

# The Palestinian Exodus in 1948

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The historical question of why the vast majority of Palestinians left their homes in 1948 is not only relevant as a problem of history, but has been given added significance by the protagonists involved. Rightly or wrongly, both Palestinian and Israeli spokesmen and adherents have sought to link the events of 1948 with their claims to the land today. In order to do this, each has come up with a different version of events and drawn its conclusions accordingly.

It is not the purpose of this paper to do anything more than examine the conflicting explanations of the exodus and attempt to offer a coherent analysis. It is not my aim to try to extrapolate from this analysis an evaluation of Palestinian rights. Indeed, if the fundamental question in the Palestine conflict is the Zionist presence in that country, this episode can at most be seen as an expression, in part, of Zionist thinking, and not the be all and end all that it is frequently touted as. For unless Israel can come to terms with the region in which she exists and be accepted by the native inhabitants, especially the Palestinian people, no settlement of the conflict is imaginable. Thus it is futile to hope that one episode in the seventy-year collision between Zionism and Palestinian nationalism can explain or justify arguments about the entire problem.

This paper will begin with an introduction discussing some of the works on the subject and the fundamental problems of dealing with historians who

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are overtly biased. It will also offer some other observations on the topic which must be kept in mind when considering these events.

The main body of this paper will seek to identify certain elements which are crucial in determining how useful a particular historical work is. Although some of these criteria will be taken from simple "good sense" historical writing, others will admittedly be more subjective and it will be left to the reader to decide on their relevance.

Finally I shall attempt to draw some conclusions, while remaining cognizant of the danger of concluding too much. I will offer further observations in order to put this historical problem in context. As I have already alluded, care must be taken to prevent too much of the present from colouring our view of the past.

Although this paper has required the use of many sources and interpretations, it cannot claim to be exhaustive either in context or scope. Only the most salient criteria will be used in analysing the works. Moreover, while I will take into account such diverse factors as time, geography, class and motivations, it would be beyond the capacity of this paper to analyse in depth every factor in the exodus, even if information about all these factors, direct and indirect, were readily available.

#### THE PROBLEM OF BIAS

Much of the material on the Palestinian exodus has not been written to examine the historical problem *per se*, but rather to strengthen Palestinian or Zionist claims, as the case may be, to the land of Palestine. Accordingly, many of these secondary sources start from a biased orientation and seek to discuss only those points which lend credence to their arguments. Evidence which contradicts these arguments is either ignored or dismissed as essentially irrelevant.

According to Zionist historians, the Arabs in Palestine were asked to stay and live as citizens in the Jewish state. Instead, they chose to leave, either because they were unwilling to live with the Jews, or because they expected an Arab military victory which would annihilate the Zionists. They thought they could leave temporarily and return at their leisure. Later, an additional claim was put forth, namely that the Palestinians were ordered to leave, with radio broadcasts instructing them to quit their homes. The implications of these arguments are obvious; despite the best intentions of the Zionists, the Arabs chose to leave, thus they forfeited their rights to the land, and must bear responsibility for the solution to their plight.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Zionist historians who have written on the 1948 exodus include Joseph Schectman, Leo Kohn, Jon Kimche and Maria Syrkin.

The Arab view of history has maintained that the Palestinians did not leave their homes voluntarily, were expelled by Zionist aggression, and, as they were expelled, maintain their right to return. Sources sympathetic to the Arab viewpoint have seen in the events of 1948 the fulfilment of a long dreamed-of Zionist plan to rid Palestine of its Arab population, thus forcibly transforming Palestine into a Jewish state.<sup>2</sup>

For a historian who investigates this question for the sake of historical knowledge, and not to score propaganda points, it is essential to understand the biases built into the topic and develop criteria for selecting that which is useful history and that which is incidental or irrelevant.

Aside from the fact that most of the history written on this topic is inherently biased, there are other factors which must also be recognized if one is to better understand the writings on this subject.

The first involves the question of nomenclature. Both Marc Bloch and E.H. Carr have argued that the very use of words destroys the writer's neutrality and forces him to take sides.<sup>3</sup> Thus what is liberation to one becomes conquest to another; the Israelis talk about the "invasion of their country" by the Arab states' armies, whereas from the Arab viewpoint, these armies were sent to "rescue Palestine and its inhabitants from Zionist aggression and restore peace." In discussing the refugees, the term "expulsion" is frequently used. Does this necessarily mean that Zionist forces required the inhabitants to leave, or is it sufficient to prove that Zionist activities so intimidated the Arab population that the resulting terror caused a mass exodus? The answer is one which each historian must independently decide on, but it is essential to recognize how the same term can be used differently.<sup>4</sup>

Even more striking is the fact that the same sources can be used to prove totally conflicting points. For example, Marie Syrkin, a Zionist writer, cites an article in *al-Shaab*, January 30, 1948, criticizing the wealthy Arabs who were leaving as proof that these Arabs left when they did in anticipation of an eventual Arab victory. This and other like articles which Syrkin cites have been used by authors intent on proving that the Arabs were urged to stay,

<sup>2</sup> Authors who maintain this position include Nafez Nazzal, Erskine Childers, Walid Khalidi and Fayez Sayegh.

<sup>3</sup> Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York: Vintage Books, 1953), pp. 158 ff., and E.H. Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> For my purposes, I shall restrict the term "expulsions" to those cases where the inhabitants were forcibly evicted from their homes. In the more frequent cases where indirect methods were used, they shall be indicated as such. It should be noted, though, that the desired ends, that is, the elimination of the native Arab population, would be the same in either case, and would have been initiated in either case by the Zionists and not the Arabs.

even in this early phase.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, many quotes can be taken out of context and made to fit the particular point which the author is trying to make.

Also to be recognized are problems dealing with the protagonists which point up the unique nature of this phenomenon. The Palestinians who left in 1948 are frequently referred to as "refugees." This term is commonly accepted to mean civilians who leave their homes in wartime. What is unique about these "refugees" is that they did not want to leave their homes and for 31 years have refused to consider any arrangements which do not include provisions for their return. The Germans who fled from the USSR after World War II, the Hindus and Muslims who fled from Pakistan and India respectively in 1947, and the Jews who left Arab countries after 1948 all have no wish to return to their former countries; the Palestinians wish only to return. Moreover, whatever the original causes of the exodus were, since August 1948 the Israeli government has been on record as refusing to allow this return. Thus when we speak of "refugees" it must be understood that we are not using this term in the traditional sense.

