

## Scenes of Cooperation and Conflict:

### Competing Interests Between Palestinian Arabs During the British Mandate

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History

The British Mandate in Palestine has captured the attention of countless scholars who have built a substantial body of work focused on this chapter in history. Many of their accounts have addressed the economy of the region, the sectarian communities of Jews and Muslims, and the British imperial structures that governed the territory.<sup>1</sup> However, less frequent are the attempts to elaborate the intersection of class interests, political practice, and cultural identity within the Palestinian Arab community in a way that effectively illustrates how intra-communal hierarchies were necessary to the formation and conservation of the British Mandate.<sup>2</sup> This paper synthesizes methods used to study political economy and state power to unpack key aspects of the intra-communal hierarchy of Palestinian Arabs and to situate this stratification within the dynamic milieu of Palestine during the 1920s and 1930s. Particularly, the paper highlights how capitalist development exacerbated the intra-communal hierarchy within the Palestinian Arab community and, as a result, produced divergent and even conflicting forms of political activity and cultural identity. A major consequence of the uneven incorporation of Palestinian Arabs into the Mandate's hegemony is that it precluded an indigenous Palestinian nationalism from gaining the necessary traction to effectively challenge both the British and the Zionists.

A political economy framework is imperative for this project.<sup>3</sup> It allows for a reconceptualization of Palestine during the first half of the twentieth century that does not presume the primacy of sectarian strife as a defining aspect of this history. In contemporary

politics, nationalist narratives promoted by both Jews and Palestinians emphasize these sectarian divides in their historical interpretations. However, these narratives have been shaped and reshaped through the contentious sequence of events that occurred after the termination of the British Mandate, most notably the creation of Israel and the Nakba, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and the sequence of intifadas. Thus, to presume that sectarian groups of Palestinians, Jews, and British were inherently antagonist to one another in the 1920s and 1930s would be to skew history in a presentist manner. These interpretations appear in scholarship on the Arab-Israeli conflict, usually adopting the colonialist narrative of British vs. Arabs or an ethnic/religious narrative of Jews vs. Palestinians/Muslim.<sup>4</sup> Political economy complicates the sectarian approach that considers these social barriers as historical absolutes. It illuminates intra-communal hierarchies and the various forms of political and economic interests spread across differentiated strata of Palestinian Arabs. Additionally, political economy recenters power by elaborating how privileged Palestinian Arabs promoted and acted on their own material interests in society. The colonialist and ethnic narratives treat the Palestinian Arab community as a group that is powerless and non-instrumental vis-à-vis the West in the historical process.<sup>5</sup> However, when the political economy of the Mandate is looked at closely, the distinctions made in conventional narratives between the British and Palestinian Arabs, as well as between Palestinian Arabs and Jews, become suspect.

Specific insights from historians who use a political economy framework to study the Middle East more broadly are instructive in applying this paradigm to Mandate Palestine. Joel Beinin attentively defines the political economy of the Middle East as an interdisciplinary approach that examines the consistent reproduction of institutions and systems of power through social struggle. Moreover, the hierarchies of power in which these struggles occur are buttressed

by the ruling class's efforts to obscure the mechanisms that propel the system.<sup>6</sup> As in other works by historians taking a Marxist approach, the assumption in this paper is that, like all modern societies, the British Mandate in Palestine was a classed society embroiled in universal dynamics of social struggle.<sup>7</sup> Exploring class dynamics within the Palestinian Arab community under the Mandate, Sherene Seikaly illustrates the relationship between Palestinian Arab businessmen known as "men of capital" and the overall economic development of the Mandate, a relationship that had stark implications on the discursive tools this business class employed to articulate notions of progress, identity, and economic behavior.<sup>8</sup> Other scholars have similarly unpacked the complex dynamic between capitalist development, consumerism, class formation, and class stratification within the British Mandate.<sup>9</sup> The insights drawn from these political economy-based interventions contradict the image of a passive and separate Palestinian subject and firmly reveal an undeniable role of active Palestinian Arabs in the formation and maintenance of the British Mandate.

Although political economy has a glaring impact on the way power is constructed and wielded in each society, cultural factors must not be ignored.<sup>10</sup> To merge the insights of political economy with the interpretations of social dynamics within the intra-communal hierarchy of Palestinian Arabs, the theories of Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci prove valuable. Treating the British Mandate as a state structure that is an integral and active piece of the story of capitalist development in the territory allows one to break with the economism that plagues orthodox Marxist interpretations of history.<sup>11</sup> Some historians have emphasized the role of the state in Mandate Palestine.<sup>12</sup> Gramsci's theory on the state exposes its connection to the world of production and details the tools at the state's disposal (ex. the law, police, schools). These tools are brandished by the ruling class of a society and the intellectuals who promote the agenda of

the ruling class in order to not only regulate the economy but to organize social relations through the elaboration and dissemination of a form of culture that serves to maintain the power of the ruling class itself.<sup>13</sup> The consent of the masses to the ruling class's narratives and institutions secures a hegemony. As a result, the state becomes a comprehensive entity that uses cultural hegemony to shroud and evade class conflict.

