

Author



Coterminous Companions: Nationalism, Class, and Arab- Jewish Cooperation in Mandatory Palestine

Kevin M. Smith

Anthropology

Abstract

This essay provides a brief overview of the development of nationalisms in Palestine, both Zionist and Palestinian, during the British Mandate as well as the transcendence of these essentialist narratives through anational working-class cooperation in the region. Contrasting the development of Zionism throughout the Jewish diaspora in Europe alongside the spread of various Arab nationalisms in the Middle East, I suggest that these nationalisms were not based on inherent rights to territory or primordial ties but instead coincide with the asymmetrically global spread of capital and the rise of territorial nation-states. Based on the labor history of Palestine, I describe the labor force throughout the mandate period and trace incidences of anational working-class cooperation between Jewish and Arab workers. These cases, although limited and often involving unfruitful strikes, offer alternatives to dominant intellectual approaches to the Zionist-Palestinian conflict as being one exclusively of incommensurable nationalisms.

Working under Professors Maurer and Mitchell, Kevin Smith has developed a study that he says is unique: a dual critique of Zionism and Palestinian nationalism, using social class as an analytical tool. Most current literature contributes to a perspective of the two populations as incommensurable national groups, which is not only inaccurate, given the historical incidences of class-based cooperation, but particularly debilitating for political activism and bringing about positive social change in the region today. Kevin followed his graduation from UCI by teaching English in Nablus, Palestine. He hopes to continue on to graduate school, pursuing a Ph.D. in History and Middle Eastern Studies.

Key Terms

- ♦ Class
- ♦ Colonialism
- ♦ Labor History
- ♦ Modernity
- ♦ Nationalism
- ♦ Palestine
- ♦ Zionism

Faculty Mentor



Kevin's paper is on a controversial and important topic, one that has arguably defined the tenor of Western relationships with the Middle East for much of the past hundred years. By delving into the origins of the Israel/Palestine conflict, however, Kevin also illuminates broader processes of state formation, economic class relationships, and power that complicate assessments of this

and other global flashpoints. Kevin has produced an essay that we think goes beyond traditional disciplines; this is an argument in itself for the value of academic research in addressing the world's most pressing problems. As his research mentors, we also benefited from the interdisciplinary conversation that Kevin helped to foster.



William M. Maurer

School of Social Sciences

Laura J. Mitchell

School of Humanities

*We were a people now we are of stone.
You were a country now you are of smoke.*
– Mahmoud Darwish

*We don't fight the wolf because of his color
or shape but because he eats our ewes.*
– Arab Workers' Congress, Palestine, 1946

Introduction

This essay deconstructs the rigid Zionist and Palestinian nationalisms represented in popular media and discourse by scrutinizing working-class cooperation between Jewish and Arab populations throughout the British mandate period in Palestine. The essay pays particular attention to Palestine's labor history as well as to larger social forces affecting the Middle East and beyond, including colonialism, modernization, and the spread of territorial nationalisms. I follow the ways in which colonialism affected aspirations for political sovereignty in the Arab world, transforming social relations from being subjects of the Ottoman Empire to modern nationalisms, and I trace the development of Zionism out of the distributed Jewish diaspora in Europe.

Commonly seen as inherently dichotomous, inflexible, and incommensurable, Jewish and Arab populations in Palestine have in reality been supple and interconnected. Descriptions of Zionist immigrants and the indigenous Palestinians as completely isolated from one another fail to account for interaction between both populations historically, which affected specific aspects of Zionist political organization, the processes of shifting land ownership, and the various forms and stages of Jewish and Palestinian discontent, nationalist narratives, and possibilities for a binational labor movement. Both populations have historically, since the first Zionist *aliya* (Hebrew for emigration, literally ascent) to Palestine at the turn of the twentieth century, interacted with and mutually reinforced each other to a substantial degree, which in turn helped shape each other's national identities in numerous ways (Khalidi, 1997; Lockman, 1996; Schulz, 1999).