Another observation frequently made is that at the time Arab civilians were fleeing, Zionist civilians were holding firm and remained at their homes. Zionist propaganda has exploited this occurrence in an attempt to portray a deeper commitment to the land by the Zionists. Additionally, Israeli public opinion has maintained that as the Arabs planned to massacre the Jews, when the Jews began winning the war the Arabs fled, fearing the same treatment would be suffered on them. On closer analysis, these positions are exposed as myths. It is not at all unusual for a civilian population to temporarily abandon its homes during war, especially if it is under attack from a superior armed force. This is a normal wartime pattern. What was unique was the Zionist tenacity in holding on to so many of its settlements, regardless of the odds, because of the Zionist belief that the only choice was to hold out to the last. The concept of *eyn breirah*, no alternative, accounted for some strategically unsound but psychologically uplifting results. The Zionist sense of desperation has been part of that community's character for much of its existence. It was the Zionist civilians who behaved in an atypical

<sup>5</sup> The *al-Shaab* article, as well as another in *al-Sarih*, March 30, 1948, is cited in Marie Syrkin, "The Arab Refugees: A Zionist View," in *Commentary*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (1966), p. 23. Erskine Childers has maintained that these articles are typical of the Arab urging of the population not to leave and regarding those who did leave unfavourably. Erskine Childers, "The Wordless Wish: From Citizens To Refugees," in *The Transformation of Palestine*, ed. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), p. 181.

manner and did not follow the normal course of civilians in wartime.<sup>6</sup>

With these caveats in mind, seven criteria will be proposed to judge the historical material relating to the Palestinian exodus. While attempts at impartiality will be made, it is recognized that in simply choosing these criteria, a subjective decision has been made. Moreover, if a historical work does not touch on all seven points, it should not necessarily be regarded as inferior, because the work might not have been comprehensive by design.<sup>7</sup> Even works which ignore most of these criteria could still contain useful facts if not useful ideas. The seven then are given as an overall guide for evaluating the wealth of literature on the subject, for distinguishing the most comprehensive and valuable works and for identifying those key parts of this historical problem which must be dealt with in order to understand the 1948 Palestinian exodus.

#### EVALUATION OF HISTORICAL WORKS

In order to make some sense of the conflicting and often contradictory reports that are presented, it is necessary to define certain criteria by which these reports can be measured. Only in this way can there be some standard for comparison, albeit a subjective standard. The following seven criteria are presented as a guide with which to evaluate the usefulness of the various writings.

##### *1. Content of the Work Itself*

This first section examines the writings by using the more general and familiar methods of historical criticism. It is an attempt to evaluate these sources on the basis of their qualitative content. We are concerned here that the authors provide positive evidence, that the quotes which the author cites are in keeping with the general tenor of the sources from which the quotes are cited and that the sources themselves are supportable.

On the basis of this standard, the work of Erskine Childers would rank as among the strongest. For years, Israeli historians have maintained that the Arabs were made to leave following instructions from their leaders, and

<sup>6</sup> See Uri Avnery, *Israel Without Zionism: A Plan for Peace in the Middle East* (New York: Collier Books, 1971), p. 226. The fact that the Zionists conducted total war, with their civilian population fully mobilized, while the Arab civilian population was not, is also noted in Musa Alami, "The Lesson of Palestine," in *Middle East Journal*, Vol. III, No. 4 (1949), p. 380.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Nafez Nazzal, "The Flight of the Palestinian Arabs from the Galilee 1948: An Historical Analysis" (Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University, 1974). This work does not deal with all the geographic locations in Palestine which saw a civilian exodus because the thesis is only concerned with events in the Galilee.

despite the best efforts of the Zionists to persuade them to stay, they chose to leave.<sup>8</sup> Some went so far as to maintain that these alleged evacuation orders were broadcast on Arab radio stations.<sup>9</sup> Childers studied radio broadcast transcripts from the relevant time period and found that not only were there no orders to evacuate, but in fact the populace was continually urged to remain. This is positive evidence which directly contradicts the Zionist position.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, at the same time that Arab radio stations were appealing to the inhabitants not to leave, Zionist radio stations were urging the population to flee, by exaggerating the course of battle, and, in some cases, fabricating complete lies.<sup>11</sup>

More positive evidence is presented by Walid Khalidi. In his article "Why Did the Palestinians Leave?"<sup>12</sup> the author discusses steps taken by Arab governments to prevent Palestinians from leaving, ensuring that they remain to fight, including the denial by Lebanon and Syria of residence permits to Palestinian males of military age on April 30 and May 6 respectively. Also cited are Arab radio broadcasts urging the inhabitants of Palestine to remain and discussing plans for an Arab administration there. Khalidi then points to the Zionist "psychological offensive" which was highlighted by, though not limited to, radio messages warning the Arabs of diseases, the ineffectiveness of armed resistance and the incompetence of their leaders.<sup>13</sup>

Zionist historians have been hard pressed to come up with much concrete, factual evidence to bear out their position. As stated, much of the Zionist case has rested on the theory that the Palestinians were ordered to leave by their leaders, a claim which has been difficult for them to substantiate, as evidence is lacking.

Quotes have been used to a great extent in the literature of this question. It is not very difficult to search through a document or article, pick out a few sentences which support one's position, and then present this as evidence. In order to judge the value of these quotes, it is necessary to examine them in the context of which they were made.

In this regard Childers has again contributed greatly towards a clearer understanding of the matter. The common practice of Zionist works is to cite several lines from an Arabic newspaper as "evidence" that the exodus

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Joseph Schectman, *The Arab Refugee Problem* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Marie Syrkin, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> See Erskine Childers, "The Other Exodus," in *The Spectator*, No. 6933, May 12, 1961, p. 672.

<sup>11</sup> Childers, "The Wordless Wish," pp. 186-87. The period under discussion is April to mid-May, 1948.

<sup>12</sup> Walid Khalidi, "Why Did The Palestinians Leave?" in *Middle East Forum*, Vol. XXXV, No. 7 (1959), pp. 21-24, 35.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-24.

was the work of the Arabs themselves. Schectman, for example, offers quotes from the Lebanese weekly *Kul Shay*, from *al-Huda*, a Maronite newspaper published in the United States, and several statements made by various Arab officials, among them Emil al-Ghoury, at the time Secretary of the Arab Higher Committee, and Msgr. George Hakim, Greek Catholic Bishop of Haifa and Galilee. These quotes and statements all imply Arab complicity in, if not initiation of, the exodus.<sup>14</sup> Childers went back to these sources, checking them for the full meaning, and found that they were taken out of context. In fact on closer examination, these statements were meant to indicate the opposite of what the Zionists tried to imply. What had in effect happened was that by carefully selecting those words which fit their story, these Zionist historians had edited history.<sup>15</sup>

Some positive evidence supporting the Zionist claims does exist, although it is not very extensive. The Zionists maintain that efforts were made to persuade the Arabs to stay via radio appeals and even leafleting of villages, in the early phase of the war.<sup>16</sup> Zionist efforts to convince the Arab population of Haifa and Zichron Ya'akov to stay were also made, in this case because Arab labour was seen as vital to maintaining the economies of these places.<sup>17</sup>

Interestingly enough, some of the strongest evidence for the Arab position comes from Zionist Israeli sources. This is more clearly understood when one examines the intended audience: pro-Zionist writers in the West are addressing an indifferent or hostile reading public and will offer no evidence which may prejudice their case. Books published in Israel, written in Hebrew, are aimed primarily at the domestic audience, and tend to be considerably franker. Thus we can cite Yigal Allon's description of *Palmach* plans to force the exodus of Galilean Arabs:

The long battle had weakened our forces and before us stood great duties of blocking the routes of the Arab invasion. We therefore looked for means which did not force us into employing force, in order to cause the tens of thousands of sulky

<sup>14</sup> These quotations and statements, which appear in other Zionist histories as well, are cited in Schectman, pp. 9-10. See also Leo Kohn, "The Arab Refugees," in *The Spectator*, No. 6938, June 16, 1961, p. 872.