The colonial state that the British established in Palestine is distinct in many ways from the European state that Gramsci theorized. The most obvious way is the explicitly external forces of political and economic interventions into the region.<sup>14</sup> However, in line with Gramsci's notion of hegemony, culture is just as instructive in domination, a topic that has been greatly explored by postcolonial scholars.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Palestine, the British used culture as a lens through which to view and structure society. They perceived Jewish Zionists and Palestinian Arabs as necessarily separate groups, both subsumed under the authority of the British and subjected to different policy prescriptions.<sup>16</sup> Although it is important to note that Zionists and Palestinian Arabs constructed their own cultural identities prior to the Mandate, the British colonial regime was based on a similar cultural hierarchy. Thus, the state as a political, economic, and cultural actor intersected with imperialism, the latter aspect having a direct bearing on how the British administered Palestine and other colonial projects. The type of hegemony elaborated within the Mandate sought to develop capitalism as well as maintain the discursive construction of culturally defined barriers between Jews, Arabs, and British. Palestinian Arabs who were incorporated into civil society maintained these social barriers which not only advanced their own economic security and political campaigns against the British, but simultaneously substantiated the imperial paradigm on which the Mandate's hegemony was established. Through this form of cultural organization, class conflict could be averted.

Synthesizing the approaches of political economy and cultural hegemony, this paper analyzes the various positions and roles of Palestinian Arabs in the larger political economy during the 1920s and 1930s, considering their participation within and/or resistance to the British Mandate. During this period, particularly during the 1920s, elite Palestinian Arabs were able to materially benefit in certain ways within the political economy of the Mandate. These benefits often came at the expense of the Palestinian peasantry, who comprised the majority of the Palestinian population. Further, the political and cultural narratives used by Palestinian Arabs to challenge the British during the more embattled period of the 1930s reflected their own class positions within the political economy of the Mandate. However, the dominant movement in Palestine against colonization at this time was primarily led by the privileged classes of Palestinian Arabs. As such, their Arab nationalist movement was tinged with class biases stemming from the inherent attributes of capitalist development, particularly consumerism, urbanization, and scientific reasoning.<sup>17</sup> This dynamic prompted the professional and political classes to overlook the material sources of the peasantry's marginalization. These oversights can be observed in not only the Palestinian Arab professionals' and elites' understandings of the economy but the political and cultural identifications of themselves within an aggressively polarized setting that became increasingly contentious during the 1930s.

As a result, the economic relationship between privileged Palestinians and the British Mandate induced the Palestinian Arab professional and elite classes to produce certain types of political action and cultural narratives that complemented their efforts to secure their positions in Palestinian society. The Palestinian peasantry forged their own politics and cultural understandings to challenge the elites within their own community as well as the British and Zionists. However, the intra-communal hierarchy produced incompatible interests amongst the

atomized socioeconomic classes of Palestinian Arabs. By the end of the Great Revolt in 1939, the uneven incorporation of different classes of Palestinian Arabs into the projects of the British Mandate and Arab nationalism solidified the hierarchy in Palestinian society. Ultimately, this power dynamic precluded the formation of a unified, indigenous Palestinian movement concerned with the material needs of the peasant majority.

Revisiting the origins of the British Mandate will help elucidate this dynamic. The British launched their military campaigns into the Ottoman Middle East during World War I and reached a virtual stalemate by 1917. In November of that year, British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour wrote to leading British Zionist, Lionel Walter Rothschild, explaining that “His Majesty’s Government” supported the creation of a Jewish “national home” in Palestine while granting “civil and religious rights” to the indigenous population of Palestinian Arabs.<sup>18</sup> Although it was not until June of 1922 that the Mandate was approved by the League of Nations, the process of establishing the colonial state became formalized upon Balfour’s declaration. The political apparatuses of this state proceeded to function like most other states by granting rights, regulating citizenship, and securing territorial boundaries. In this way, viewing the Mandate through the lenses of state hegemony is instructive.

Under the new system, the colonial aspects of state building resulted in explicitly unequal treatment of Palestinian Arabs. The British arrogated the role of deciding who was able to enter the territory and who was able to become a citizen. Palestinian Arabs who were living abroad for various reasons, such as those seeking international business opportunities or fleeing the conflict of World War I, found themselves forced to apply for citizenship to their homeland. This was intensified after the passage of the Palestine Citizenship Order-In-Council of 1925.<sup>19</sup> The strict pathway to citizenship was reiterated by High Commissioner Herbert Plumer and entailed that a

person must have resided in Palestine for at least two years before applying, must be of “good character,” must have knowledge of English, Hebrew and Arabic, and must be committed to permanently residing in Palestine.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, British policies set minimum wages for Arab workers at significantly lower rates than that for Jewish workers.<sup>21</sup>

As the Balfour Declaration makes clear, the British did not act alone but with the support of Jewish Zionists, who were relocated to Palestine with greater ease than Palestinians living abroad. Zionists swayed British imperial policy to achieve this end. A memorandum that circulated in the Colonial Office in 1922 regarding the topic of immigration stated that “one of the most essential parts of the programme for establishing a Jewish National Home in Palestine [is] necessarily a system of organized Jewish Immigration into that country.”<sup>22</sup> Subsequent legislation granted citizenship to Jewish immigrants in a manner that was “proportioned to the [economic] necessities of the country and its ability to absorb and support immigrants.”<sup>23</sup> In the year 1925, 33,801 out of 34,641 immigrants to Palestine were Jews.<sup>24</sup> Jewish Zionists had a direct role in facilitating and shaping this process in Mandate Palestine by negotiating the entrance of thousands of Jews to support the growing economy. Additionally, through organizations such as the Jewish National Fund, Zionists purchased and “redeemed” land in Palestine that was then designated as an “inalienable right of the Jewish People” according to the 1929 Constitution of the Jewish Agency.<sup>25</sup> In industrial sectors, Zionists thrived as they sought to develop an economy that aligned with British plans for development.<sup>26</sup>

The role of Palestinian Arabs in the Mandate’s project is apparent when one considers the economic and political interests of the rural notables, who were intertwined with the broader economic system of private, commodified property. In Gramscian terms, this stratum had irrefutable ties to the world of production. Many of the landowning class of Palestinian Arabs at

this time were absentee landlords who resided in the burgeoning cities. There they enjoyed a distinguished socioeconomic status. The mechanized methods of farming that the Zionists brought with them allowed the Jewish National Fund to purchase fertile lands from Palestinian landowners and develop the land for settlement and cultivation.<sup>27</sup> The Palestinian Arab landowners, who were not pressured to update their technology, sold their land to the Jewish National Fund, facilitating the transfer of land from Arab to Jewish hands.<sup>28</sup> Becoming increasingly detached from their land as urban areas and civil society expanded, this class of Palestinian Arabs facilitated the creation of the British Mandate and its economic development.