The nationalist view of the conflict, whether Zionist or Palestinian, relies on problematic “mythmaking” national histories that seek to preserve a distinct national group throughout time, existing as an unchanging community and as isolated from national Others. Both Zionist and Palestinian nationalists use such myths, arguing that their present-day communities have shared a history and, concurring with a worldwide shift towards a grid of nation-states, that they require an exclusive nation-state of their own

(Gelvin, 2005). However, these nationalist histories are what Frederick Cooper (2005) refers to as “writing history backward,” as they search for the roots or origins of national communities and then project their current cohesiveness into the past, ignoring the fact that a Zionist or Palestinian nationalism was non-existent in political debates or communal identification before the late nineteenth century. Thus, nationalist narratives reinforce the view of history as a linear trajectory into the present, ignoring myriad historical turns and the human agency that can at any moment disrupt supposedly inevitable trajectories. Likewise, these narratives fail to acknowledge the purely social factors involved in creating, or fabricating, the national community, which in reality has no “primordial ties” in Clifford Geertz's (1996) sense, or natural or definitive characteristics sufficient to warrant categorization as a distinctive national community.

To consider the Zionist-Palestinian conflict as one belonging to an essentialized rivalry between two historically based nations disregards the fact that these groups did not exist as such prior to the late nineteenth century.¹ Further, viewing the conflict's history as one exclusively of violence and opposition between the two communities refutes the significance of non-violent interaction, and, as this essay demonstrates, cooperation in the labor movement. The essay recognizes the integral role of nationalist discourse in prolonging the conflict, but posits that the conflict itself is not rooted in an inevitable clash between Zionists and Palestinians. It seeks to highlight cases of interaction between members of the two communities to illustrate the weaknesses of their nationalist histories both as political devices and as historical narratives that gloss over the problematic, social basis of nationalist ideology.

Nationalism, Modernity, and Key Concepts

Colonialism's uneven and intermittently global spread transformed conceptions of space, time, and national identity. Nationalism has historically served as a driving force that “makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die” for their imagined national communities (Anderson 7). One

1. This paper relies on the well-documented sociological and anthropological understandings of the nation-state as a post-Westphalian construct, situated in the modern global-capitalist system. These understandings argue that nationalism is a recent social construction, is not synonymous with other previous forms of ethnic, tribal, linguistic, or religious affiliation, and is unique in its sense of “belonging” to a national community. Although the ancient state of Israel shared the same name as the modern nation-state, it differed in its political organization—it was ruled by monarchs, not by parliamentary bourgeois democracy—and in its social relations—personal allegiances rather than abstract commitment to a nation-state. See Anderson (1991) and Hobsbawm (1990) for a description of contemporary theories of nationalism.

of nationalism's most problematic aspects is its inherent exclusion of the other; its monopoly on history, collective memory, and political agency permits national elites to forcibly contrast their own polities against external populations (cf. Anderson, 1991; Eriksen, 2002; Hobsbawm, 1990; Malkki, 1997). This often violent separation between nationals and foreigners has allowed for the numerous institutions of control imposed upon non-national others throughout the past two centuries. The geopolitical grid of modern nation-states requires that each individual possess some form of citizenship or else suffer the consequences of exclusion like so many Palestinians, Roma (Gypsies), Kurds, Basques, and other stateless peoples—those who fall through the cracks of national boundaries and international sympathy as Liisa Malkki (1994) describes them.

Modernity and the rise of nationalisms have been given many tentative and inconclusive starting points; the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 is frequently credited as the beginning of the territorial nation-state, but this approach tends to arbitrarily locate modernity as existing after a clearly defined starting point, ignoring “modern” activities of empire-states in the “pre-modern” past, such as the use of the cadastral survey in the Chinese empire (Cooper 123). Yet, the modern nation-state qualitatively differs from earlier forms of states, such as empires and tribal confederations, due to its precise demarcation of national boundaries, its centralized power structure, its systematic, industrialized bureaucratic processes, its class structure, its production of a national sense of belonging through the standardization of time and language, and its citizen registry. However, Radhika Vyas Mongia (2003) points out that the nation-state is a political formation directly arising from the colonial empire-state: both share similarities in governmentality and chronological overlaps. Mongia describes the use of the passport in post-independence India as a measure created and imposed by the British Empire, leaving little distinction between territorial regulation policies of the “nation-state” of India and the “empire-state” of Great Britain.

Arising concurrently with the nation-state's newly demarcated territorial boundaries and state structures were territorial nationalisms themselves. Eric Hobsbawm (1990) makes the assertion that “[n]ations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round,” meaning that industrial state infrastructures provide the material basis for nationalist conceptions of a nation to arise; nations themselves, as imagined communities, do not precede and construct nationalist movements or states, “for the purposes of analysis nationalism comes before nations” (Hobsbawm 10). Benedict Anderson (1991) concluded that a national consciousness

was due in large part to the proliferation of print capitalism, permitting a wide audience to simultaneously consume the same media, novels, and literature, contributing to the conception of an imagined national community—what he refers to as “simultaneity” (Anderson 24). New conceptions of “foreign” and “national” statuses arose in conjunction with such transformations in conceptions of time, space, and social relations—regional differences, such as crossing national borders, were previously absent in collective perceptions of distance or territory.

