilities “which gave him almost exclusive control over the affairs if he were a mind to use potential power which he had in his hands.”¹⁴⁵ Most painful for Totah was that the Quakers did not seem to understand the Palestinian war for independence and what it was all about. With this terrible

¹⁴³ Katibah, *The New Spirit in Arab Lands*, 32.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 294.

¹⁴⁵ Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 42.

experience behind him he once again returned to America, this time permanently. Totah's heart was weak, but had not turned to stone and he looked forward to making changes in America by advocating for social justice for Palestine and the Arab world. In December of 1944 the Totah family left Ramallah for good to begin a new life in America.

CHAPTER SIX: “IN RESTLESS AND DREAMLESS AMERICA”

*Take up the White Man's burden, Ye dare not stoop to less
Nor call too loud on Freedom, To cloak your weariness-* Rudyard Kipling

Human considerations, the abiding values of friendship, brotherhood and genuine statesmanship, should guide the relationship between the strong United States and the weaker Middle East. – Khalil Totah, 1954

This chapter will provide some background information on how the Palestinian issue came before the United Nations and the positions of the British, the Zionists, and the Arabs. It will also focus on the struggles Totah experience in his efforts to inform Americans about the Arab cause. It was his intention to change American minds about the conflict in his homeland. When the Second World War ended in 1945 the United States positioned itself to become the leading military, economic and political power in the world and U.S. policymakers used the opportunity to create an American order. As a result of President Roosevelt’s death Harry Truman ascended to the presidency in 1945, the Zionists were on the verge of triumph. In the years leading up to the founding of the State of Israel, the Arab Americans, despite overwhelming odds, kept alive the debate over Palestine. Totah under the Institute of Arab American Affairs, continued to issue public statements and to petition the State Department, the President, and Congress to listen to the Arab side. He participated in several third party sponsored debates with American Zionist leaders. His message was consistent: he advocated self-determination, majority rule, and representative government in Palestine.

At the base of America’s ‘special relationship’ with Israel lies a neglected part of the history. This story often remains hidden beneath the highly mythologized account of the

miraculous ‘birth of Israel.’ As historian Naseer Aruri writes, “The fact that Israel was born in the sin of dispossession of another people has never been seriously acknowledged in public discussion.”¹ Kathleen Christison also points out, “For many Americans, including the reasonably well informed, Palestinians never had a history.” In her book *Perceptions of Palestine*, Christison recounts a story in which a U.S. senator asked a Saudi official “where on earth [had the] Palestinians come from to begin with?”² Since the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948 the Palestinian people have long become politically invisible in the United States. This erasure was enabled in part by the political, as well as cultural marginalization of those most qualified to tell their story.

With the decline of the British and French colonial empires in the Middle East, the United States emerged as the supreme commercial and financial power in the world. From the 1920s on, as a rising power the U.S. faced many problems, including what to do with colonized territories such as Palestine. After the war the United States led an international development plan that had been shaped by corporate capital. Thirty years after Wilson’s attempts, America was finally able to embed its liberal policies in the solutions offered to help Europe rebuild. With advice from corporate and state elites the United States made Europe the beneficiary of the Marshall Plan while state and private sector elites gave Israel its own aid. Arab countries received no such deal, they were merely to be importers of goods from Europe and sellers of oil.³

¹Naseer Aruri, *Dishonest Broker: The U.S. Role in Israel and Palestine* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 2003),11.

² Kathleen Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 2.

³ Inequality defined this new world order. For an in-depth analysis of this see Nathan Godfried, *Bridging the Gap between the Rich and Poor: American Economic Development toward the Arab East, 1942-1949* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

Despite the “success” of these economic programs questions still remained. The United States had inherited the “problem of Palestine” from the British.

During the 1940s Zionism and Palestine became an issue of public debate in the United States. Judah Magnes wrote at the time, “I am astonished at the lack of information about the great Palestinian resistance of 1936- 1939.” There simply was Arab viewpoint circulating in the United States.⁴ In 1944 when Eva and Totah returned home to America with their three children, home was a different place. There were tractors, combines, corn pickers, electric lights, appliances, and indoor bathrooms. Eva wrote in her journal that descriptions from letters had not fully prepared her for the changes until she experienced them herself.⁵ She had spent so much time in Ramallah that America felt as though it was a foreign country to her. The children were equally culture-shocked and it took them a little while to adjust. Their youngest daughter Joy had good memories of her birthplace, even with the difficult situation, and struggled to find where she fit in this new country.

My early life was spent in the idyllic setting of the Friends Schools of Ramallah, Palestine; climbing a giant fig tree, visiting the cooks, gardeners, and my father in his office as Principal. I was aware of the violence during the Arab Revolt against the British in the late 1930s, and impacted by blackouts and bombings during the early 1940s.⁶

One particular fond memory she had was of visiting Judah Magnes at his home in Jerusalem.⁷ Magnes had founded the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and he and Khalil Totah were friends for many years. He thought Zionism to be contrary to American principles, and an exploitation of a very real tragedy. “My father discussed with Magnes the possibility of a binational state. Both men stood in the middle of a nationalist trend, holding a minority view

⁴ Judah Magnes, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, volume 5 (1976), 6.

⁵ Totah, *Prairie to Palestine*, 220.

⁶ “Palestinians and Israelis can live in peace.” *The Free Library*. Retrieved Apr 21, 2016 from <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Palestinians+and+Israelis+can+live+in+peace.-a0149500573>

⁷ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 180.

among their people.⁸ The British had tried to persuade Magnes to leave Palestine during the revolts, but he refused and stayed behind hoping for the best. Magnes often said it was hard to be a Jew in Zionist Palestine, but he did his best to fight for the rights of all who lived in the country.

From his meetings with Magnes and experiences in America it was clear to Totah that the Arabs needed a way to disseminate information in order to influence grass roots public opinion. If the United States wanted to help rebuild this part of the world it was important that it be informed about the Arab struggles in Palestine. Totah wrote that in the American media the “Zionist drumbeaters were non-stop.”⁹ All the American public heard about was of the murderous ferocity of Arabs, the ignorance of the rebels, and other misinformation about Palestine. Totah had moved to the United States to escape the problems of violence and turmoil in Palestine and so that his children would have a better chance at education. But he also wanted to work to change American minds about the struggles in his homeland. He became a United States citizen in 1946 and remained active in politics for the rest of his life.¹⁰

In an effort to influence public opinion in the United States, the Arab States worked to establish an Arab Office in Washington D.C. It was staffed by leading young Arab intellectuals, many of whom Totah had worked with. Their aim was to limit American support for a Jewish state in Palestine. Along with his close friends Dr. Fuad Shatara and Habib Katibah, Totah helped to establish the Arab National League in 1938.¹¹ The Arab National League was in

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Papers marked “Official Documents,” January 24, 1949, Box 2, Folder 11, Totah Papers.