One example includes Abdul Latif Tabawi, a Palestinian who graduated from the British-installed Arab College in Jerusalem and who served in the Education Department. Tabawi owned a swath of land on which Palestinian tenants lived in the Nablus district. These tenants, Tabawi claimed, hindered his ability to maintain his lifestyle. Tabawi argued that he should not be personally and financially burdened simply because a tenant needed to make a living. The district officer permitted Tabawi to evict his tenants.<sup>29</sup> Many landowners went through a similar process to evict tenants in order to market their land to the prospective Jewish buyers, fueling tensions within the intra-communal hierarchy of Palestinian Arabs.

Citrus cultivation is another striking example of how Palestinian Arabs performed a cooperative role within the political economy of the Mandate. The cultivation of oranges in Palestine had been occurring for centuries before the British arrived. The industry grew dramatically in the mid-nineteenth century as the European market for orange exports, particularly those from Jaffa, expanded. This encouraged Arab landowners to pursue profit in the global market.<sup>30</sup> After World War I, merchants from Bethlehem invested their money into the expanding citrus plantations along the coastal plains.<sup>31</sup> In 1921, a British report on the economic

situation in Palestine notes the progress in the orange and fruit trades by stating that the Jaffa Orange Growers' and Shippers' Syndicate had been created for export purposes and "had yielded good results, and bodes well for the future."<sup>32</sup> At this time, a productive citrus sector was developing beautifully, with Palestinian merchants and large landowners playing a vital role.

Palestinian religious functionaries also played a cooperative role in the development of the citrus sector. A 1928 annual report on Palestine conducted by the British notes that large areas of *waqf* (religious endowment) lands were made available for development after purportedly being restored for health reasons. The Supreme Muslim Council drained an extensive, malaria-ridden swamp on waqf lands in Wadi Rubin, "thus rendering a large tract in a fertile orange-growing district available for irrigation and intensive cultivation."<sup>33</sup> The report proceeds to explain how the Palestine Jewish Colonisation Association also carried out drainages in the Kabbara marshes.<sup>34</sup> British development plans worked favorably for these citrus cultivators and the Palestinian landowners who had a stake in the commodification of land.<sup>35</sup>

In urban areas, the hegemony of the Mandate incorporated many Palestinian Arabs based on their overt economic interests. Palestinian business leaders established a variety of industries and lobbied for economic protections to remain viable in the market. In the footwear industry, for instance, Palestinian business owners, along with Jewish business owners, sought economic protection as cheap European and Syrian footwear entered Palestine.<sup>36</sup> Other Palestinian industries such as flower milling, soap making, and weaving expanded under the Mandate. "Between 1918 and 1927, Arabs and Jews established 2,269 commercial and manufacturing enterprises. Sixty percent of these enterprises were Arab."<sup>37</sup> Industrial Palestinian Arabs who accumulated capital under the Mandate were able to establish a degree of economic security.

From this position, the Palestinian business elites further invested in Arab industries, stored their wealth in Arab banks, and steered economic policy from numerous Chambers of Commerce.<sup>38</sup>

The growth of industrial output was complemented by the growth of a professional class of Palestinian Arabs who acted as consumers. This professional class could also take advantage of new opportunities in the emerging urban civil society. Rapid economic growth, access to schools and higher education, and opportunities for administrative service created by the mandatory government contributed to the development of the middle class.<sup>39</sup> This class of Palestinian Arabs increasingly participated in civil society organizations devoted to culture, literature, sports, and politics.<sup>40</sup> They also took part in the growing consumer culture facilitated by newspapers such as *Filastin*.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the positions, opportunities, and lifestyles of the urban professional class became increasingly connected to the political economy of the Mandate.

Many leaders in the Palestinian, Jewish, and British communities collaborated, whether admittedly or not, to develop a functioning economy on which the British Mandate could be securely established. This was a result of the relationship between the world of production and the privileged classes in Palestine. These links formed the basis for the colonial state and its hegemony. However, it is important to note that the privatization of land in the Ottoman Middle East had been occurring for decades prior to the Mandate. This process greatly profited the Arab landowning elites, many of whom moved to the expanding cities. By the early 1900s, a privileged class of urban Arabs were engaged in commercial sectors of banking, trading, and shipping, as well as professional sectors like teaching, journalism, law, and civil service.<sup>42</sup>

Regional economic development spurred the creation of an urban civil society that increasingly espoused liberal ideas and Arab nationalism by the late Ottoman period. These developments continued under the Mandate, which formalized the indigenous manifestations of

liberalism and commercialism within a political structure after the Ottoman collapse. As such, the political and economic systems of power that developed in Palestine were not simply imposed by the British onto Palestinian Arabs, but rather emerged through the cooperation of various parties within the broader political economy, including an elite stratum of Palestinian Arabs. Thus, the hegemony of the colonial state was made possible by the ensemble of actors within it and their connections to the world of production.