<sup>15</sup> See Childers, "The Wordless Wish," pp. 197-98.

<sup>16</sup> Leafleting is discussed in Schectman, p. 2, and Uri Avnery, p. 221. Avnery's explanation, that the Zionists sought to calm international opinion, is more credible than Schectman's, which sees efforts largely as simple goodwill gestures.

<sup>17</sup> See David Cairnes, letter to the editor, in *The Spectator*, No. 6940, June 30, 1961, p. 950. The Zionist claim has always rested to a great degree on what transpired in Haifa. The dramatic appeal by the Jewish mayor to persuade the inhabitants to remain is cited as representative of the positive intentions of the Zionists. While this appeal was no doubt genuine, it would seem to have been atypical as regards the rest of Palestine, and must also be viewed in the total context of the battle for Haifa. See Childers, "The Wordless Wish," p. 190.

Arabs who remained in the Galilee to flee, for in case of an Arab invasion they were likely to strike us in the rear.

I gathered all the Jewish mukhtars who had contact with Arabs in different villages, and asked them to whisper in the ears of some Arabs that a great Jewish reinforcement had arrived in Galilee and that it was going to burn all the villages of the Huleh. They should suggest to these Arabs, as their friends, to escape while there is still time.<sup>18</sup>

More recently, Yitzhak Rabin published his memoirs in which he described the Israeli conquest of Lod (Lydda):

We walked outside, Ben-Gurion accompanying us. Allon repeated his question "What is to be done with the population?" B.G. waved his hand in a gesture which said "Drive them out!"

Allon and I held a consultation. I agreed that it was essential to drive the inhabitants out. We took them on foot towards the Bet Horon road, assuming that the legion would be obliged to look after them, thereby shouldering logistic difficulties which would burden its fighting capacity, making things easier for us.... The population of Lod did not leave willingly. There was no way of avoiding the use of force and warning shots in order to make the inhabitants march the 10 to 15 miles to the point where they met up with the legion.<sup>19</sup>

In examining these sources on their merits, that is whether they provide positive evidence rather than disputing other evidence and whether the quotes are in keeping with the tenor of the source from which it is quoted, we find that there is more material to support the Palestinian view of history than the Zionist view. To be sure, each historian will have to weigh these materials by his own standards, but it would seem that taken in isolation, the sources themselves give more credence to the theory that the Palestinians were made to leave, either directly or indirectly expelled, rather than to the Zionist claim that the orders of Arab leaders induced the exodus. A more carefully defined exploration of these positions will be made in the next section, which presents the thesis that the exodus must be viewed in three distinct phases, each with different factors and motivations in operation.

## 2. *The Three Phases*

The Palestinian exodus began soon after the UN Partition Resolution was passed on November 29, 1947, and continued even after the Armistice Agreements were signed between Israel and the Arab states in early and

<sup>18</sup> Allon, former commander of the *Palmach*, is quoted in Walid Khalidi, "Plan Dalet - The Zionist Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine," in *Middle East Forum*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 9 (1961), p. 28, and Childers, "The Wordless Wish," p. 192.

<sup>19</sup> This portion of Rabin's memoirs, censored in the official edition, was published in the *New York Times* (October 23, 1979) and was reprinted in *Palestine Perspectives*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (October 1979), p. 11.



mid-1949. It is impossible to understand the exodus without examining it in phases, determining who left, what their motivations were for leaving, and who wanted them out in each phase. Although there is some overlap, nearly all the authors who distinguish phases speak of them as follows: Phase One, from November 29, 1947 to mid-March 1948; Phase Two, from late March to May 15, 1948, and Phase Three, from May 15, 1948 onwards.<sup>20</sup>

In the first phase, the number of Palestinians who left was small when taken as a percentage of the total population who eventually were displaced. Estimates run as high as 30,000, but when compared to a total of 700,000, this was clearly a minor wave.<sup>21</sup> Most of the sources agree that this was a movement of upper and middle-class Palestinians, whose motivation was to temporarily absent themselves from the growing chaos in Palestine. It has been noted that well-to-do Arabs had taken an "extended vacation" to Lebanon or Egypt in the earlier fighting of 1936-39. With this option open, it should not be surprising that many who had the opportunity to leave would do so again.<sup>22</sup>

In this same period, the Zionists may have had some motivation for preventing the exodus from becoming widespread. The Zionists were determined to prove to world opinion that the Partition Resolution was reasonable and workable. Second thoughts already were being expressed by both Britain and the US as to the advisability of turning over nearly half of Palestine to the Zionists — an area in which 46 percent of the population would still be Arab. The violent Arab reaction to the Partition Plan and the willingness of the local population to resist caused second thoughts at the UN and elsewhere, thoughts which the Zionists were anxious to dispel. However in examining the writings there are conflicting reports of Zionist actions. Avnery and Gabbay state that as events were getting progressively worse, the Zionists engaged in a holding pattern, while Childers maintains that even at this point, the population was being intimidated by psychologically demoralizing broadcasts and other warnings. In any event, it can be safely said that the Zionists did not encourage large scale emigration during the first phase.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Those who distinguish phases include Avnery, Childers ("The Wordless Wish"), Rony Gabbay in *A Political Study of the Arab-Jewish Conflict* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1959), and William Polk, David Stamler and Edmund Asfour in *Backdrop to Tragedy — The Struggle for Palestine* (Boston: Beacon Hill Press, 1957).

<sup>21</sup> Polk, Stamler, Asfour, p. 290.

<sup>22</sup> This movement of upper and middle-class Palestinians is discussed in Gabbay, p. 65, and Schectman, p. 5. It must be emphasized that these early departees confidently expected the situation to improve with either the entry of the Arab armies to put down Zionist activity or the reimposition of British mandatory authority. The fact that at no time was it considered that Palestine might fall to the Zionists will be elaborated on below.

<sup>23</sup> Avnery, p. 221; Gabbay, p. 68, and Childers, "The Wordless Wish," p. 181.

The first phase ended with the US announcement to the United Nations that it was changing its support from the partition plan to a trusteeship for Palestine. Although the writings differ on the motivations for the exodus in this new phase, it is clear that it was in this period, late March to mid-May, that the first main exodus took place.