¹¹ Hani Bawardi, *The Making of Arab Americans From Syrian Nationalism to U.S. Citizenship* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 175.

regular contact with the State Department and documented meetings took place in October of 1938, January of 1939, and April of 1941.¹²

Total then became director of the Institute of Arab American Affairs (IAAA) in 1944. This was an organization that represented one of the only voices in America on behalf of Palestinians. In an attempt to document Arab progress in Palestine, the IAAA provided literature on economic and cultural developments in the country. It highlighted exports such as the orange industry and discussed how over years Arabs had introduced many things to Europe. In general, the IAAA sought to remind its members of long-standing Arab contributions to civilization.¹³ Leading pro-Zionists denounced the IAAA as a “propaganda machine whose only mission was to make Arabs look good to United States people at any cost.”¹⁴ The statement implied that men like Total and others trying to tell their truth about the issues were only trying to deceive the American public.¹⁵ But no matter how strong an advocate for the Arab cause, Total was always cognizant that he needed to be seen as a good and loyal American citizen. In his letters to officials such as President Harry Truman or Secretary of State George Marshall, Total emphasized that he and other members critiqued U.S. positions on Palestine as American citizens.¹⁶ First and foremost they were Americans before they were Arabs.

The pro-Arab advocates were vocal at all of the forums where the political future of Palestine was discussed. Rabbi Elmer Berger of the Council for Judaism recalled in his memoirs that in 1946, “We testified at ‘hearings’ held by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs...It was a stormy session. Emanuel Celler, congressman from New York said, ‘They ought to take

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Moha Ennaji, *New Horizons of Muslim Diaspora in Europe and North America* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

¹⁴ Mizra Khan, *Arab Propaganda in the United States* (New York: Shulsinger Brothers, 1948), 10.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

you bastards outside and shoot you.’”¹⁷ Media outlets shut out Arab-Americans such as Totah, Philip Hitti, George Antonius, and H. I. Katibah from any kind of rational discourse. Despite their high level of education and expertise they were discredited in the American media which gave more time to the Zionist cause.¹⁸ As public figures these men promoted pro-Arab and pro-American goals with the implicit support of the Arab American community. The endless speaking engagements and the years of advocacy, which had not garnered many supporters, led to extreme frustration on Totah’s part. As a result he eventually developed a reputation for being emotionally unstable and too easy to stir up.

Elmer Berger said hecklers made debates a horrible ordeal for opponents of Zionism. Berger said that he and Khloussi Khairy of the League of Arab States were “howled down” by a disapproving audience in a debate with Louis Lipsky and other Zionists. Police officers often patrolled the debate halls to keep order.¹⁹ Berger had worked with Totah at forums and elsewhere. He observed that Totah’s “presentations always seemed predicated on political equities and justice, but the Zionists sat in blocks and had his number. During questions they would ask loaded questions and bait him with derisive comments about Arabs. “The old boy would obligingly just go through the ceiling,” Berger wrote. “He would lose control of his intellectual resources and become an almost maniacal, emotional hunted animal, screaming and striking back with anything that came to his mind or to his sadden and despairing heart. I tried several times to advise him to keep control. I told him he was performing exactly as the Zionist errand boys wanted him to.”²⁰

¹⁷ Elmer Berger, “Memoirs of an Anti-Zionist Jew,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. 2 (Autumn 1975–Winter 1976), 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

In February 2, 1944 New York Democrat Robert F. Wagner and Ohio Republican Robert Taft, an introduced a Joint Congressional Resolution which called for the United States to “use its good offices to take appropriate measures” to open Palestine for the “free entry” of Jews. The resolution was tabled when the Secretary of State General George Marshall advised it would jeopardize the war effort.²¹ He warned the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that “immigration of Jews into Palestine with the idea of turning it into a Jewish state would lead to disturbances.”²² Arab reaction to such a resolution would limit military contributions from the Middle East and most importantly hinder an oil pipeline deal with Ibn Saud. American non-interference was not only a matter of national but also of private economic interest. While this appeared good for the Arab cause, it was not in any way out of concern for the people of Palestine. It was also a short-lived reprieve as the resolutions were back on table by that November.²³

In 1945 the IAAA published a Manifesto, which it submitted to the delegates of the UN conference on international organizations at San Francisco. This manifesto claimed to express the “heart and minds of Arabic speaking Americans.”²⁴ As always, the IAAA was careful to remind its readers that IAAA members while of Arab decent were above all American citizens. The Manifesto declared that the legacy of WWI had left the Palestine question unsettled and this was not acceptable. It also made the argument that the Balfour Declaration was neither legal nor moral. It went on to report that the 1939 White paper was more than appeasement by the British,

²¹ Record of the 78th Congress (second session). *Editorial research reports 1944* (Vol. II). (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1944). Retrieved from <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre1944122008>

²² Ibid.

²³ Lawrence Davidson, *Foreign Policy, Inc: Privatizing America's National Interest* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009),108.

²⁴ “Manifesto of the Institute of Arab America Affairs on Palestine (Submitted to the honorable delegates of the United Nations Conference on International Organization at San Francisco), New York, April 1945” (Archives of the Missionary Research Library, New York).

it was, in fact, righting wrongs that had been committed. The Manifesto stressed that Arab claims to the land were “and had always been a political issue and not a religious issue.”²⁵ Last but not least, mirroring Wilson’s words to ‘make the world safe for democracy,’ it urged the UN to “let Palestine take its rightful place in a democratic and progressive world. World security depended on keeping Palestine free and this in turn would make Jewish people safe everywhere, by making the world safer.”²⁶

In that same year former president, and Quaker, Herbert Hoover declared a plan for removing and transferring Arabs from Palestine, “The Arab population of Palestine would be the gainer from better lands in exchange for their present holdings. Iraq would be the gainer, for it badly needs agricultural population. Today millions of people are being moved from one land to another.”²⁷ Totah was not appreciative of his fellow Quaker’s plan and engaged in a chain of editorial letter debates in the *New York Times*. Under the urging of Hoover, Zionist Rabbi Elisha Friedman wrote a letter to the *Times* voicing support of the proposal. Totah published a letter in response to Friedman, “In his letter, Mr. Friedman never alluded to the crux of the matter - whether the Palestine Arabs wish to be transferred to Iraq or not.” Totah called it an “injustice to the Arabs.”²⁸ Totah asked, “Is it not high time for those who volunteer to solve the Palestine question to consider the wishes of two-thirds of its inhabitants? Palestine is home to the Arabs. It has been home to them for only thirteen centuries. Millions of their babies were born on Palestine's holy soil and millions of their dead lie buried there.” Responding to Totah’s letter, Friedman wrote: “Mr. Totah seems to have misunderstood the Hoover plan. There will be no

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Jane Wise, “Letters to The Times; Arab Transfer Favored Protest Against Hoover Plan Evokes Argument,” *New York Times*, January 06, 1946, E8.

²⁸ Ibid.

need to ‘pack a million Arabs from Palestine to Iraq’ They will go willingly for very acre of stony semi-arid they will receive three acres of fertile irrigated soil in return.”²⁹ He also fought back,

‘Injustice to the Arabs’ which Arabs? The workers and sharecroppers or the usuries and effendis? The Jews have helped the Arabs greatly. Malcolm McDonald said it is because the Jews have come to Palestine bringing modern health services and other advantages that the Arab men and women who would have been dead are alive today. That Arab children who would have never drawn breath have been born and grown strong.³⁰

He thought the Arabs should recognize the fact that they should to be grateful for Jewish presence, thanking the Jews for their lives instead of trying to cause trouble for them. Like Merle Davis had once argued with Totah to be grateful for his life circumstances and all that he had gained from colonial presence in his life; his America wife and his education. The Arabs owed their very existence to, and should be grateful for, Western intervention.