During the period of the British Mandate, the process of intra-communal stratification amongst Palestinian Arabs deepened and produced a situation in which different classes of Palestinian Arabs enacted different forms of politics. Rural notables, religious functionaries, urban industrialists, and urban professionals produced a politics that reflected their relationship to the Mandate's endeavor to build a functioning hegemony. As the situation in Palestine worsened during the 1930s, tensions intensified between the Palestinian Arab leadership and the British. Nationalist movements gained further traction. However, the content and activities of these nationalist movements varied greatly between Palestinian Arabs of different socioeconomic classes. Although all variants of nationalism in Palestine targeted the British for removal, some nationalist movements were more tepid than others. A look at the relationship between class, politics, and knowledge production will help elaborate this nationalist dynamic within Palestine.

In the political sphere during the 1920s and 1930s, the British established or allowed the creation of Arab-led parties and institutions, giving privileged classes of Palestinian Arabs the opportunity to participate in the state's project. Moreover, as the Mandate's cultural hegemony was based on the discursive separation between Arabs, Jews, and British, the parties and institutions that both the British and Palestinian Arabs founded reflected this categorization. Arab nationalists such as Hamdi al-Husayni and Awni Abd al-Hadi created and led the popular

*Istiqlal* Party.<sup>43</sup> Although the party denounced land sales to Zionists, al-Hadi had previously sold land to Jewish buyers.<sup>44</sup> In 1921, the British created the Supreme Muslim Council which tended to religious matters such as monitoring *shari'a* courts, funding Islamic schools, and managing waqf land. Hajj Amin al-Husayni, of the traditional Arab nobility, was elected to the presidency of the Supreme Muslim Council. He was also appointed to the position of Grand Mufti of Jerusalem by the British in the same year. Hajj Amin al-Husayni derived much of his prestige from his material alliance with the Mandate.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the political institution of the Arab Higher Committee, also led by Hajj Amin al-Husayni, was established on April 25, 1936. Members of the Committee were mostly from the upper class who were less inclined to challenge the overall system of the Mandate. Out of the thirty-two members of the Arab Higher Committee, twenty-eight, or 87.5 percent, were from the upper class (landowners, big business owners, or traditional Arab notables). The other four members were from the professional class (urban professionals, shopkeepers, teachers, government clerks, religious functionaries). No members were from the urban working class or peasantry.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the political leadership represented the interests of only a fraction of Palestinian Arabs. Their nationalism was linked to regional networks of educated and affluent Arabs as well as to the cultural hegemony of the Mandate that defined them based on their Arab ethnicity and Muslim religion.<sup>47</sup>

In the private sphere, business leaders generated a discourse around their position and involvement within the political economy. By the early 1930s, economic growth stemming from cheap labor and surplus capital enlarged and entrenched the industrial class.<sup>48</sup> Termed the “men of capital,” Palestinian Arab industrialists, merchants, bankers, and professionals in urban areas launched a journal called *Al-Iqtisadiyyat al-'arabiyya* (the Arab Economic Journal) in the mid-1930s.<sup>49</sup> According to Sherene Seikaly, these men “sought to shape economics as a neutral and

scientific realm of nation building, to define class and status in new ways, and to safeguard their own power.”<sup>50</sup> In the process of creating a neutral discourse to facilitate nation-building along Arab nationalist lines, these Palestinian Arab businessmen not only secured their own economic power but reified this power as natural. This process functioned alongside the spread of nationalism amongst middle-class consumers, who used their buying power to support the Arab nationalist cause.<sup>51</sup> The newspaper *Filastin* intensified both middle-class consumption and Arab nationalism. The pages of their publications were splashed with Arab nationalist advertisements, which used the Arabic term *watani* (national) to describe Arab-made goods and products. National matches, national beds, national wheat, and national cement found their way onto the pages of *Filastin*.<sup>52</sup>

In the realm of education, the British sought to incorporate into the hegemonic state the urban and affluent Palestinian Arabs, many of whom cooperated with the Mandate’s program. In 1918, the British established the Arab College in Jerusalem to train teachers to work in Palestine. The education system employed professional teachers to teach in Arab villages and urban areas, as well as at the Arab College.<sup>53</sup> There were two educational tracks for Palestinian Arabs: urban and rural. Providing an agriculturally based education for the rural Palestinians was a point on which many Palestinian Arabs could agree with the British. Humphrey Bowman, the director of education in Mandate Palestine, promoted this type of education for peasants and encouraged Palestinian peasants to stay on the land instead of moving to cities.<sup>54</sup> Khalil Tota, the Palestinian director of the Arab College, concurred and explained how rural education should be agrarian based while education in the towns should be vocational rather than academic.<sup>55</sup>

Many in the professional class of Palestinian Arabs may have had misgivings about the overall project of the Mandate, but because education was viewed as a liberating process, it was

often accessed and controlled by Palestinian Arabs who worked in conjunction with the British to establish a standardized education system. Although these developments brought standardized education to some Palestinian Arabs, the political infrastructure to incorporate peasants into civil society remained undeveloped. Palestinian Arabs who received English language skills in the cities could more easily advance in society, possibly securing a job within the mandatory government or traveling abroad for university education and/or employment. The peasantry did not receive the same education as urban Palestinian Arabs and, thus, could not access the language competency skills needed to become a member of civil society. They were left to perform their agrarian function under the hegemonic colonial state. This was where the peasantry was needed.<sup>56</sup>

The politicking of and tacit cooperation between the British and the Palestinian Arab elites came at the expense of the struggling peasantry. Much of the peasantry had already been struggling since the late nineteenth century because of Ottoman tax policy and the intrigues of large landowners and moneylenders.<sup>57</sup> As tensions between peasants and landowners continued under the Mandate, the peasants became increasingly indebted to the urban notables and were forced to repay their loans with inflated interest rates, some between thirty and sixty percent.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, mechanized tools and specialist knowledge available to the incoming Jewish farmers were not readily available to the Arab peasants, nor did the Arab landowners establish any means to acquire the new tools and information. The landowners did not share the deep, personal attachment to land that the peasants felt.<sup>59</sup> As a result, many peasants saw their land holdings dwindle as their status moved from land proprietor to agricultural laborer.