The traditional Zionist sources do not distinguish phases; nonetheless it is usually to this period which they attribute the Arab leaders' alleged calls for a mass evacuation.<sup>24</sup> As stated, Childers' research demolished much of this argument by proving that, if anything, the population was being urged to remain. In fact, it was at this time, before the Mandate had formally ended, that the Zionists went on the offensive, hoping to achieve a *fait accompli* by seizing as much of Palestine as possible.

As the fighting increased, terrorist activity on both sides escalated dramatically as well. Although atrocities and massacres were not unusual, the barbarous extermination of the village of Deir Yassin by Irgun and Stern Gang terrorists became symbolic to much of the population of the kind of war it was fighting and the type of enemy it was opposing. Despite the public disavowal by Ben-Gurion and the Jewish Agency, the impression left behind was not easily erased, especially given the fact that Deir Yassin had been a peaceful village and had deliberately tried to stay out of the war.<sup>25</sup>

It is clear that in this second phase large numbers of Palestinians fled their homes. What is under dispute is whether this was directly the result of Zionist intimidation or whether the Arabs became so taken up by their own fear that they fled, to the surprise of the Zionists. As both offer ample documentation, I believe this point is worth investigating.

Among those who blame Arab news reports for the resulting panic flight are Polk *et al.* and Gabbay. They maintain that the Arabs overstated the case of Zionist atrocities, made the situation seem worse than it was and thus caused the population to flee, rather than to fight harder, as was hoped. Gabbay, in particular, has assembled an impressive listing of sources which describe Zionist cruelty and savagery.<sup>26</sup>

Childers maintains that it was the Zionists who disseminated these stories, at the time when the Arab sources were urging calm. He cites carefully composed "horror recordings" in which a voice calls out in Arabic for the population to escape because "the Jews are using poison gas and atomic

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, David Ben-Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1971), pp. 66-73.

<sup>25</sup> The mounting level of violence and its effect on the population is discussed in Avnery, p. 223; Polk, Stamler, Asfour, p. 291, and Childers, "The Wordless Wish," pp. 182-85.

<sup>26</sup> These include newspaper articles from four different publications over a four week period, plus Arab delegation reports at the United Nations. Gabbay, p. 90.

weapons."<sup>27</sup> Additionally, he refers to radio broadcasts by the Zionists designed to demoralize the Arab audience.<sup>28</sup>

In this case, I am inclined to prefer Childers because the sources he cites would have reached the masses, who would then react accordingly. Radio was the most widely used form of communication, and the "horror recordings" were broadcast on the scene. Gabbay's evidence, newspapers and UN documents, were designed for outside consumption, by diplomats and politicians abroad and by the educated and influential Arab decision makers. This is not the kind of material which would necessarily have been in the hands of the common Palestinian. Thus I believe that Childers' contention, claiming that Zionist provocation had more to do with causing the exodus than backfiring atrocity propaganda, is borne out.

We have further evidence from Avnery. The author postulates that in this phase conflicting policies were considered by the Zionists — some trying to persuade the Arabs to remain, as in Haifa, but most encouraging the population to leave. Avnery cites a carefully made statement by Yigal Allon in which he stated, "While planning the capture of the Arab part of Safed, it was not our intention to prevent the flight of the Arab population." Avnery goes on to discuss battle plans from the Israeli Army archives which show that certain combat brigades had orders to expel the population in preparation for the expected Arab army invasion.<sup>29</sup>

The third phase began with the proclamation of Israeli statehood. Here all but the most biased of Zionist works agree that expulsion became standard policy and was carried out systematically. The reports of expulsion will be dealt with in greater detail below; here it is sufficient to state the Zionist motivations.

If there was any value left to the effect world opinion had on the Zionist community, it had long evaporated by May 15. The Zionists adopted a cynical attitude, maintaining that as the UN had done nothing to establish a Jewish state by force, and left this task solely to the Zionists themselves, they owed the UN and the world nothing and were free to pursue any policy which was expedient and which they could get away with. Moreover, the war was now being fought against regular Arab armies and the sense of desperation grew more acute. It was in this period that intimidation was openly practised and direct expulsion was carried out when the inhabitants did not leave willingly.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Cited in Childers, "The Wordless Wish," p. 188.

<sup>28</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 186-87, on Zionist radio broadcasts from mid-April through mid-May and compared to Arab radio broadcasts urging calm and warning against mass flight.

<sup>29</sup> Allon is quoted and the battle plans are discussed in Avnery, pp. 223-24.

<sup>30</sup> See Avnery, p. 224; Childers, "The Wordless Wish," p. 109, and Polk, Stamler, Asfour, p. 294.

Thus while the results were the same in all three phases — the uprooting of the native population from its homes and its displacement to other parts of Palestine or the Middle East — the motivations varied through the phases. So too did the people who left and the forces that acted to cause the exodus. By discussing the exodus in these phases, a clearer understanding of the historical events is possible. Thus, unless a historical work is specifically interested in examining only one particular period, it should acknowledge the variety of factors which attended these three separate periods.

### 3. *The Nature of the Conflict and the Flight*

A critical analysis of the Palestinian exodus must accurately and, at times, graphically, illustrate precisely the nature of the conflict which led to the exodus. Specifically, this criterion would deal with describing the fear and terror felt by the civilian population, the mutilations and atrocities which were a regular feature of the war and the nature of the flight itself — one of mass panic.

One of the greatest weaknesses of the traditional Zionist argument, which attempts to explain the exodus as a careful, calculated and organized plan by various Arab authorities, is that it cannot account for the totally disorganized way in which the exodus occurred.<sup>31</sup> Indeed as John Glubb has observed,

Voluntary emigrants do not leave their homes with only the clothes they stand up in. People who have decided to move house do not do so in such a hurry that they lose other members of their family — husband losing sight of his wife, or parents of their children. The fact is that the majority left in panic flight.<sup>32</sup>

The 1948 war itself was replete with an abnormal degree of terror; as described by Avnery, “the rules of civilized warfare did not apply. It was rather a violent collision between two movements of almost religious fervour — one, colonizing Zionism, the other, xenophobic nationalism. Each sought

<sup>31</sup> For example, Syrkin states, “the development of the exodus as well as Arab statements indicate that the flight was at first stimulated by the Arab leaders to inflame the populace (since the Palestinian Arabs had shown little stomach for battle) to create an artificial ‘refugee’ problem which would elicit world sympathy to counterbalance the claims of Jewish refugees and to prepare the ground for invasion by the Arab states who could then appear as the saviours of their brethren. An additional reason was no doubt the desire to evacuate Arab civilians from territory which the Arab states expected to bomb.” Syrkin, p. 24. The portrayal of a deliberate plan to induce the Palestinians to leave is also given in Schechtman, pp. 6-7, and Kohn, p. 872.