Etienne Balibar (1991) describes the nation-building process as “producing the people,” whereby a fictive national community is fostered through the homogenization of language and race (Balibar 93). Such uniformity situates individuals in a public sphere in which they can communicate in the same language and perceive each other as belonging to the same race, thus solidifying the concept of a shared national community. Weldon Mathews refers to nationalisms as the “cultural response” to changes arising from the modern system of nation-states and industrialization (Mathews 42). Nationalist groups essentialize their cultural heritage in a variety of ways, considering their ties to land, language, religion, or other cultural traits as indelible, natural bonds, existing unchanged for centuries. In the case of Mandatory Palestine, the rise of nation-states throughout the region resulted in “a sense that the modern world was divided into nation-states and that the attainment of statehood was a normal and natural historical process” (Mathews 43). Fledgling Palestinian and Zionist nationalisms, fostered by the British Mandate, resulted in a desire for a nation-state based on views of themselves in the past and the present as cohesive, national units that were fitting puzzle pieces in a larger, newly established nation-state system.

Nationalism and Class

Nationalism, although invoking irreversible ties to the past, is a modern phenomenon that has suited the spread of colonialism and industrial capitalism in various ways. Immanuel Wallerstein (2001) describes how the nation-state has aided the flow of capital by facilitating trade, protecting internal markets and enterprises, and increasing its strength through taxation, patents, and managing property rights (Wallerstein 46). As it arises from conditions in the era of industrial capitalism and nation-states, nationalism is a political ideology that reinforces class exploitation by considering the nation as a unified community regardless of class differences, thus sublimating class based political action. This is particularly evident in anti-colonial nationalist movements, where recognized class differences were

generally blamed on the corruption of foreign capital and military occupation only, allowing upper-class nationalist leaders to maintain their class standings as putatively equal members of the nation.

In Cooper's (2005) chapter on the labor movement in post-WWII French West Africa, he describes the tumultuous relationship between national movements and class struggles. The nationalists channeled activism into conduits desiring an African nation autonomous of colonial rule, while the labor movement made varying demands and took many different trajectories, ranging from demands for equality with French citizens to proletarian internationalism. Similarly, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2002) describes the efforts by Indian nationalist elites during the inter-war period to mobilize peasants and workers against colonial rule but in favor of a sovereign Indian nation; efforts that excised the contribution and sentiments of the subalterns and replaced them with those of the nationalist elites. Chakrabarty discusses concurrence between Nehru's own Marxist sentiments and interest in a national, democratic Indian public sphere as opposed to an anational² construct (Chakrabarty 1992:49). But whereas Nehru saw Marxism as useful in critiquing British colonialism and as compatible with the nationalist movement, M.N. Roy, an Indian Marxist, was wary of "how anti-imperial the Indian capitalist class could be, given that it was born and bred in a colonial economic structure," while also doubting the gains for the working class that would arise from the Indian nationalist movement (Chakrabarty, 1992:49).

Palestine and the British Mandate

The region now referred to as Palestine was under Ottoman rule from the early sixteenth century until World War I. The name Filastin in Arabic did not come into use until the nineteenth century as British and other merchants began

to frequent the region through colonial trade routes and it became imperially administered in a precisely territorial fashion. Ottoman rule had loosely defined Palestine, the maghrib, and the Arabian Peninsula as a large, amorphous empire, in contrast to the more rigid boundaries imposed by British and French colonial mandatory policy after 1920 in what became Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, and Iraq.

In May of 1916, before the Ottomans were defeated in WWI, the British and French empires signed the Sykes-Picot agreement, dividing the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire into British and French rule (Hourani, 1991). The British drafted a mandate for Palestine in 1920, which separated it into two provinces, Palestine and Transjordan, a year later. The newly formed League of Nations officially granted Britain mandatory rule over Palestine in 1922, ostensibly a form of regional sovereignty for the newly founded states but in reality a poorly disguised form of colonial governance (Cleveland 2000). The mandate provided the British the legal rights to manage the political and military affairs of the region, imposing taxation on citizens, monitoring immigration through identification documents, and maintaining bureaucratic control over the newly enumerated citizenry and commerce throughout the region. During this period, industrial infrastructure was further developed, including the expansion of inchoate Ottoman and private railway systems, and many members of the indigenous population were uprooted from agricultural work and forced into the nascent urban wage labor force.