The material deterioration of the peasantry was solidified within the Mandate's state hegemony through the process of capitalist development as well as the process of keeping the

peasantry on the land as peasants. Land scarcity produced higher land prices while population growth drove down the cost of labor. As peasants lost proprietorship of land and became an agricultural workforce, their renewed tenancy required that they use their own tools and knowledge while providing landowners with a rising percentage of crop yields. This landowning class was increasingly comprised of merchants, who could sell goods in local and regional markets.<sup>60</sup> In addition to policies of state rationing of crops for villages, the practices of the education system outlined above helped to maintain the peasant physically and discursively.

As for the peasantry's response to this marginalization, the political economy proved to be a contributing factor. It produced certain forms of political activity that ranged greatly during the 1920s and 1930s. At times, Palestinian peasants waged small-scale fights by aiming their frustrations against local moneylenders or land managers. This was most likely the result of the *musha'a* land system, which had an atomizing effect on the villages and prevented any sort of wider, unified front against the large landowners, let alone the entire British Mandate and Zionist organizations. Some peasants also organized politically to obtain concessions from British officials.<sup>61</sup> Their economic demands were evident at numerous times during this period.

In addition to the economic factors that informed their responses, the peasantry's social and political connections to networks of people who were not peasants themselves proved to be an important contributing factor in structuring their struggle. This can primarily be observed during the Great Revolt of 1936. In April 1936, the Arab Higher Committee called a general strike of Palestinian Arab workers. Soon after, local organizations sprang up in major towns and villages across Palestine, forming a network of locally managed institutions. These institutions collected taxes, secured weaponry for rebel fighters, provided medical and legal services, and supervised striking workers. Urban workers, merchants, business owners, students, and most

importantly poor and landless peasants combined efforts to make the rebel infrastructure function.<sup>62</sup> One interesting example of this alliance involves Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad, a descendant of a large landowning family who conducted business in the agricultural sector and was heavily involved in the peasant struggles against the British and Zionist through the rest of the revolt.<sup>63</sup> Although the power of this movement came from rural Palestinian Arabs most negatively affected by the economy, the cross-class alliances that they and others forged were the bonds that made the rebel networks and, as an extension, the pressures exerted by the rebellion as a movement so powerful. These counterhegemonic efforts vigorously challenged the Mandate.

Backlashes to the insurrection came from both the British as well as the Palestinian Arabs who were a part of the urban business class and nationalist leadership. Regarding the British, the revolt prompted swift and brutal intervention by the Mandate's administration. These measures included devastating raids on homes and villages that resulted in the destruction of property, foodstuffs, and livestock, as well as the humiliation, beating, and killing of Palestinian Arabs.<sup>64</sup> The relatively quiescent period of colonial rule during the early 1930s gave way to the harsher exhibition of imperial domination once the hegemonic state was threatened from below.

To facilitate the colonial counterinsurgency, the British utilized the relationships formed under the Mandate with the Palestinian Arab leadership. Although Hajj Amin al-Husayni espoused Arab nationalism and initially assumed leadership over the revolt, he was keenly aware that his social and political power partially derived from his alliance with the British. Furthermore, al-Husayni's power also derived from his appropriation of the hegemonic discourse in both colonial and anti-colonial narratives that viewed social relations through a sectarian lens. In al-Husayni's case, one can observe the entanglement of material gains acquired within the political economy of the Mandate and the social prestige wielded for a type of nationalism that

had its political limitations. For the Mufti, the insurrectionist challenge from below could only go so far. Thus, al-Husayni administered passive sermons, gave speeches calling for support from the Arab world, and instructed the public to refuse paying taxes as an alternative to violence, all while only mildly criticizing the British. While meeting with High Commissioner Wauchope in May 1936 to discuss options for handling the revolt, al-Husayni stated that the leadership needed to “find a formula that did not make them look weak in the eyes of the people.”<sup>65</sup>

By October 1936, the economic conditions for Palestinian Arabs worsened and the death toll surpassed one thousand. The Arab Higher Committee and British officials sought to end the conflict. Finally, Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Arab representatives in the Arab Higher Committee accepted the plea from the Arab world and ended the revolt.<sup>66</sup> In 1937, the rebellion moved to the rural areas and was picked up by a smaller fraction of inhabitants that became increasingly targeted by their own Palestinian neighbors who joined and organized peace bands to track down rebel fighters.<sup>67</sup> It was during this second phase, which lasted until 1939, that Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad was killed by the joint efforts of the British and Palestinian Arab peace bands.