<sup>32</sup> John Glubb, *A Soldier With The Arabs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957), p. 251.

to destroy the other. This kind of war degenerates easily into a battle of extermination."<sup>33</sup>

The terror felt by the population was helped along by Zionist psychological tactics. Radio broadcasts sought to undermine morale and give the impression that Palestinian resistance was futile. Civilian populations were warned of alleged impending epidemics as well as alleged dissension in the ranks of the Arab forces.<sup>34</sup> Later, rumours were spread by the Israeli forces that they possessed the atomic bomb.<sup>35</sup>

Given the nature of the fighting, the increasing terror of the population and the Zionist efforts to build on that terror, it is inconceivable that the exodus would be anything but one of mass panic and uncontrollable flight. Despite efforts by Arab authorities to halt this tide, the Palestinians fled in terror.

Walid Khalidi, in discussing the exodus from Haifa, describes how "hundreds of people blocked the narrow lanes and pushed and heaved against one another, each trying to save himself and his children. Many children, women and old men fainted and were trampled by the surging crowds."<sup>36</sup> This report is also mentioned in Childers' article, which adds, "the flight to the harbour... with drowning in overloaded boats was accompanied by clearly directed Zionist firing on them [the refugees]."<sup>37</sup>

Fear and panic were as prevalent in the countryside as in the large cities, such as Haifa. Nafez Nazzal, in his description of the Galilean exodus, gives as an example the flight from one village: "The villagers of Ghuweir Abu-Shusha were persuaded by the neighbouring Jewish mukhtars to leave to Syria.... The villagers heard how ruthless and cruel the Jews were to the people of Deir Yassin and the nearby village of Nasr ed Din. They were not prepared to withstand the Jewish attack and decided to accept their neighbours' advice and leave."<sup>38</sup> Even Gabbay, whose analysis is, on the whole, critical of the Palestinian position, agrees that "the way in which

<sup>33</sup> Avnery, p. 220. Commenting on the Deir Yassin massacre, Avnery says: "... while Deir Yassin became a symbol, it was by no means an isolated incident. Killings of this nature had been perpetrated by both sides previously and many more took place subsequently.... Civilians of both sides expected to be annihilated if they fell into enemy hands" (p. 223).

<sup>34</sup> Zionist terror tactics are discussed in Khalidi, "Why Did the Palestinians Leave?" p. 24, as well as Childers, "The Wordless Wish," pp. 186-89. Both cite extensive evidence of Zionist pressure tactics.

<sup>35</sup> Childers, "The Wordless Wish," p. 187.

<sup>36</sup> Walid Khalidi, "The Fall of Haifa," in *Middle East Forum*, Vol. XXXV, No. 10 (December 1959), p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> Childers, "The Wordless Wish," pp. 188-89.

<sup>38</sup> Nafez Nazzal, p. 220. In discussing the exodus from Tiberias, Nazzal writes that "the panic-stricken Arabs accepted the offer [of safe conduct by the British] because they had heard what had happened at Deir Yassin and in the adjoining villages of El Manara and Nasr ed Din" (p. 221).

groups and even members of the same families fled, individually and in different directions, can give us an idea of the degree of panic and horror which was felt amongst them."<sup>39</sup>

Finally there is the testimony of Count Bernadotte, the UN mediator in Palestine, who reported that "the exodus of the Palestinian Arabs resulted from panic created by fighting in their communities, by rumours concerning real or alleged acts of terrorism, or expulsion. Almost the whole of the Arab population fled or was expelled from the area under Jewish occupation."<sup>40</sup>

In short, the overwhelmingly disastrous and horrifying nature of the war in Palestine, breeding numerous atrocities and massacres, giving rise to mass fear and panic, and aided by Zionist efforts to exploit to the fullest this growing fear and panic, created not an orderly exodus but a mass flight of civilians throughout the country. One must clearly understand the type of "evacuation" this was. Thus the sources which attempt to portray an orderly "departure" of the Palestinian population, for whatever reason this "departure" is alleged to have taken place, cannot be viewed with the same amount of credence as those which accurately describe the real terror that attended the exodus.

#### *4. Geographical Distinctions*

The motivations for the exodus, as well as the way in which the exodus occurred, varied as much by region as by time phase. A comprehensive analysis of the flight of the Palestinians must take this distinction into account as well.

The Childers article is the most specific in this regard, dealing with individual cities and towns. The author discusses the events leading up to the flight and the process by which it took place in specific locations throughout Palestine. Unlike others who are inclined to make blanket statements, Childers carefully documents the particulars of each major exodus, citing numbers of civilians and the methods employed to cause their flight. These ranged from prolonged siege and psychological warfare as in Jaffa and Acre, to outright expulsion, as in Lydda and Ramleh.<sup>41</sup> The differences in location are important to note, for a favourite trick of apologetic writers seems to be to focus on one place where the train of events followed the

<sup>39</sup> Gabbay, p. 93.

<sup>40</sup> This observation by Count Folke Bernadotte is frequently cited not only as an example of descriptions of panic, but also as evidence that the Zionists pursued a policy of expulsion. UN Progress Report, September 16, 1948, part one, paragraph 6; part three, paragraph 1.

<sup>41</sup> Childers, "The Wordless Wish," pp. 188-94.

author's description and then attempt to pass this off as representative of the situation throughout Palestine.

An example of the latter is Schechtman's tendency to cite statements (irrespective of their value) without qualifying them by specifying what region, town or city they are applicable to. Rarely is a location given at all, and when one is given, there is no reason to believe that the author intends the example to be limited to that location.<sup>42</sup> Another example is provided in the writing of Leo Kohn, a former political adviser to the Israeli Foreign Ministry. He essentially repeats the same arguments as does Schechtman, quoting from the same statements, and like the former, he refuses to draw any distinction between experiences in various places.<sup>43</sup> On the Arab side, the analysis offered by Fayez Sayegh totally ignores geographic details as well.<sup>44</sup>

Before leaving this category, special mention should be made of the work of Nazzal. Although the study sought to deal only with the situation in the Galilee, the author did an extremely thorough analysis of many of the towns and villages in this region and the facts behind the exodus in each. In discussing specific places, Nazzal shows that the population responded in different ways, based largely on the nature of the Zionist assault. In some villages indirect psychological pressure or war conditions were sufficient to cause an exodus; elsewhere attacks on villages and enforced expulsion were employed.<sup>45</sup>

Once it is determined that circumstances and results varied from place to place, we can appreciate the value of a work which deals with geographic distinctions. Indeed, with such a work, one can hope to search accurately for true patterns, rather than be condemned to a simple statement which does not indicate how common or how relevant the occurrence described therein really was.