Totah again drafted a rebuttal to Friedman. “The transfer of population,” wrote Totah, “is not a question of financing and engineering; it is a human, moral and religious matter.”³¹ Once again Friedman argued back: “Why set off engineering against humanitarianism. When the ‘human, moral and religious problem’ of the Arabs require perpetuation of ancient feudal land ownership, economic stagnation, dirt and disease ignorance and superstition, Palestine was built primarily by funds from the US and America has a stake in Palestine. Arabs are ‘uncreative in practical matters, deficient in organizing power and in capacity for combined action, lack power

²⁹ “Palestine Debate Upset by Heckling,” *New York Times*, April, 14, 1946.

³⁰ Jane Wise, “Letters to The Times; Arab Transfer Favored Protest Against Hoover Plan Evokes Argument,” *New York Times*, January 6, 1946, E8.

³¹ Ibid.

of cooperation and of sustained labor.”³² Totah did not publish a response to this final letter of Friedman’s.



Figure 6: Debate at Fort Dix on Immigration into Palestine, 1946

On November 17, 1946 in New York’s Waldorf-Astoria an audience of seven hundred people attended a Foreign Policy Association luncheon. They “booed and hissed [at Totah] when he stated that the great contribution of Zionism to the Holy Land has been bloodshed ever since Zionism began.”³³ He was also booed when he said only ten percent of American Jews were Zionists. Totah shared the platform with Dr. Nahum Goldmann, a Jewish Agency representative. Goldmann stated that the Agency’s proposal for a Jewish state in a partitioned Palestine would enable both Jews and Arabs to live their own lives and cooperate to build “one of the greatest

³² Ibid.

³³ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 366.

centers of human civilization in the world.”³⁴ For his part, Totah told the audience that “Zionism means war” because the Arabs would fight to prevent the establishment of any Zionist state. He said that there was, however, a way to prevent war and that was to institute immediately a democratic government in Palestine. “The Zionists are clamoring for a free democratic Palestine. So are the Arabs. Why not inaugurate democracy at once?” Nahum Goldman’s response, if any, went unreported.³⁵

Totah also attended the Anglo-American Commission to testify about the Palestinian question in January 1946. The Anglo-American Commission was a collaboration between the United States and the United Kingdom to find a solution for the Arab–Jewish conflict in Palestine, and also an attempt to figure out what to do with Jewish refugees who survived the Holocaust. Totah asked the committee to consider the problem from the viewpoint of “right and wrong” not “from the standpoint of statistics or the number of eggs which Jewish hens produce, or the quantity of milk or butter which Jewish cows produce.”³⁶ Both British and American members of the committee questioned Totah sharply after he maintained that the Arabs feared Zionist aims, and that Zionism had prevented the granting of democratic government in Palestine. A member of the British delegation referred to Totah’s threat of Arab cooperation with other powers, if not satisfied by the British, as “black-mail.” At this period in his life Totah was concerned with Cold War matters, not blackmail. He was worried that Arab leaders might look to Russia for help if America turned its back on them. It was not in the interest of the American people to make enemies of people in Middle East he argued. He testified that the Arabs looked to

³⁴ “2-State Palestine Urged by Goldman,” *New York Times*, Nov 17, 1946, 26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ “A Survey of Palestine: prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry,” (Washington: U.S. Government Print Office, date).

Western democracies for their structure of society, that they wanted a democratic structure similar to American republicanism which would allow all people of Palestine, Jews and Arabs, to vote for their own leadership and laws.³⁷ To allow for this type of democracy Palestine needed independence.

In 1946 Totah wrote an open letter to President Truman (who had refused to receive an IAAA delegation):

Zionists are anxious to form a majority in Palestine...It is then and only then that the Zionists will concede to let the principles of free election and majority rule operate in that country. The position of the Arabs, in accordance with the best tradition of American democracy, is that the rules of free election and legislation be given the right of way now, before it is too late.³⁸

But 1946 was an election year and Truman wanted votes. He soon issued a statement demanding that Palestine allow for the admission of 100,000 Jews.³⁹ Former assistant chief, Division of Near Eastern Affairs Joseph C. Satterthwaite later recalled that:

In '47 America was naive, the Zionists had an organization and were able to use the treatment of Jews in Germany as a great emotional appeal. They persuaded the public that there were no people in Palestine. It was empty country and they were just coming home; all this type of specious argument simply went over because the Americans didn't know the situation. It's not enough that the Jews were being persecuted in Europe, but it's the Arabs who are now being persecuted in Israel.⁴⁰

Truman had many pro-Israel friends who worked to influence him. While he did have occasion to encounter dissenting opinion, for political reasons he gave them little consideration. For example, former U.S. Minister to Saudi Arabia William A. Eddy recounted a visit in which four

³⁷ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 200.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Lawrence Davidson, *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 4.

⁴⁰ Richard D. Mckinzie, "Oral History Interview with Joseph Satterthwaite," Washington, D.C., November 13, 1972, Harry S. Truman Library, at <<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/orallhist/satterwt.htm>>.

Chiefs of U.S. missions had come to the White House in 1946 to brief Truman regarding the deterioration of American political interests in the Middle East. Eddy recalled:

The four arrived for a White House appointment which had been scheduled for about October 10. The four were kept idle in Washington for weeks, away from their posts and with no duties whatsoever, because the White House advisors, including David K. Niles, persuaded the President that it would be impolitic to see his Ministers to Arab countries, no matter how briefly, prior to the November Congressional elections. After the elections, the Director of the Near East Office of the Department of State was allowed to bring the four in for a private conference with Mr. Truman. The spokesman for the group, George Wadsworth, presented orally an agreed statement in about twenty minutes...finally, Mr. Truman summed up his position with the utmost candor: 'I'm sorry, gentlemen, but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents.'⁴¹

Domestic pressures precluded Truman from considering alternatives. Perhaps also his own Baptist upbringing and his avid Bible reading influenced him. His favorite Psalm was: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion."⁴²

Arab-Nazis In America

As Totah began to actively write and speak out in venues across Canada and America, the media began to portray him as an anti-Semite and linked him to the "pro-Nazi" Grand Mufti. In January 1947, Vassar Town Hall held a forum on the conflict in Palestine. Participants hissed, laughed and stamped their feet during Totah's portion.⁴³ Totah appeared with Eliahu Ben-Horin, who represented the Jewish Agency for Palestine. Totah said that the Arab attitude was very simple: "Palestine is our country. It has been for centuries and still is...possession is nine-tenths

⁴¹ William Eddy, *F.D.R. Meets Ibn Saud* (Washington: American-Mideast Educational & Training Services 1954), 34.

⁴² "Guest Voices: Finding Faith in the Oval Office - On Faith at Washingtonpost.com."