These complex alliances amongst Palestinian Arabs as well as between Palestinian Arabs and the British demonstrate the significance of political praxis in shaping society. As Joel Beinin emphasizes, social struggles have an impact on the reproduction of institutions and systems of power within the political economy. The struggle of the hegemonic bloc of actors to control the state, as Antonio Gramsci describes, can be met with the struggle of counterhegemonic forces from below. However, this challenge from below requires putting into practice the consciousness of one’s own marginalization. In this way, economic factors are not pure determinants in history. Active politics play a crucial role. These political formations make possible counterhegemonic

challenges. Although political activity is informed by the complex layering of class interests, political ideology, and cultural identity, the undeniable conflict between distinct socioeconomic classes of Palestinian Arabs during the Great Revolt contradicts the sectarian assumptions in contemporary nationalist narratives. Using Gramsci's cultural hegemony as a framework to analyze Mandate Palestine reveals that stark sectarian divisions were neither innately absolute nor patently evident. Intra-communal conflicts based on competing interests within the political economy prove to be a more formative dynamic in this history.

This paper has many implications on both the historiography on this subject and contemporary political movements.<sup>68</sup> However, this research primarily strives to illuminate the historical subtleties that precluded the formation of an indigenous Palestinian nationalist movement centered around the concerns of the peasant majority. The deteriorating economic situation during the Mandate held the potential to spark such a movement, unifying all classes of Palestinian Arabs or even Palestinian Muslims and Jews. Although alliances such as these existed, they were not prominent enough to change the overall material conditions under the Mandate or to counter the cultural dichotomization in British, Arab, and Zionist discourses. Palestinian Arab elites could not be divorced from their material relationship to the Mandate and the political-social authority that such a relationship imparted. Their power developed through the intersection of political economy and culture, which was embedded within the structures of the colonial state. The web of power dynamics that pervaded the British Mandate factionalized the Palestinian Arab community and produced various political movements based on competing interests within the intra-communal hierarchy of Palestinian Arabs. As a result, by the end of the Great Revolt in 1939, the muddled and strained relations between Palestinian Arabs effectively obstructed the development of a truly Palestinian nationalist movement.

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of scholarship on the economy of Palestine under the British Mandate, see Jacob Metzger, *The Divided Economy of Mandatory Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For a study on Jewish, Muslim, and Christian identities in the pre-Mandate and Mandate periods, see Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early-Twentieth Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). For an example of research viewing the Mandate through the lenses of empire and politics, see Roza El-Eini, *Mandated Landscape: British Imperial Rule in Palestine, 1929-1948* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the descriptor of “Palestinian Arab” is used to designate the group of Arabs living within Mandate Palestine. “Arab” is used to refer to Arabs in the Middle East prior to the Mandate, primarily during the Ottoman period. The paper avoids describing the Arabs living and operating in the Mandate as simply “Palestinians” due to the current political connotations of such terminology. The descriptor of Palestinian carries with it the presumption of a unified Palestinian nation that was present during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, this paper complicates the notion of a unified Palestinian nation during the Mandate years, as do other works in the field.

<sup>3</sup> Political economy refers to many methods of inquiry and conceptualizations of political and economic life. I use the term to essentially refer to the inseparable relationship between politics and economics, each critically informing the practices and discourses of the other. In the case of Mandate Palestine, the political structures and organizations of the Mandate were embedded within the process of capitalist expansion. The politics produced to govern and justify the system complemented the economic demands of the British rulers. Likewise, the political strategies and narratives produced by Palestinian Arabs were also underpinned by their relationship to the economy. This is what the paper seeks to elaborate.

<sup>4</sup> This perspective is seen clearly in the works of Bernard Lewis, particularly in *The Arabs in History* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 1950) and *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> As a result of these narratives, the discursive categories of West and non-West, along with the characteristics attributed to each under the prevailing world historical paradigm, remain unproblematized. The West, in the dominant paradigm, is conceived as the modern power center which actively makes history while non-Westerners are portrayed as powerless, exotic, passive, and non-instrumental in the historical process. See Peter Gran, *Beyond Eurocentrism: A New View of Modern World History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 1-5.

<sup>6</sup> Joel Beinin, “Political Economy Defined,” *JADMAG Pedagogy Publications* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 4-6.

<sup>7</sup> In *Beyond Eurocentrism*, Peter Gran details that all modern states are class based and are maintained by obscuring this basic reality through the elaboration and dissemination of culturally hegemonic ideas on either race, region, gender, or caste. He is working within a Gramscian framework. Adam Hanieh has provided insights on the utility of Marxism in his writings on the political economy and the Middle East. See Adam Hanieh, *Capitalism and Class in the Gulf Arab States* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Mandy Turner describes her use of Marx and Gramsci to articulate the role of social movements from above and social movements from below in the Middle East and Palestine. See Mandy Turner, “A Critical Political Economy: Social Forms, Power Relations, and Alternatives,” *JADMAG Pedagogy Publications* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 26-28.

<sup>8</sup> Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). However, due to the focus on political economy as capitalist development in the business sector, Seikaly’s analysis favors a form of economism as expressed in the urban, business class while only mentioning the peasantry in relation to the men of capital’s economic and discursive projects.

<sup>9</sup> For an incisive analysis of how middle-class formation and Arab nationalism were co-constituted within capitalist development under the British Mandate, see Deborah Bernstein and Badi Hasisi, “‘Buy and Promote the National Cause’: Consumption, Class Formation, and Nationalism in Mandate Palestine Society,” *Nations and Nationalism* 14, no.1 (2008): 469-489.

<sup>10</sup> Joel Beinin provides instructive advice for how to effectively consider culture without reducing everything to it. In this way, the economic determinism of orthodox Marxism can be remedied. See Beinin, 6.

<sup>11</sup> See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 270-272.

<sup>12</sup> For example, see David De Vries, *Diamonds and War: State, Capital, and Labor in British-Ruled Palestine* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010). “In this picture the state is brought into the discussion as a primary force that enables the existence and operation of such occupational communities, well embedded in their quotidian routines, business strategies, and future calculations, to the point that the boundaries between state and capital become often blurred” (7).