The mandate period witnessed growing inequality and landlessness among both immigrants and the indigenous population, contributing to the formation of a Palestinian nationalism and an increasingly armed faction of the Zionist movement, including the *Haganah* and *Irgun*, secret paramilitary groups in defense of Zionist settlement. These growing tensions contributed to a series of revolts, including the 1936–39 Great Revolt and the 1947–48 civil war directly preceding the partition, which involved atrocities committed by both Zionists and Arab nationalists. The British mandate was officially terminated in 1948 after the approval of a UN partition plan calling for two states, one for the Zionists (Israel) and one for the Palestinians, with an international zone designated for Jerusalem. However, the 1948 war between Israel and Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq led to an armistice in 1949 that expanded Israel's territorial boundaries, enveloping western Jerusalem and forcing into exile roughly 700,000 Palestinians in what is referred to in Arabic as the *nakba* (disaster).

2. The term "anational" is used to describe a political orientation that is "international," meaning it is not constrained by territorial demarcations imposed by nation-states nor by the particular ideologies of nationalism that unify a population on the basis of a common territory, cultural tradition, historical collectivity, and stratified class structure. It is also "international" in that it seeks to establish social bonds between two or more socially constructed nations. However, Liisa Malkki (1994) critiques the use of the term "international" as it is used in phrases like "international community," referring to bodies that surpass territorial, national boundaries like the United Nations, by noting that while they transgress borders of nation-states, such "international" bodies actually reinforce the ideologies of nationalism and preserve the cohesiveness of the nation-state by normalizing a geopolitical division of the globe into separate but equally represented territorial nation-states. Therefore, in accord with Malkki's critique, I use the term "anational" to refer to an "international" political orientation that is also anti-national, that is, not simply circumventing but also politically opposing the stratification of human populations into separate national groups. This term is of particular importance when referring to the labor movement in Mandatory Palestine, where the proponents of contending nationalisms sought to convince workers to join nationalist movements rather than to reject nationalist narratives for a proletarian, anti-nationalist orientation.

Palestinian Nationalism

As Mediterranean trade routes began to increase in the late nineteenth century, a new Arab “notable” class emerged, an entrepreneurial group of businessmen and landholders who were able to prosper through land grants, loans, and profit from import-export trade with Europe and neighboring regions. It was through the political activities of these literate and prosperous notables that a new national identity developed (Muslih, 1988). During this period, differing strands of Arab national identity arose, from Ottoman to pan-Arab and Palestinian. Until the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, Ottomanism was dominant, seeking Ottoman unity to defend Islam and the region from imperial European powers. After 1919 and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Arab nationalism became dominant, at first seeking an independent Arab nation-state as a means to independence from the Ottomans and European imperial powers, but later breaking down into regional nationalisms prioritizing sovereignty of local alliances (e.g. Egyptian, Syrian, or Palestinian nations). Muhammad Muslih notes that the goals of Arab nationalists to create one Arab state were ultimately superseded by these territorial allegiances: “their destiny and their responsibility lay in their native land, which it was their duty to liberate, to defend, and to rebuild” (Muslih 192).

Palestinian nationalism arose during the interwar mandate period with other regional nationalisms, most notably Syrian, but was unique in its experience with Zionism and Jewish immigration. This is perhaps one of the defining features of Palestinian nationalism in contrast to other Arab nationalisms, as the displacement of many Palestinians and the contestation over political dominance and land between Jewish immigrants and Palestinian elites became commonplace. However, Rashid Khalidi (1997) warns that the origins of Palestinian nationalism cannot be thought of as exclusively in response to the initial Zionist immigration, but instead should be considered alongside the broader development of nationalism in the Arab world and beyond. European imposed capitalism, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the usurpation of power and land by the French and British Empires, and an incipient colonial/nation-state system in the region each contributed to the development of territorially-based Palestinian nationalism, a phenomenon previously foreign to the indigenous Arabs’ collective conceptions of kinship and more local territorial bonds (Khalidi, 1997; Lockman, 1996).