<http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2007/05/finding_faith_in_the_oval_offi.html>

⁴³ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 343.

of the law.”⁴⁴ He also deplored the difficulty of presenting the Arab side in magazines, movies, or on the radio. He said that Zionism was unethical. The question is not racial or religious but political. “Democracy is based on rule by the majority. Why then are the Arabs denied the vote?”⁴⁵ In response to Totah’s question about democracy and consent of a country’s inhabitants, Ben-Horin commented essentially with a series of moral equivalency questions: What about the Mufti’s collaboration with Hitler?⁴⁶ He also asked, “what about the low educational status of most Arabs?” This must have been a particularly cutting remark to Totah as Ben-Horin went on to say, “88 to 98 percent are illiterate in some places. Is this the criterion for democracy?”⁴⁷

From Portland Maine to Los Angeles Totah was faced with hecklers wherever he went. Americans held very negative perceptions about the people of Palestine, and Arabs in general. The consensus seemed to be that Arabs rioted regularly as they were only used to outmoded Ottoman relics of governance, not “modern” democracy. Arab peasants lacked a coherent political consciousness and were only capable of knee jerk reactions, they were clannish and volatile; motivated by kinships not higher ideals. Arabs were also irrational, as Ben-Horin reminded the audience, “Arabs have seven other countries [and] Jews just want a place to be safe and secure...If that is wrong then we are wrong.”⁴⁸ Speaking in August of 1947, Dr. Totah found himself in hot water when he defended the Mufti: “The Mufti is a patriot, is a gentleman, and he was just as patriotic and had a right to his opinions as Jefferson and Franklin had to theirs when

⁴⁴ “Vassar Town Hall,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1947.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ A much publicized meeting took place between Adolf Hitler and Haj Amin al-Husayni in 1941. The meeting with Hitler was mostly about the Mufti’s own wish to secure a national status for the Arabs and to be recognized as their future leader.

⁴⁷ *Vassar Miscellany News*, Wednesday January 22, 1947.

⁴⁸ “What Should Be America’s Attitude Toward a Jewish State in Palestine?” Totah Speaking at an Interdenominational Discussion Panel in New York on Friday, October 24, 1947.
https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-5UiCSQccCwZoezi/Cairo%20To%20Damascus_djvu.txt

they were fighting for American liberty.”⁴⁹ The news agencies reported misleading information that the Arab masses had no objection to the Zionist program, and if it were not for such sinister figures as the Mufti all would be well in Palestine.

It may seem petty, but Totah was highly upset that he was outnumbered 2:1 in debates with Zionists. Event organizers and reporters assigned him less speaking time and less print space. This built in bias was significant for him. Another sticking point for him was that he was never asked to represent the Christian cause, he was always the representative Arab voice and would often find himself debating with pro-Zionist Christians who used Christianity to support their view. The significance of his lack of voice and limited space paralleled the loss of Palestinian land and advocacy. This attempt at silencing produced within him serious anger and frustration, again a reflection of what was happening to the Arabs on a larger scale. In a 1947 letter to the *New York Times* entitled, “Arab Views on Palestine,” Totah wrote that his predictions about escalating violence in the Middle East over the struggle in Palestine was coming true. The Arab position was no longer one of reason, logic and argument, he said, but had reached the emotional, religious, and fanatical stage. It was no longer a matter of patriotism to defend Palestine, but had become a religious duty of every Arab. Totah believed that the masses led the leaders and would continue to do so.

The “Arabists” and The Partition of Palestine

In an unlikely pairing Arab Americans were joined by some non-Arab American diplomats who appeared to sympathize with their cause. Bayard Dodge, Harold Hoskins, and Kermit Roosevelt, among others argued for the Arab cause. However, this support did little to give credence to claims that IAAA and other Arab organizations were not anti-Semitic as many of

⁴⁹ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 312.

these men, especially those in the State Department were very much anti-Semitic. They wrote letters to the newspapers and publicly debated the Zionists.

Zionism did not have unanimous support in the United States, but it was not enough to change the course of events.⁵⁰ These “Arabists” as they were known, included long time Foreign Service Officer Richard Parker. Parker wrote in a piece entitled, “The Arabists”, that people like himself, those who spoke Arabic and had a deep understanding of the region in general, had been much vilified.⁵¹ A certain cultural stereotype of an ‘Arabist’ still lingers today. Recent books such as Robert Kaplan’s *Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite* and Mitchell Bard’s *The Arab Lobby: The Invisible Alliance That Undermines America's Interests in the Middle East* play into the cultural stereotype of the Arabist as anti-American, delusional, dangerous to American security, and only interested in oil profits for themselves and their Arab “allies.” As Kaplan explains the Arabists “carry a lot of unfortunate intellectual baggage.”⁵² Political philosopher Francis Fukuyama saw the Arabists as typifying “the most exotic and controversial vestige of the East Coast Establishment...who have been more systematically wrong than any other area specialist...this is because Arabists not only take on the cause of the Arabs, but also the Arabs’ tendency for self-delusion.”⁵³

By the early 1950’s this stereotype had solidified in American perceptions. It was exemplified by the popular belief that those who studied Arabic culture and could read Arabic were somehow under the ‘spell’ of the Arabs. Curtis Jones was a Foreign Service officer in 1946

⁵⁰ Lawrence Davidson, *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

⁵¹ Richard Parker, “The Arabists: A Review Essay: The Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite Robert D. Kaplan,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24.1 (1994),69.

⁵² See Robert Kaplan, *The Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite* (New York: Free, 1993), 127, and Mitchell Bard’s *The Arab Lobby: The Invisible Alliance That Undermines America's Interests in the Middle East* (New York: Harper, 2010).

⁵³ *Ibid*, 74.

and become an Arabic language officer. He wrote that the “the appellation of Arabist would acquire faint opprobrium, and those who held it could face automatic exclusion from the formulation of U.S. Policy in the Mideast.”⁵⁴ Former NEA Department staff member Edwin M. Wright spoke out about this during an interview in 1973: “It's too well-known what happened to the people that McCarthy attacked. The best specialists we had on China were all fired or declared Communists. We purged them, and that led us into the debacle of supporting Chiang Kai-shek. The same thing happened in the Middle East.”⁵⁵ This ‘purge’ served to narrow perspectives on the issue as those most familiar with the subject matter were ostracized.⁵⁶ Richard Parker writes, “If ever there was a body that was frozen out of serious policy decisions it was the Arabists, who were regarded with suspicion by their American colleagues as well as by American Jews and other supporters of Israel.”⁵⁷ Truman chose to ignore the experts. He supported the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine, which was adopted in November of 1947.

The British had become extremely weary of a situation they could not fix and had turned the problem of Palestine over to the United Nations. In 1947 U.N. delegates from fifty-seven nations met in New York and voted to partition Palestine by a vote of 24 to 16. They adopted the plan as Resolution 181.⁵⁸ The United Nations General Assembly decided on the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem to be an internationalized city. For Palestinians the news brought disbelief and anger; they felt that they had no say in a decision to

⁵⁴ Curtis Jones, “The Education of an Arabist,” *Foreign Service Journal* (1982),18.

⁵⁵ Richard D. Mckinzie, “Oral History Interview with Edwin M. Wright,” Wooster, OH, July 26,1974, Harry S. Truman Library, at <<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/wright.htm>>

⁵⁶ See Hugh Wilford, *America's Great Game: The CIA's Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Basic Books Press, 2013).

⁵⁷ Parker “The Arabists”, 72.