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<sup>13</sup> Gramsci, 12 and 246.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of British colonial policy in Palestine, see D. K. Fieldhouse, "Palestine: The British Mandate, 1918-1948," in *Western Imperialism in the Middle East, 1914-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> The most well-known forays into this topic were conducted by Edward Said. See *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978). See also works by scholars of the Subaltern Studies Group, such as Ranajit Guha: *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). These works tend to emphasize culture as a primary force of imperialism and power. Political economy is less explored.

<sup>16</sup> For details on how British policies reflected different treatment toward Arabs and Jews, see Fieldhouse, "Palestine: The British Mandate, 1918-1948." For imperial perceptions toward Arabs and Muslims, as well as Jews, leading up to the mandatory project, see Lorenzo Kamel, *Imperial Perceptions of Palestine: British Influence and Power in Late Ottoman Times* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of this relationship between Arab Nationalism and the middle class in Palestine, see Deborah Bernstein and Badi Hasisi, "'Buy and Promote the National Cause': Consumption, Class Formation, and Nationalism in Mandate Palestine Society," *Nations and Nationalism* 14, no.1 (2008): 469-489. For a wider chronological scope of the relationship between the middle class in the Middle East, nationalism, and conceptions of modernity, see Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> "Balfour Declaration 1917," *Yale Law School*, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/balfour.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/balfour.asp).

<sup>19</sup> In response to these measures, the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Palestinians in Foreign Countries was created by Palestinians in Jerusalem to put pressure on the British to amend the law. The committee fought for the uncomplicated entry of Palestinians who were living abroad, such as in the Americas. It was ultimately decided that the law would not be amended. See Nadim Bawalsa, "Legislating Exclusion: Palestinian Migrants and Interwar Citizenship," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 46, no. 2 (2017): 45-50.

<sup>20</sup> Nadim Bawalsa, "Legislating Exclusion: Palestinian Migrants and Interwar Citizenship," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 46, no. 2 (2017): 45-50.

<sup>21</sup> See Mahmoud Yazbak, "From Poverty to Revolt: Economic Factors in the Outbreak of the 1936 Rebellion in Palestine," *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 3 (2000): 107.

<sup>22</sup> TNA CO 733/35, quoted in Bawalsa, 46.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Bawalsa, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Bawalsa, 45.

<sup>25</sup> Dan Leon, "The Jewish National Fund: How the Land was 'Redeemed,'" *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics* 12/13, no. 4/1 (2005): 115-117 and 120-121.

<sup>26</sup> See Fredrik Meiton, "The Radiance of the Jewish National Home: Technocapitalism, Electrification, and the Making of Modern Palestine," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57, no. 4 (2015): 975-1006.

<sup>27</sup> Mahmoud Yazbak, "From Poverty to Revolt: Economic Factors in the Outbreak of the 1936 Rebellion in Palestine," *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 3 (2000): 101.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Stein, "Rural Change and Peasant Destitution: Contributing Causes to the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-1939," in *Peasants and Politics in the Middle East*, ed. Farhad Kazemi and John Waterbury (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991), 151-154.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 152-153.

<sup>30</sup> Mark LeVine, *Overthrowing Geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and the Struggle for Palestine, 1880-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 34.

<sup>31</sup> Jacob Norris, "Return Migration and the Rise of Palestinian Nouveaux Riches, 1870-1925," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 46, no. 2 (2017): 71.

<sup>32</sup> R. Harari, *Palestine Sessional Papers: Administration Reports. Department Of Commerce And Industry. Report On The Economic And Commercial Situation Of Palestine. White Paper, June 1922 & British Constitution For Palestine, August 1922*. 1922. Selected files from series CAB, CO, FCO, FO, PREM, T, WO, The National Archives, Kew, UK. The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom. *Archives Unbound*. Web. 27 Oct. 2020. <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/gdsc/i.do?&id=GALE%7CSC5107024467&v=2.1&u=psucic&it=r&p=GDSC&sw=w&viewtype=Manuscript>>.

<sup>33</sup> *Annual Report For Palestine And Transjordan, 1928. Corrected Proof. Wailing Wall Riots, 1929*. 1928. Selected files from series CAB, CO, FCO, FO, PREM, T, WO, The National Archives, Kew, UK. The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom. *Archives Unbound*. Web. 27 Oct. 2020. <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/gdsc/i.do?&id=GALE%7CSC5107036466&v=2.1&u=psucic&it=r&p=GDSC&sw=w&viewtype=Manuscript>>.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> These instances of cooperation are not to suggest that all Palestinians belonging to a certain socioeconomic class facilitated these transactions with the same motives. There were many factors that influenced Palestinian Arabs' decisions to sell land or participate in certain sectors of production. These influences ranged from the strain of burdensome debts to the prospects of achieving substantial profits. For an analysis of the various economic roles and motives within the Palestinian community during this period, see Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917-1948*, trans. Haim Watzman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), particularly chapter 3.

<sup>36</sup> Hizky Shoham, "'Buy Local' or 'Buy Jewish'? Separatist Consumption in Interwar Palestine," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 3 (2013): 478.

<sup>37</sup> Seikaly, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Palestinian Arabs of the business class translated their economic capital into political capital as leaders of political parties and Chambers of Commerce as well as cultural capital as leaders of the liberal Arab nationalist project and producers of cultural discourses in the pages of *Iqtisadiyyat*. For a discussion on Palestinian Arab investments in industry, banks, and cultural production, see Seikaly, *Men of Capital*, 28-32 and 106-109.