### *5. Expulsion as a Cause of the Exodus*

Although many of the facts concerning Arab and Zionist motivations and actions are open to interpretation, it is clear that at some point, direct expulsion was employed by the Zionists. The degree to which this well-documented fact is acknowledged by the writer will serve as another criterion for analysing the work. Writings which ignore or deny that expulsion took place

<sup>42</sup> Schechtman, pp. 6-10.

<sup>43</sup> Kohn, pp. 872-73.

<sup>44</sup> Fayez Sayegh, *The Palestine Refugees* (Washington, D.C.: Amara Press, 1952), pp. 7-16.

<sup>45</sup> Nazzal, pp. 219-25. Examples of villages where the population was attacked and/or expelled are Saffuriyya, Safsaf, al-Tabigha and al-Sanakiya.

cannot be taken very seriously, nor can those which claim direct expulsion was the sole cause of the Palestinian exodus.

It is clear that by the third phase, that is, from May 15, 1948 onwards, expulsion of Palestinians became a regular practice. Avnery, explaining the Zionist rationale, says,

I believe that during this phase, the eviction of Arab civilians had become an aim of David Ben-Gurion and his government.... UN opinion could very well be disregarded. Peace with the Arabs seemed out of the question, considering the extreme nature of the Arab propaganda. In this situation, it was easy for people like Ben-Gurion to believe the capture of uninhabited territory was both necessary for security reasons and desirable for the homogeneity of the new Hebrew state.<sup>46</sup>

The expulsion of civilians from Lydda and Ramleh are perhaps the best documented examples. Though direct expulsions had already taken place in other parts of the country,<sup>47</sup> these were the largest and hence the most notorious. Although the exact number of civilians expelled is not known (the normal peacetime population was supplemented by refugees from other locales), estimates range from 75,000 to 100,000.<sup>48</sup> According to Childers' description, which is largely corroborated by Rabin,<sup>49</sup>

On July 11, Moshe Dayan led a jeep commando column into the town of Lydda with rifles, Stens and submachine guns blazing. It coursed through the main streets, blasting at everything that moved.... The corpses of Arab men, women and even children were strewn about in the streets in the wake of this ruthlessly brilliant charge. Next day, the adjoining town of Ramleh was seized. All Arab men of military age were rounded up and penned into special enclosures. Israeli loud-speaker vans then toured the two towns announcing that neither food nor water would be provided and that the Arabs had 48 hours to get out to Transjordan. Israeli troops then began sacking both towns. On July 13, the loudspeakers gave final orders, naming the Kubah and the Hinda bridges as the exodus routes for Ramleh and Lydda respectively.<sup>50</sup>

Edgar O'Ballance, a military historian, adds,

Israeli vans with loudspeakers drove through the streets ordering all the inhabitants to evacuate immediately, and such as were reluctant to leave were forcibly ejected from their homes by the triumphant Israelis whose policy was now openly one of clearing out all the Arab civil population before them.... From the surrounding villages and hamlets, during the next two or three days, all the inhabitants were uprooted and set off on the road to Ramallah.... No longer was there any

<sup>46</sup> Avnery, pp. 224-25.

<sup>47</sup> See Polk, Stamler, Asfour, p. 293, on Israeli ejection of the population of Beit Jiz and Beit Susan villages, and Nazzal, p. 225, on expulsions from Galilean villages.

<sup>48</sup> Childers, "The Wordless Wish," p. 194.

<sup>49</sup> See above regarding Rabin's recently published memoirs, including the censored account of the Palestinian expulsion from Lydda and Ramleh.

<sup>50</sup> Childers, "The Wordless Wish," pp. 193-94.



“reasonable persuasion.” Bluntly, the Arab inhabitants were ejected and forced to flee into Arab territory.... Wherever the Israeli troops advanced into Arab country the Arab population was bulldozed out in front of them.<sup>51</sup>

Propagandist writers either ignore the expulsions completely or try to explain them away. Thus we have the comment by Harry Sacher that “all the inhabitants of both Lydda and Ramleh, as of all the captured villages, chose evacuation and took the road to Ramallah, carrying with them such belongings as they could.”<sup>52</sup> Syrkin can state, incredibly, that, “it should be noted that while it was not Haganah policy to encourage the exodus, some hostile villages threatening the road to Jerusalem were evacuated by individual Haganah commanders... a number of villages which served as bases for the enemy camped in the surrounding hills were forcibly cleared, and their inhabitants joined the exodus. But these were isolated instances, occurring late in the fighting, and involving numbers too small to affect the scope of the mass flight or to explain it.”<sup>53</sup> Finally, Schectman attributes Arab flight to “atrocious propaganda” and thus does not even address the numerous instances of Zionist attacks and expulsions of Palestinian civilians.<sup>54</sup>

Although direct expulsions were only one way in which the Palestinians were made to leave, the failure of an author to seriously consider them in his analysis can be taken to be a sign of an incomplete inquiry. The direct expulsion of Arab civilians from their homes was an important element in the overall exodus, and it is one which any serious author must deal with.

## 6. *The Role of Zionist Ideology*

Throughout this analysis thus far, no mention has been made of a single, all-encompassing motive for the exodus. Indeed it is still debatable as to whether there was one, or whether there were several, oft-times conflicting, motives present. However, after the exodus was over, the Israeli government refused, and to this day continues to refuse, to allow any significant repatriation of the Palestinians. If we are to consider Zionist ideology as providing a major motivation for causing the exodus, we must make a significant extrapolation — seeing in the Israeli refusal to permit repatriation

<sup>51</sup> Edgar O'Ballance, *The Arab-Israeli War 1948* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), pp. 147, 172.

<sup>52</sup> Harry Sacher, *Israel: The Establishment of a State* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1952), p. 279.

<sup>53</sup> Syrkin, p. 26. This brief apologetic reference to Zionist expulsion is the only one made in the entire article, which has nothing whatsoever to say about the cases of Ramleh and Lydda.

<sup>54</sup> Schectman, p. 13. The author states: “...the Arab population was particularly susceptible to such atrocious propaganda, to dire prophecies that the advancing Jewish forces would exterminate them without mercy. So deeply was the fear of Jewish reprisals and the severity of Jewish rule implanted among the Arab population that it survived the war period.”

the logical outcome of a policy which encouraged the displacement of the Arab population.<sup>55</sup>

There is evidence that Zionist leaders were already thinking about removal of the indigenous population before the actual occurrence. On February 7, 1948, Ben-Gurion told the Central Committee of Mapai (the largest Zionist political party in Palestine) "it is most probable that in the 6, 8 or 10 coming months of the struggle many great changes will take place, very great in this country and not all of them to our disadvantage, and surely a great change in the composition of the population in the country."<sup>56</sup>

Childers sees the inherent principles of Zionism, necessarily excluding an Arab population from Zionist society, as going back to the very origins of the ideology. One can argue whether the earliest steps which Childers discusses were aimed at the Arabs *per se*,<sup>57</sup> but it is clear that by the 1930's and into the 1940's, calls for the forcible transfer of Arabs out of Palestine were being made by the Zionist Revisionists and may well have been considered by the more moderate factions too.<sup>58</sup>