⁵⁸ Resolution 181 (II). Future government of Palestine, November 29, 1947

<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7F0AF2BD897689B785256C330061D253>

give their land away. The Arab League and Palestinian institutions rejected the partition plan. Two months before that Totah had written to the Secretary of State requesting that the United States use a strategic perspective on this issue or risk alienating the Middle East over the policy.⁵⁹ He received no answer back. In an April 1949 letter to executive secretary of the American Friends Service Committee, Clarence Pickett, Totah wrote of the UN's "sordid backstage deals" involving "United States favors under the Marshall Plan."⁶⁰ He wrote that, "The Christian West is bullying with its material resources, superiority and diplomatic advantage." He was "grieved and ashamed" of the United States and the United Nations.⁶¹ He thought that the UN was anything but a peacemaker, and this would mean war for Palestine as more people opposed rather than favored partition.

The British withdrew from Palestine on May 14, 1948. The next day Israel declared itself a nation and set in motion events that have had consequences to this day. Despite the efforts of Arabs, the US public never fully understood the extent of the Palestine issue. Once the State of Israel was forged and Truman threw his support behind it most Americans took for granted it was the moral thing to do. Dr. Milton Konvitz, professor of industrial and labor relations at Cornell University said that establishment of the State of Israel would "ultimately will lead to the liberation of the Arabs because it will demonstrate that it is possible to live in the Middle East a life of dignity, freedom, and peace."⁶² Dr. Konvitz was secretary of the American Association for Jewish Education. He went on to say that "the Arabs have not learned what the Four Freedoms mean. They have no freedom from fear, want, or oppression. They need to be liberated from

⁵⁹ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 352.

⁶⁰ Khalil Totah, Letter to Clarence Pickett, April 1949, Box 9, Section 1, Totah Papers

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Professor Milton Konvitz, "State of Israel Eventually of Benefit to Arabs," *Democrat and Chronicle* Rochester, New York May 28, 1948.

poverty, illiteracy, and even slavery. The democratic State of Israel will shake the social and economic foundations of the Arab states- to their advantage.”⁶³

The Refugee Problem

After May 15, 1948, Arab families by the thousands fled or were forced out of their homes in Palestine. They walked in the unrelenting summer heat towards Ramallah, which became a haven for refugees.⁶⁴ The Friends meetinghouse served as shelter for many of these families. After the war was over the refugees could not go home; thus began another struggle; the fight for a right to return to their homes, which to this day has not happened.”⁶⁵ This traumatic event became known as the Palestinian *Nakba*.⁶⁶ The Nakba also marks the beginning what came to be known the Arab ‘refugee problem.’ Once this phrase became popular in political circles and American media outlets, the plight of the Palestinians became subsumed under a limited narrative. The people of Palestine, no longer seen as a dispossessed people, simply became a refugee problem. Under this circumstance America could take action in offering assistance and humanitarian services to a people who were in need of help. The roots of the problem need not be raised in order to address the suffering. The idea of solving the ‘refugee problem’ by relocating them to neighboring Arab countries like Lebanon and Syria, highlighted the notion that as Arabs these people were interchangeable and could be absorbed anywhere in the Arab world. Under this new label the Palestinians as a people and a nation lost any amount of political weight they might have had. Christison writes that “the Palestinians had become an indistinct mass of refugees-not a nation, not a political entity, only a problem and not a major

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Totah, *Dynamite in the Middle East*, 2.

⁶⁵ Jean Zaru, *Occupied with Nonviolence: a Palestinian Woman Speaks* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008),7.

⁶⁶ Nakba (or catastrophe) followed the 1948 War and the subsequent dispossession of 700,000 Arabs from their lands.

one at that.”⁶⁷ In a statement to the National Security Council in 1958, Information Director George Allen simply referred to the Palestinians as “refugees on the West Bank.”⁶⁸ In a similar pattern, while National Security Reports of the 1950’s contained many references to the new state of Israel, they did not mention Palestine. Papers with titles such as “United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to The Arab States and Israel.”⁶⁹ and “United States Policy Toward Israel and The Arab States”⁷⁰, effectively erased the idea of a separate Palestinian identity.

Total as both a Palestinian Arab and an American citizen was heartbroken over this issue and remained so for the rest of his life. His daughter Joy recalled how Total awoke one day crying after a dream. “He said he was at a chain link fence in Israel, looking onto his bayara, he could see it but he was not able to reach it. He felt heartbroken.”⁷¹ For Total and many Palestinians, citrus represented their land and property, the very lifeblood and the territorial value of Palestine. Those who lost their land and their homes saw it as a land rights issue, land was a signifier of Arab independence, economically and culturally. Citrus added deep meaning to the history of Palestine. In his book *The Lemon Tree*, author and reporter Sandy Tolani recounts a heartbreaking moment when Dalia, an Israeli citizen, realizes that Bashir, a Palestinian whose house she and her family now occupy, has saved a few lemons from the tree in her yard from his visit four months ago. He explains to her why,

⁶⁷ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 94.

⁶⁸ Statement by George V. Allen at the National Security Council, 24 July, 1958. *Documents Relating to the Israeli-Palestinian Dispute*, www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/me.htm.

⁶⁹ National Security Report, “United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Arab States and Israel”, April 7, 1952.

⁷⁰ National Security Report, “United States Policy Toward Israel and The Arab States,” Jan 26, 1951.

⁷¹ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 320.

To us this lemon is more than fruit. It is land and history. It is the window that we open to look at our history. A few days after we brought the lemons home, it was at night, and I heard a movement in the house. I was asleep. I got up...Do you know what I saw? My father, who is nearly blind...I saw him holding the lemon with both hands. And he was pacing, back and forth in the room, and the tears were running down his cheeks.⁷²

For Dalia and her family leaving Bulgaria with 1,800 other families fleeing persecution the occupation of Bashir's house meant freedom and a new beginning for her family. The right of return for Bashir means that Dalia and her family must leave their home, which is all Dalia has ever known. The loss of his home means that Bashir has grown up in a world of displacement and loss. There are no answers to this terrible situation.

In 1948 Totah's hometown of Ramallah became a safe haven for refugees. Qalandia, a Palestinian village located in the West Bank between Jerusalem and Ramallah, is still a refugee camp to this day.⁷³ Families from Jaffa, Lydda, and Ramleh fled and were forced from their homes as they took refuge in Ramallah. In January 1949, Moshe Sharett, Israeli Foreign Minister, stated that Arab leaders and the British encouraged the exodus, and that it had been turned into a stampede "by sheer unreasoning panic plus the unwillingness of many Arabs to live in a Jewish State. Totah as Executive Director of the IAAA spoke out against this accusation. He charged that people would not abandon their homes, which they had occupied for over a thousand years "for such flimsy reasons as the Arab League radio broadcast."⁷⁴

Displacement of populations and appropriation of lands are central to the construction of postwar regimes. After the flight of Palestinian Arabs there were only about 170,000 Arabs left

⁷² Sandy Tolan, *The Lemon Tree* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), 18.

⁷³ "Kalandia Camp." UNRWA, www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank/kalandia-camp. High levels of unemployment, overcrowding, and frequent incursions by Israeli forces negatively affect the social fabric of the camp. The camp has also witnessed a rise in violence and illicit behavior in recent years as a result of the deteriorating economic conditions.