<sup>39</sup> Bernstein and Hasisi, 131.

<sup>40</sup> Bernstein and Hasisi, 131.

<sup>41</sup> Bernstein and Hasisi, particularly 142-146.

<sup>42</sup> Seikaly, 28.

<sup>43</sup> Weldon C. Matthews, "Pan-Islam or Arab Nationalism? The Meaning of the 1931 Jerusalem Islamic Congress Reconsidered," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 1 (2003): 5.

<sup>44</sup> Yazbak, 104.

<sup>45</sup> See Weldon C. Matthews, particularly 10-12.

<sup>46</sup> Taysir Nashif, "Social Background Characteristics as Determinants of Political Behavior of the Arab Political Leadership of Palestine Under the British Mandate," *Journal of Third World Studies* 26, no. 2 (2009): 164-165.

<sup>47</sup> It becomes clear here that the cultural identity was not only conditioned by the political economy and Arab nationalist identity in the pre-Mandate and mandatory periods, but then proceeded to condition the political economy and overall project of the Mandate itself. There is a dialectic present.

<sup>48</sup> Seikaly, 28.

<sup>49</sup> Seikaly, 25.

<sup>50</sup> Seikaly, 26.

<sup>51</sup> Bernstein and Hasisi, 140-142.

<sup>52</sup> Bernstein and Hasisi, 141-142.

<sup>53</sup> See Marco Demichelis, "From Nahda to Nakba: The Government Arab College of Jerusalem and its Palestine Historical Heritage in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2015): 264-281. It is important to note that access to higher education also gave Palestinian Arabs further opportunities abroad, resulting in an out migration of educated Palestinian Arabs to European countries.

<sup>54</sup> See Elizabeth Brownson, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and the Politics of Teaching History in Mandate Palestine," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 3 (2014): 9-25. Bowman's reasoning included the prevention of a "half-education, unemployed class, so prevalent in India and Egypt" (11).

<sup>55</sup> Brownson, 12. Rural education, along with agricultural coursework, also focused on Arabic literacy and religion. The towns focused on English language education along with their vocational training.

<sup>56</sup> The peasantry was needed on the land not only to perform the function of agricultural output but to keep the urban areas more manageable. Industries could only hire so many workers. As peasants migrated to the cities, shantytowns were constructed on the outskirts, posing health concerns for the Mandate. Mahmoud Yazbak notes the problem of migrants from villagers unable to secure a job during the mid-1930s. See Yazbak, 108. Also, for a discussion on the shantytowns on the outskirts of major cities, see Tamir Goren, "Efforts to Establish an Arab Worker's Neighbourhood in British Mandatory Palestine," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 6 (2006): 917-933. The hegemony's spatial and discursive dichotomization of the countryside and the cities needs further examination.

<sup>57</sup> Stein, 145-146.

<sup>58</sup> Stein, 149.

<sup>59</sup> Stein, 146-151. It is important to note that the peasantry's struggles were not always due to Zionist or British demands but to natural afflictions such as poor soil quality and droughts.

<sup>60</sup> Amos Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy Under the Mandate: A Story of Colonial Bungling* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 185-1909.

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<sup>61</sup> Stein, 148-152. For instance, some Palestinian farmers convoked an economic conference in 1929 at which they called for an agricultural bank, updated infrastructural and communication systems to facilitate product distribution, and improved sanitation and educational systems.

<sup>62</sup> Charles W. Anderson, "State Formation from Below and the Great Revolt in Palestine," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 47, no.1 (2017): 41-44.

<sup>63</sup> See Sonia Namir, "'A Nation in a Hero': Abdul Rahim Hajj Mohammad and the Arab Revolt," in *Struggle and Survival in Palestine/Israel*, ed. Mark LeVine and Gershon Shafir (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 141-156. Namir elaborates on the complex relationship between socio-economic class and political struggle through the life of Abdul Rahim Hajj Mohammad.

<sup>64</sup> Charles W. Anderson, "The Suppression of the Great Revolt and the Destruction of Everyday Life in Palestine," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 79 (August 2019): 11-13.

<sup>65</sup> Hajj Amin al-Husayni, quoted in Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem: Al-Hajj Amin Al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 76.

<sup>66</sup> See Philip Mattar, 80. The other Arab nations called on the Palestinian leaders to end the strike and make a deal with the British because "we rely on the good intentions of our friend Great Britain, who has declared that she will do justice."

<sup>67</sup> See Matthew Hughes, "Palestinian Collaboration with the British: The Peace Bands and the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-9," *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 2 (2016): 297-306. For instance, the Nashashibi family helped establish peace bands to go after their political rivals such as the Husaynis. For their part, the British funded directly many Palestinian Arabs who were working for the peace bands.

<sup>68</sup> It is the hope that this paper provides a constructive approach to studying the British Mandate of Palestine through the lens of political economy, which brings together aspects of the economy, colonialism, state formation, and cultural hegemony. However, this study is undoubtedly incomplete. Further research to develop the theory of state hegemony under the Mandate should assess how the various Palestinian Arab actors in civil society functioned as intellectuals for the colonial state, disseminating logics of capitalism, liberalism, and cultural separatism to the broader population. Likewise, inquiries should be conducted into the effects of this dissemination and the degrees to which it was at all successful. Additionally, research must be performed into how power was exercised by the peasantry and channeled upward in society, impacting the range and direction of British and Arab attitudes and practices. Such research has implications on contemporary nationalist narratives that undergird the Israeli state as well as the Palestinian nationalist movements fighting for increased autonomy or statehood in the Occupied Territories.

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