The experience of Zionist immigration directly contributed to the growth of a Palestinian nationalism separate from

Syrian or other Arab nationalisms. However, this distinction was not complete immediately following the first Zionist emigrations or fall of the Ottoman Empire. The beginnings of nationalism in Palestine itself can be traced to Syrian nationalist caucuses immediately following WWI. James Gelvin (2005) notes that while market forces and the growth of nation-states definitely contributed to the formation of nationalism in Palestine, it was not clear that a unique Palestinian nationalism would arise. He points out that the formation of a unified Palestinian movement was hindered by the Ottoman policies of maintaining relative autonomy for religious and minority groups—including Christians and Druze in Palestine—which were carried over by the British. Likewise, rivalries between the various upper-class Arab notables prevented an organized national community for some time. The influence of nationalism in Syria also overshadowed a separate Palestinian national movement until the interwar period, when a distinctive Palestinian nationalist movement could be identified. This nationalist movement was led by political officials and notables who came primarily from aristocratic and upper-class families under the Ottoman Empire; it was thus one led by propertied elites, not necessarily one involving all Palestinians affected by the Zionist immigration.

The Arab revolts of 1936–39 against Zionist and British forces and the 1947–48 riots over the partition of Israel each served as symbolic markers of the Palestinian national movement in its response to British colonialism, Zionist immigration, and the creation of the nation-state of Israel. Palestinian nationalism has since been subject to the duress of Israel’s post-1967 military occupation and refugee status (Schulz, 1999). Yet in order to explain the creation of the Israeli nation-state in relation to Palestinian nationalism, I must now briefly examine the history of the Zionist national movement.

Zionism

Zionism, the movement to establish a Jewish nation-state in Palestine, was also a modern phenomenon concurring with the rise of European nation-states (Brenner, 2003). Popularized in large part by the ideas of Theodor Herzl, a Jewish Austro-Hungarian writer and theorist, the Zionist project sought to create a national haven for the persecuted Jewish diaspora. Zionism was predicated on European Enlightenment ideas of liberalism, the democratic nation-state, and socialist/nationalist values of dignified Hebrew labor.

Historically, Jews faced severe repression at the hands of various states, and, like many other stateless peoples, experienced discrimination and geographic distribution due to their status as the other. With the rise of European nation-states, Jewish people were dispersed throughout Europe, facing pogrom after pogrom in both Eastern and Western Europe. A return to the holy land of Palestine had been envisioned by Jews for centuries, but it was only under the conditions of persecution in the modern, post-enlightenment period, including violent pogroms and increasing levels of poverty and alienation under industrial capitalism, that a political movement specifically seeking a nation-state in Palestine developed. Theodor Herzl summarized his views on the Zionist movement in his work *The Jewish State* in 1896, shortly after the first Zionist emigrations to Palestine began. Many Jews distributed throughout Europe were inspired by the Zionist project and emigrated in hopes of attaining a better life in Palestine, “a land without a people for a people without a land” (Herzl, qtd. in Lockman, 1996:31). However, this early Zionist slogan exemplified a desire to marginalize the indigenous Arabs in an ongoing effort to legitimate their colonizing project.

Zionism did, however, initially receive criticism from the Jewish community, including the argument that Herzl sought to return to Palestine—the Promised Land—based on post-Enlightenment political thought instead of waiting for the messianic return promised in Judaic scripture (Brenner 2003). The project also faced hostility from the region’s indigenous Arab population, whom Herzl and other Zionists attempted to ignore completely. For example, Joseph Massad (2006) details the ways in which the Zionist movement embarked on its colonial expansion and appropriation of homes, cultural symbols, and divine property rights to land in Palestine. For instance, Israeli-born nationals later became known as *sabras*, which was originally an Arabic word for a type of cactus in the region, yet was appropriated in a “renaming process” by Zionists seeking to legitimate their rule and stay in the region as natural and dating back to time immemorial (Massad 37–8).

Because many of the first Jewish emigrants to Palestine had Marxist leanings and emphases on labor rights and dignity, the first *aliyas* featured an insistence on labor unions and associations, including the first Jewish agricultural cooperatives, the *kibbutzim*. The Zionist project’s leftist/labor orientation, however, while seeking egalitarian working conditions and recognizing the contributions of the working classes, was in many respects exclusive and concerned only with Hebrew or Jewish workers. This strand of Zionism, known as Labor Zionism, was ultimately about improving

living conditions for Jews in the Promised Land through socialist labor cooperatives and associations that were strictly nationalist, i.e. for Jewish Zionists only.