Also beyond dispute is the fact that the 1947 Partition Resolution awarded an area to the Jewish state whose population was 46 percent Arab. Moreover, much of this land was owned by Arabs.<sup>59</sup> It has been argued by the Zionists that they were prepared to make special accommodations for this large population; yet it is difficult to see how such accommodations could have coalesced with their plans for large-scale Jewish immigration; moreover, by August 1, 1948, the Israeli government had already stated that it was "economically unfeasible" to allow the return of the Arabs, at the very time when Jewish refugees were already entering the country and being settled on abandoned Arab property.<sup>60</sup>

If the ultimate aim of Zionism was to establish a homogeneous Jewish state in Palestine, or at least one with an insignificant Arab minority, then it

<sup>55</sup> Avnery does not see the exodus as a deliberate policy but does make this point regarding the return of the Palestinians: "Personally I believe that behind all the arguments against repatriation, plausible and senseless, there lies the basic ideal of Zionism: a homogeneous Jewish state, "as Jewish as England is English," as was said many times by Zionist leaders." Avnery, p. 227.

<sup>56</sup> Ben-Gurion is quoted in Gabbay, p. 110.

<sup>57</sup> Childers' citing of the 1901 Jewish National Fund prohibition on land sales to Arabs and the 1907 boycott of Arab labour as proof of inherent Zionist racism against the native population is debatable. Some historians have argued that these measures were aimed more *towards* the Jews, to prevent their evolution into an exploitative class, than *against* the Arab population.

<sup>58</sup> See Childers, "The Wordless Wish," pp. 166-77.

<sup>59</sup> Childers, "The Other Exodus," p. 675.

<sup>60</sup> Kohn, p. 872, states that the Jewish Agency was making special preparations to accommodate a large Arab population in the period before the mass exodus. Childers has questioned this assertion, given Foreign Minister Shertok's claim of "economic unfeasibility" on August 1, 1948, only several months after these provisions were allegedly made. Childers, "The Wordless Wish," p. 196, and "The Other Exodus," p. 673.

is almost a certainty that the Zionist leadership came to the conclusion that the mass of Palestinian Arabs would have to be removed from their homes, either forcibly or peacefully. As the Palestinians had never considered abandoning their land to foreigners, the Zionists would have been highly motivated to force them to leave.<sup>61</sup>

One can question to what extent Zionist ideology played a role in each phase and in each location where the exodus took place. Yet if one looks for a framework in which to understand Zionist actions and reactions, then this factor must be given considerable weight. Furthermore it can be stated with far more certainty that if Zionist ideology did not directly cause the exodus, it has kept it from being resolved, for so long as Israel remains a Zionist state, the readmission of a large Palestinian population is a contradiction in terms.

### *7. The Nature of Palestinian Society and Palestinian Resistance*

The last factor to be analysed is the structure of Arab society, its reaction to the war and its expectations throughout. Although this overview will only touch on the most salient points, it is necessary to take these into consideration, in order to understand how such vast numbers of people could be driven out of their homes and lands.

The first point which must be made is that the clash between the Zionists and the Palestinians was not one of equals. Although the Zionists possessed a smaller population, they made up for this weakness by possessing a better educated and more technologically sophisticated community. More importantly, when the British mandatory administration began to withdraw, the Zionists had ready-made governmental institutions, public services, as well as an army prepared, all of which had been created and developed during the Mandate. These military and administrative organs not only helped to keep the community cohesive but also boosted morale during the conflict.

Within the Arab society, these institutions did not exist in such an advanced form. Many governmental services broke down as the British left Palestine in chaos and this in turn hurt morale. Although steps were taken to counter this disadvantage, they were too late to prevent the outbreak of terror which gripped the Palestinian community.<sup>62</sup> The structure of society

<sup>61</sup> This point is made by Sayegh, p. 7 and by Polk *et al.*, who state that "once the notion that Palestine was 'empty derelict land' was exploded and it was realized as it was already in 1919, that the Arab population would never peacefully accept the imposition of Zionism, war and emigration were inevitable. If Palestine were to absorb a million or more Jewish refugees, something would have to give somewhere." Polk, Stamler, Asfour, p. 294.

<sup>62</sup> Khalidi states that government employees were urged by Damascus Radio, April 4, 1948, to stay on the job. On April 24, word came from Damascus that the Arab Higher Committee had decided to transfer its headquarters back into Palestine. Khalidi, "Why Did the Palestinians Leave?" p. 23.

was also a factor in the way the exodus was carried out – an all-out war had not been fought for generations in Palestine and many residents, expecting disaster, fled as their villages came under attack. Like other residents had done in past Middle Eastern conflicts, they sought to wait out the attack, and return when the situation had come back to normal. Of course, once they left, the Israelis refused to allow them to return.<sup>63</sup>

Even more directly related to the origins of the exodus was the type of resistance offered by the Palestinians and by those outside forces which came, according to their statements, to defend the Palestinian people against the Zionists.

A key point to be made is that while the Zionists planned a total war effort, and devoted all their energies to this goal, the Palestinians did not. The nature of Palestinian resistance to both the British and the Zionists in the past had always been in the form of guerrilla strikes, largely spontaneous and centring on the power and influence of the leaders.<sup>64</sup> Once the fighting began, this deficiency was acutely felt, and as the Zionists took the offensive, the lack of a unified Arab central command allowed them to concentrate on their targets selectively.<sup>65</sup> While the failure of military resistance to be effective cannot be blamed for the exodus itself, it is important to note as an ingredient which caused mass panic and terror.<sup>66</sup>

The Zionists had a further military advantage in that their well-trained and organized army, albeit unofficial, could operate in the months before the Mandate ended, whereas the armies of the Arab states could not enter Palestine until May 15, 1948. When these armies did enter the war, they too, like the indigenous fighters, suffered from a lack of unified command.

<sup>63</sup> The nature of Palestinian society and its implications for the exodus are discussed in Gabbay, pp. 86-88; Don Peretz, *Israel and the Palestine Arabs* (Richmond: William Byrd Press, 1956), pp. 7-8; Avnery, pp. 225-26, and Polk, Stamler, Asfour, p. 128.

<sup>64</sup> See Sayegh, p. 9, discussing the weaknesses of indigenous military resistance. Also see Musa Alami, pp. 374-79. Alami states, "We had no clear idea of total warfare, but were dominated by the ideas and methods of previous revolts. These had been, in the first instance, popular mass movements of general excitement and enthusiasm. Later there had developed revolutionary groups or bands, but the organization of these groups had been primitive.... When the struggle began, these groups were formed again with the same materials and elements on the same basis and with the same methods: no general support, no regular soldiers, no unity, no totality, no training, no defence, no good arms" (p. 378).