⁷⁴ Khalil Totah, Speech at University of California, *American Perspective Foundation for Foreign Affairs* (Washington, D.C 1949). See also Tolan, *The Lemon Tree*, for an in-depth analysis on the Arab League radio broadcasts at this time.

within the borders of what became Israel's territory, this was compared to 700,000 Arabs living in the area before the start of the war. Once the state of Israel came into existence and the provisional government came in to being, it improvised an emergency legislation to give legal sanction to what happened. The first bit of emergency legislation was called the "Abandoned Areas Ordinance." This provided the definition of an "abandoned area" as "any area or place conquered by or surrendered to armed forces or deserted by all or part of its inhabitants, and which has been declared by order to be an abandoned area."⁷⁵ The United States government enacted similar laws to deal with the situation at hand. For the United States, as always, its main concern was that of the immigration of "unwanted" refugees. In 1949 the Senate Judiciary committee introduced the "Displaced Persons Bill" This bill would limit the numbers of Arabs from Palestine refugee camps that could enter the United States.

Total's orange grove became part of this "abandoned property." In 1949 Total appealed to the U.S. State Department to help him obtain compensation for the loss of his orange grove and lands in Palestine. "As an American citizen resident in the United States," he wrote, "to whom should I turn for redress except to you?"⁷⁶ His last letter dated June 3, 1949 was full of grief and despair at the creation of Israel and the loss of his land. He took the battle to his typewriter as he had always done. He wrote to the State Department, the government of Israel, Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois (whom Eva knew). He even wrote to fellow Quaker Richard Nixon to plead his case. He was never successful in obtaining restitution for his properties in Israel. No public records exist of the US government attempting to obtain compensation for Total's or other American citizens' property or assets seized by Israel during the 1948 war or

⁷⁵ *Ruling Palestine, A History of the Legally Sanctioned Jewish-Israeli Seizure of Land and Housing in Palestine* (Geneva: Cohre & Badil, 2005), 40.

⁷⁶ Rosemarie Esber, "When Israel Compensated Germans for Land in Palestine," *The Electronic Infatada* 5 June 2013.

after.⁷⁷ Often the letters came back addressed to Mr. Totah instead of Dr. Totah, this seemed another slight. Adding insult to injury American government officials considered Totah an absentee landowner and a refugee. He stressed that he was not a refugee but an American citizen who would be accorded respect and justice.⁷⁸

The war had changed the demographics of Ramallah. Before 1948 Christians had been a majority in Ramallah with only four Muslim families in the city, by 1953 this had significantly changed with 1500 Muslims living in Ramallah and Christians making up only 10 percent of Population.⁷⁹ The Christians were able to leave the country due to their connections with the United States and other Western nations. Most of those left behind were rural and poor Muslims. For their part the Quakers felt a responsibility to help those in the refugee camp and petitioned the American government to let them help. The fledgling Israeli government was wary of Quaker intentions. Quaker leaders Colin Bell and Moses Bailey met with Arthur Lourie, Israeli Consul-General in New York to request permission to work in the refugee camps. Lourie indicated his concern about allowing the Quakers to help, citing that the Quakers had been active in supporting Palestinians and that “Khalil Totah had been the primary propagandists for the Arab cause in the United States.” He finally agreed that a small Quaker team could give assistance to refugees.⁸⁰

A People Without a Land

Even though the fate of Palestine had been determined and Totah no longer had a cause to fight for he did not give up. He remained interested in American politics looking for some sort

⁷⁷ Rosemarie Esber, “When Israel Compensated Germans for Land in Palestine,” *The Electronic Infatada* 5 June 2013.

⁷⁸ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 200.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

of hope that America would realize the error of its ways and reverse its policy with Palestine. His notes show that he analyzed everything from Chester Bowles' pants, to Peace in Indochina. He was very much concerned with America and its traditions, or as he put it "[my] own American traditions."⁸¹ These traditions included; the dignity of man, individual rights, anti-colonialism, social reform, and pioneering in political and moral fields. It was as if he was trying to reconcile the country that he knew with the country that he had always imagined it to be. Perhaps mirroring his own emotions, he wrote, "Washington is depressed, glum unenthusiastic."⁸² As decolonization continued across the world, he felt it to be the end of an era. He wrote "Western withdrawal from Asia, most spectacular; British from India, Dutch from Indonesia, British from Burma, French from Indochina."⁸³ Unfortunately it was an era in which Palestine no longer could claim rights, it no longer existed, except for in the memories of those who had known it and fought for it. The Palestinian people were nationless; a people without a land. Today 12 million people in the world are stateless, 4.5 of those 12 million are Palestinian.⁸⁴ They have no constitutional protection, no property security. As Hannah Arendt has famously said "citizenship is the right to have rights." Without a nation or a place in the world from which to claim their citizenship Palestinian Arabs seemingly have no rights in this modern world. A world which Totah had fought so hard to belong to

⁸¹ Totah Undated Notes, Box 9, Section 2, Totah Papers.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ "Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons," *Central Intelligence Agency*, Central Intelligence Agency, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2194.html.

CONCLUSION: DYNAMITE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

*Take up the White Man's burden, Have done with childish days
The lightly proffered laurel, The easy, ungrudged praise.
Comes now, to search your manhood, Through all the thankless years
Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom, The judgment of your peers!* – Rudyard Kipling

In 1952, after an absence of about eight years, Khalil Totah returned home to visit the land of his birth. He felt “drawn to that area as by a magnet...I was burning with desire to see for myself instead of depending on warmed-up second-hand accounts.”¹ At the time Ramallah was part of Jordan, and its demographics had changed tremendously. Totah commented that his hometown now was, “adequately supplied with an almost complete galaxy of religious shades and complexions.”² Most of the refugees who had come to Ramallah after 1948 were Muslim. Totah was encouraged to see that, despite British government predictions, Muslim-Christian relations had not worsened. Although there were grumblings that many Christians had lost their government positions, Totah surmised that it had more to do with the fact that “Christians had a disproportionate share of government jobs during the mandate than anything to do with discrimination.”³ During this visit to Ramallah, Totah attended a public dinner in his honor and met with the mayor and the Municipal Council, as well as Dr. Husain al Khalidy former Mayor of Jerusalem and custodian of the Dome of the Rock. He spoke to an audience of Arabs and urged them to look beyond their anger over what had transpired; he urged them to

¹ Khalil Totah, *Dynamite in the Middle East* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955),1.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 154.

forget about the past, except to learn lessons from it. There was no use laying blame on anybody, but there was something to be gained from bucking up, putting their house in order and starting over again on a more intelligent basis. Despair, disunity and frustration were more serious enemies to them than Israel, the United Nations, and Truman.⁴

He also promised that “the more Arabs became insanely active on their own behalf; the saner American policy would become toward them.”⁵ He closed with Benjamin Franklin’s dictum “God helps those who help themselves.” He urged the coming generation not to give up. But felt unsettled that it was easy for him to utter words of hope “when I was safe and secure in my distant California.”⁶ He understood from his visit with refugees from Jerusalem that “misery, wretchedness, fear and insecurity were the elements they breathed day and night.” He knew that the refugees he had spoken with were “marching on a bitter path.”⁷

Totah asked himself a very important question. He wondered, out of all the intellectuals that Syria had produced, why did they do so little? Why did none rise to the occasion? Many Syrians also came to view the idea of the “American Dream” of freedom, as taught by missionaries, as a model for mastering their own destinies. Wilsonian style missionary diplomacy provided a type of Christian internationalism which had spread through the intelligentsia within Ramallah. Those who had been raised in missionary schools, suffered the weaknesses, as well as the benefits, of Western indoctrination. American missionary influence helped to steer Totah’s advocacy for Palestine in a direction that undermined his ability for effective leadership. He learned that rugged individuality and economic prosperity were the keys to success and influence.