<sup>65</sup> Alami, p. 379. "Other places watched what was happening next to them and waited for their turn, and were unable to do anything because of their preoccupation with themselves, the lack of cooperation and of a common command. Thus the country fell, town after town, village after village, position after position, as a result of its fragmentation and lack of unity."

<sup>66</sup> Alami, p. 381. "If ultimately the Palestinians evacuated their country, it was not out of cowardice but because they had lost all confidence in the existing system of defence. They had perceived its weakness and realized the disequilibrium between their resources and organization, and that of the Jews."

Additionally, the Israelis possessed the interior lines, and could move about from front to front. Although over 300,000 Palestinians had already been uprooted by the time the Mandate ended, the failure of the Arab armies to secure victory led to still more disasters, as the Israeli forces, now on the offensive, began regularly to expel Arab civilians from newly occupied areas. Outclassed in the levels of training, quality and quantity of arms and essentially split regarding their overall goals, the Arab armies fell back, exposing still more Palestinians to the Israeli assaults. Again, the Arab military failure cannot be cited as a cause for the flight (as some Zionists have done), yet it contributed to the ever increasing sense of hopelessness and resignation, as well as sheer fear and horror which led to further mass flights and expulsions of Palestinian civilians.<sup>67</sup>

Above all, it must be remembered that although the Israeli victory led to the capture of even more land than the Partition Resolution allowed for, at the time any victory by the Zionists seemed remote, especially to the Arab community in Palestine. Although Zionist propaganda has greatly exaggerated this point, claiming that the Arabs must pay for their bad judgment, it remains to be said that, at least in the early stages, the belief in the ultimate triumph of Arab forces led the population to take some actions, or not take other actions, although they would have reversed these decisions had they realized the eventual disastrous outcome.

In the first phase, most of those who left were wealthy and influential members of the community who had significant property, commercial and professional interests in Palestine. These Palestinians were acting as they had twelve years earlier, when they temporarily left the country to avoid the conflict that was taking place in Palestine at that time.<sup>68</sup> It seems highly unlikely that these individuals, with such a great stake in the life of the community, would have left at all and would have abandoned most of their material possessions, including their houses, had they not expected to return within a month or two. Despite the growing danger of living in a country torn by war, it seems totally improbable that permanent exile would ever have been considered a reasonable price to pay for safety.

As the fighting progressed and efforts to halt the Zionist advances by indigenous resistance, as well as by the Arab Liberation Army, failed, the situation looked increasingly grim. Still, the belief that the combined forces of the Arab states' armies would rescue the country allowed many Palestinians to consider an option they would not have considered had they

<sup>67</sup> The weaknesses of the Arab armies are discussed in Polk, Stamler, Asfour, pp. 129 and 286, and Alami, pp. 382-87.

<sup>68</sup> Gabbay, p. 65. During the 1936-39 rebellion, 40,000 Palestinians left the country, returning when the fighting subsided.

known the ultimate outcome: namely, temporary evacuation. Again it is incomprehensible that evacuation would have been considered had these civilians not believed that with the entry of these forces, the Zionist advances would be reversed.<sup>69</sup> As Musa Alami observed, "Had the Palestinians been able to foresee their fate, they would have willingly given up all they possessed in order to preserve their country and avoid their exodus and dispersal."<sup>70</sup>

As the Israeli offensive increased, more and more civilians were uprooted, either through direct expulsions or by Israeli-inspired terror tactics. The inhabitants fled, usually retreating with the Arab armed forces, but still convinced that once the tide turned, they could return to their former homes. Only when the armistices were signed did it become evident that return was not imminent.<sup>71</sup> Even so, many Palestinians tried to get back across the new frontier to their former homes. The Palestinian people as a whole, to this day, have refused to abandon the hope of ultimately returning to Palestine.

In summary, while the nature of Palestinian society and Palestinian resistance cannot be held responsible for the exodus, one needs to understand it in order to fully comprehend how such a vast number of persons could be driven from their homes. In evaluating it we can get a better idea of the makeup of the combatants and the background to the mass exodus which took place.

## CONCLUSION

Although the preceding seven criteria have shed some light on our ability to know what happened and to evaluate the works which claim to be able to explain the events, the total picture is still not complete. Although the above standards are useful in weeding out the worst of the biased literature, it is in no way comprehensive. Moreover, even propaganda, though inherently distortive, can be instructive. If nothing else, it provides an idea of what each protagonist is trying to prove, and therefore what is to be read with caution. After reviewing Childers' work, which effectively negates the Zionist argument that the Palestinians were told to leave through radio orders, future

<sup>69</sup> See Alami, p. 381; also Fauzi al-Qawuqji, "Memoirs, 1948" in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. I, No. 4 (1972), p. 49, and Nazzari, p. 221. Discussing the exodus from Tiberias, Nazzari remarks: "They had also heard of the promised entry of the Arab armies into Palestine, and they expected a speedy Arab victory. Why should they risk death during the siege when they could leave now and return home in a month's time, upon the Arab victory in Palestine?"

<sup>70</sup> Alami, p. 387.

<sup>71</sup> Avnery, p. 226.

historians can look more critically at Zionist sources, aware of what can be regarded as propaganda.

As we have amply demonstrated by now, the Palestinian exodus was a complex affair, not given to easy answers. The many varieties of, and factors in, the exodus have been explored, yet there is no doubt that there is further and more detailed information which still has to come to the surface. Rabin's memoirs are a case in point; his corroboration of the Palestinian expulsion from Lydda and Ramleh endorses the Arab position and what might have been regarded by some as only a piece of the truth now rests on still more solid ground.

Unfortunately, the continuation of the Arab-Israeli conflict necessarily biases our historical view of the events of 1948, as each side pounces on any historical revelation which lends credence to its position. This is tragic for two reasons: from a strictly historical basis, the historian is subjected to pressures and distortions in his work as the present acts on his view of the past. More importantly, failure to resolve the conflict forces the tragedy to continue as the past is used to serve the present. So long as the protagonists refuse to break free of the past, the Palestinians continue to suffer in exile and Israel is condemned to be inevitably regarded as an alien to the Middle East which must be neutralized.

In its most simple, perhaps crudest form, the Palestinian exodus was the result of the establishment of a Zionist state with all that this entailed. The Zionist inability to conceive of a place for the native Arab population in its structure, its view of "the Arabs" as a single, irreconcilable foe and the desire to make the state "as Jewish as England is English" meant that the removal of the Palestinians was seen as a desirable outcome which should be actively or passively pursued. Justice and prudence both insist that Israel must reverse this ideology and attempt to rectify the past if it is ever to gain acceptance into the area. It should be clear to the Israelis that *faits accomplis* are in the long run self-defeating; Israel can only win peace by accommodating itself to the region and this must surely entail rectification of the continuing injustice and tragedy of the situation stemming from the Palestinian exodus of 1948.