⁴ Totah, *Dynamite in the Middle East*, 155.

⁵ Ibid, 156.

⁶ Ibid, 157.

⁷ Ibid, 159.

Totalah was determined to live the American Dream. American missionaries also presented modernity to students as a way forward, a promise of better things to come. Totalah found himself believing that through the hard work of education peace would come to Palestine, but it never came. Totalah's daughter Joy said that even as a young person her father was what she called "American-to-be."⁸ With his education and passion for teaching others Totalah might have been one of Palestine's greatest advocates, but that advocacy was inhibited in some ways by American missionary colonialism.

As this study has shown Totalah's life coincided with a period of tremendous transformation and change in the Middle East. He and his fellow intellectuals were not so much inspired by Woodrow Wilson's words, as they were validated by them. His story has also shown that the American Quaker missionary enterprise had a strong impact on the residents living in his hometown of Ramallah. After the events of 1948 the Arab refugees that remained in Ramallah were a people in exile, although they had once been part of a professional, educated and prosperous class of Arabs living in the Holy Land. They missed their church, St. Paul's of Jerusalem, and told Totalah they felt as though they were lost disciples scattered to the wind. Not only did they lose their church, but also their homes, businesses, orchards, fields, and even faith in humanity. But they did not lose their memories. Like many in the diaspora, shared memories kept them bonded.⁹ Totalah reported that some were given to despair and anger because they could see no justice in the world. They felt as if the United Nations and especially the United States had betrayed them.

⁸ Joy Totalah Hilden, *A Passion for Learning: The Life Journey of Khalil Totalah, a Palestinian Quaker Educator and Activist* (Indiana: Xlibris, 2016), ix.

⁹ Easter was around the corner but they could not visit the graves of their loved ones buried on Mt. Zion, or decorate their burial site with flowers as custom dictated.

Syrian intellectuals in the first third of the 20th century had appreciated that the president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, supported an ideology of freedom, independence, and democracy. But now when they thought of the words President Wilson used when he spoke of national self-determination they wondered how things ended up this way for Palestine. The people Totah met with told him that even though Wilson had been long dead, he would never wash the blood from his hands.¹⁰

By the time of Totah's visit the media, politicians, and world leaders had taken to calling the residents of Palestine refugees, but they were not simply refugees, they were Palestinians. Totah saw that these people were living in a powder keg of emotional and psychological anger, which would someday blow up if the United States did not acknowledge that almost one million Palestinians were scattered across Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Jordan.¹¹ These people dreamed of returning home, some even kept the keys to their homes in their pockets for when that day would come. In the meantime, they waited, continued to go to church, and prayed that justice would prevail.¹²

Philosopher Homi K Bhabha views traumatic events in global history as being both inter-historical and trans-historical. He says that the trauma often persists beyond its happening and can leave a residue for years to come.¹³ This is what the people of Ramallah and all of Palestine experienced. Even Totah, who had moved a world away and felt safe and secure in California, felt the trauma and knew it would not easily disappear. His childhood home would never be the same again, and the children of future generations would conceive of Palestine in an entirely different way. During his visit, he met with noted Palestinian leader and friend Aouni Abdul

¹⁰ Totah, *Dynamite in the Middle East*, 159.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Katibah, *New Spirit in the Arab Lands*, 10.

Hadi. They went for tea at Haj Amin Husayni's home. "I found him the same man I had known him to be in Jerusalem," Totah wrote of the Mufti. "He was reserved, calm and cautious. He did not indulge in making any kind of statement but gave one the impression of fortitude and faith in the future. He did state the Palestine affair was not settled. At heart he has not given it up, but has hopes for the future...he showed no bitterness or venom."¹⁴

Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, a Palestinian political scientist, wrote in 1981 that "the Palestine of 1948 was a very different Palestine from that of 1917 and that difference is not solely the result of the impact of either imperialist or Zionist."¹⁵ He hoped that scholars could "study the historical development of the Palestinian Arab community at any particular point in modern times" without making Zionism a focal point. The task would be to research Palestinian history and nationalism as a historical phenomenon in its own right and not merely as a reaction to imperialism and Zionism. For the Arabs of Palestine there was no single enemy to begin with; neither was there a single hero. Wilson did not represent anything more than validation of their developing aspirations. They struggled against a varied set of problems: Zionism, Ottomanism, French control, British control, and American missionary influence, just to name a few. These struggles occurred under the increasingly common context of Jewish immigration. It was this context that gave Palestinian nationalism its particular identity.

Totah and others formed their ideas of America, not so much around a Wilsonian idealism, but rather a mythologized perspective of the country. Intellectuals in Syria and Palestine developed a theory of their own history to mark their place in the modern world and they adopted the rhetoric of the American Revolution to symbolize their own power struggles. In

¹⁴ Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 220.

¹⁵ Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, ed. *The Transformation of Palestine: Essays on the Origin and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1987), 403.

doing so they imagined a past America that no longer existed, if it ever had. They often invoked the names of Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson and other patriots to support their own causes.

It became easy to see the hypocrisy in a world that judged Arab patriots differently than American patriots. Arab patriots were dangerous terrorists simply because of the color of their skin. The racial attitudes that politicians like Woodrow Wilson and missionaries like Daniel Bliss, Bayard Dodge, even in part by Eli Jones and Elihu Grant had carried with them on to the shores of nations had lasting repercussions. The lessons that young Arabs learned in missionary schools were lessons that they were never allowed to put in to actual practice as the color of their skin precluded them from doing so. They were too different, no matter what they did to prove otherwise. It seemed to the Western world, modernity, just like patriotism, and nationalism was fine for some, but not for all.

Arab students like Totah, put their trust in America to do the right thing and stand behind Palestinian rights as human beings, but they underestimated how little human rights and justice actually mattered to American diplomats who were focused on larger issues of economic security and political power. In focusing closely on the life of a prominent Palestinian Christian intellectual I did not intend to ignore imperialism, Zionism or colonial actions, but instead to reframe them. Wilson's words had varying degrees of influence within nationalist spaces and often depended on different lived experiences. It was especially important for me to understand how Totah and others of his generation understood the language of Wilsonianism. They were not simply some "laggard provincials reacting to political developments at the center."¹⁶ This line of thinking is paternalistic and imposes a framework in which people like Totah were merely pawns

¹⁶ T. G. Fraser, *The First World War and Its Aftermath: The Shaping of the Middle East* (London: Gingko Library, 2015), 59

in a game of chess. One should consider what Historian Andrew Arson calls “the tangled genealogies of the ideas of self-determination.” He says that claims of self-determination were not born of Wilson “rather they drew upon the registers of political community and reform elaborated by the public men and literati of the Arabic speaking Eastern Mediterranean in a series of campaigns directed at the Ottoman state in the years before 1914.” The first Arab congress was in 1913 and debates surrounding Arab independence had been occurring in the Middle East decades before Wilson. Arabs drew up plans on how they wished to live in the world and questioned its imperial construct.

Historian Cemal Aydin has suggested that it might be “useful to consider whether the disappointments with the Paris Peace Conference somehow built on and reflected a dominant anti-colonial discourse about new imperialism’s betrayal of the ideals associated with the French Revolution, Enlightenment or civilization.”¹⁷ Cemal’s analysis of Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asianist visions of world order, which emerged during the late 1870s, posits that they were in response to the perceived rejection by European powers.

The main critique of pan-Islam and pan-Asianist thought was directed against the “uncivilized” acts of European imperialism, which created obstacles in the process of self-civilizing reforms of non-Western societies. This was a corrective critique of the world order, asking for the fulfillment of the promises of the global civilization process and the universalization of modernity.¹⁸

In order to do this one needs to also look at the individual communities that responded to this universal call and how their own histories impacted the ways in which they organized around it. As recent scholarship has shown, the Middle Eastern Renaissance or Nahda was as internal as

¹⁷ Cemal Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought*, 8.

¹⁸ Ibid.

much as it was Western inspired.¹⁹ The Ottoman Tanzimat reforms sought to change the local economy in Egypt and Syria, elites hoped that the European language of reform would strengthen the Ottoman State.²⁰ The Gulhane Edict, which launched the reforms in 1839, had elements that resonated of John Locke and Thomas Jefferson.²¹ At this time the Ottoman Empire had become Britain's second largest export market, but this trade only served to widen the economic gap between Muslims and non-Muslim. Native Christians were therefore at the center of the political debates as their economic ties to Europe helped to forge alliances and fostered their adoption of Western ideals. They were taken by the materialism of the West, but also were quick to identify some of the ills that it contained and critique it from the inside.

Dr. Totah was born almost fifty years after the reforms had been launched. His life story highlights the changing Arab world at a time when the challenges and paradox of liberal democracy proved a road block, not just to Palestinians, but peoples across the world. Today many pundits and politician see modern day Palestine as an international “problem,” but the idea of Palestine was not simply a nationalistic construct, it was also a home and community. The Arab refugees are not simply troublesome, intransigent, or dangerous. Palestine has become larger than life, its trajectory ruled by its history. To assume that Arabs have always been intransigent when dealing with Israel, or that it is part of Arab “nature” to be rebellious or that they have less of an interest in becoming part of the “modern” world, are assumptions that obscure their humanity. These understandings and assumptions narrow future possibilities.

¹⁹ See Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 44.

Dr. Totah's story is just one small piece of a larger transformation in Syria and Palestine. Dr. Totah created an enduring legacy of service, education and activism, which connected his hometown of Ramallah, Palestine to his adopted homeland, the United States. In some ways he absorbed the dominant ideology of the day, he rejected his own Arabness and tried to become American above all else. His utopian idea that he could be a "citizen of the world," never fully seemed to come to fruition, he remained Palestinian at heart. His life seemed to be always in flux, in the end he was neither an insider nor an outsider, neither East nor West, but just a human trying to make sense of an insensible situation.

Today Totah's orange grove is now part of a kibbutz called Yad Mordechai. This agricultural kibbutz was founded in the late 1930s by Polish immigrants. It is about 22 miles from Gaza and, by 1948, about 130 Jewish settlers lived there. Today Gaza is war torn, its citizens are literally being squeezed out of existence, protestors for the land rights movement are being shot daily. The people in Gaza are in dire need of help from the international community. And today Totah's hometown of Ramallah is a sprawling city full of busy traffic; cars and pedestrians. The small stone buildings of the past are quickly disappearing. The Totah property is now buried under one of Ramallah's most renowned public spaces, Al Manara Square. Until the end of the 19th century al-Manara Square was part of the dirt road that connected Ramallah to al-Bireh. After the establishment of the Friend's Boys School on the border between Ramallah and al-Bireh in 1901 the road became more important. During the 1936–1939 Arab revolt the British authorities built a prison next to al-Manara, and it still stands today. During the first intifada the square became a popular site for protest. In October of 1987, Israeli troops shot and killed a woman and injured four protesters in the square. In 1993, as part of the Oslo Accords, the Israeli military had to leave the city. The square continues to be used to protest the actions of both

Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Totah had had visions of a bright future for himself, a future that would go beyond the boundaries of this town. In his lifetime he felt that Palestine was on the cusp of something new and exciting.

Totah died of a heart attack in Whittier, California at the age of sixty-six. Totah once wrote, “What the Arabs need is not mere relief, but sympathy and acknowledgment of their rights...no attempts should be made to gloss over the aggression which has been committed against them.”²² This sentiment still holds true today. Institutionalized aggression and marginalization against the Palestinian people have served to silence those who support their cause. Any society that actively supports the silencing of dissenting voices is a threat to democracy everywhere.

²² Khalil Totah in a Letter to Clarence Pickett and Henry Cadbury, April 1, 1949, Box 9, Section 2, Totah Papers.

Zion, thou art doubtless anxious for news of thy captives;
they ask after thee, they who are the remainder of thy flock
From West and East and North and South,
from near and far; bring peace from every side.
And peace is the desire of the captive, who giveth his tears
like the dew on the Hermon and yearns for the day they will fall on thy hills
I am a mourner who weeps for your poverty and when I dream
of the return I am the accompaniment to thy songs
-Yehudah Halevi, Jewish physician, poet and philosopher
(b.1085 d.1141)

Wounded shore! Vainly fluttering before my eyes!
You are ever in my heart
Not in humiliation will I return,
Will you, liberated, welcome me back?
My hands outstretched to you
Fall wearily beneath the weight of longing.
When I weep, lamenting my loss,
I weep for myself and you
-Kamal Nasir, Palestinian poet, politician and founder of Jordanian Daily Al-Bath
(b.1925 d.1973)

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APPENDIX: BIOGRAPHICAL TIMELINE

Khalil Abdallah Totah, born Ramallah, Palestine	5-20-1886
Studied at New Boys Training School, Ramallah	1901
Studied at Brummana Friends School, Brummana, Lebanon	1903
Studied at English College, Jerusalem, Palestine	1904
Teacher at Friends Boys Training School, Ramallah	1905
Studied Oak Grove School, Vassalboro, Maine	1906-1907
Studied at Clark College, Worcester, Mass. A.B. Degree	1908-1911
Principle Friends Boys Training School, Ramallah	1912
Compulsory Turkish Militray Training Service (3 months)	1914
Minister Friends Meeting, Central Village, Mass.	1914
Columbia University M.A. degree	1917
Y.M.C.A. Director with 79 th Div. U.S. Army, France	1918-1919
Principal of Gov. Teacher Training College, Jerusalem	1919-1925
Columbia University, N.Y. City, Ph.D. degree	1926
Principal Friends Boys School, Ramallah	1927-1944
Director Institute of Arab American Affairs, N.Y.	1945-1950

BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR

Amy Smith was born in Keene, New Hampshire on January 11, 1971. She graduated from Camden Rockport High School in Camden, Maine in 1989. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in History, with a minor in Spanish, from the University of Maine in 2010. She received a Master of Arts degree in History at the University of Maine in 2014. She currently works as Assistant Director at the University of Maine Hutchinson Center. She is a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in History from the University of Maine in May 2018.