Marginal concern for the surrounding peoples was evident in some of the Zionist discourse; for instance, Labor Zionism purported that improving conditions for Jewish workers would inevitably benefit the surrounding regions as well. Zionist leaders promoted the Orientalist conception of the Arab community as backward and inferior to the modern Zionist European immigrants, and as needing the training and assistance of Zionist workers and political infrastructure to arise from their benighted condition. Such ideology remained a key strand in the Zionist movement throughout the mandate period, marked most prominently by the *Histadrut* (Hebrew for organization), an exclusively Zionist labor union founded in 1920 at the beginnings of the Labor Zionism movement. Socialist values eventually became relegated to smaller associations however, especially to the *kibbutzim*, and a formal capitalist state structure soon presided with the partition in 1948.

The creation of Israel solidified the Zionist claim to property rights and exclusive ties to the region with the support of the United Nations, the United States, and the Soviet Union, despite opposition from most of the newly established (and also colonial in origin) Arab states. The Zionist project was facilitated further under the aegis of the British Empire, which would come to aid the project in critical ways, by providing military defense for the Jewish settlers, selling them property rights, and displacing Palestinians by force. Yet despite the tumultuous period of Zionist emigration to Palestine and the Arab revolts against property loss and displacement, the region’s burgeoning nationalisms did not constitute totalizing, homogeneous forces.

Anational Working-Class Cooperation in Palestine

Here I present a brief outline of the major cases of Arab-Jewish working-class cooperation in Palestine from the late 1800s onward. Much of the literature on the Zionist-Palestinian conflict and the Mandate period has contributed to the incommensurable and static view of Jewish and Palestinian nationalisms, failing to account for their interaction and the ways in which they reciprocally affected each other. Deborah Bernstein (2000) criticizes this literature viewing Jewish and Arab nationalist groups as isolated and unchanging, instead demonstrating that there have been numerous cases of interaction. Even when the nationalist groups have rejected each other and sought to

distance themselves, this has still involved a mutual recognition of the other: “separation and segregation were often the case...[yet] separation is itself a kind of interaction, a dynamic process of response to challenge and threat” (Bernstein 7).

After the first *aliya* in the 1880s, lands appropriated by Jewish immigrants were often worked by or leased to Palestinians, allowing for cases of mutual understanding and agricultural cooperation—as Gershon Shafir (1996) notes, “[w]ithout the cooperation of Palestinian Arab villagers the earliest Jewish settlers would have been in dire straits” (Shafir 199). Most cases of early nationalist or ethnic conflict between Jews and Arabs were really over resources and capital—i.e. land use and private property—as the land previously used by Palestinians was through custom and kinship ties, which later violently contrasted with the privatization incurred by the Zionist immigrations and British Colonialism (Shafir, 1996).

In *Constructing Boundaries*, Bernstein (2000) begins by describing the Jewish and Arab workforces during the mandate period. She distinguishes between three major sectors of the labor economy: Arab, Jewish, and Governmental. The Jewish sector was predominately urban and capitalist, while the Arab sector was largely agrarian and semi-feudal (Bernstein 33). The Governmental sector included the public works, educational facilities, railways, and postal services, and employed about 15,000 regular workers (Bernstein 34). Most of the Jewish immigrants were from middle- or working-class backgrounds in Europe, and emigrated in search of employment with little or no capital of their own, thus constituting a newly proletarianized workforce (Bernstein 23). The Arab workforce primarily consisted of agricultural workers and peasants who, due to the declining profitability of agricultural work, were being forced into the wage labor system (Bernstein 25). Bernstein notes that there existed a large wage discrepancy between Jewish and Arab unskilled workers throughout the mandate period—in 1934, for example, Arab agricultural workers made roughly 80–100 mils while Jewish agricultural workers made 200–350, and Arab construction workers made about 100–150 mils while Jewish construction workers made 300–900 (Horowitz, 1948; cited in Bernstein, 2000:31). There also existed a smaller discrepancy between Arab and Jewish skilled workers, but the fact that Arabs constituted cheap labor in the region remains evident. Bernstein builds on Edna Bonacich’s (1972) notion of a Split Labor Market (SLM) wherein different ethnic or national groups receive unequal treatment; the more advantaged groups ensure a higher value for their labor, while the disadvantaged groups threat-

en or become cheaper substitutes for the more advantaged groups (Bernstein 10). In the case of Palestine, Arab workers were clearly disadvantaged and served as low-paid substitutes for Jewish workers in most sectors of the economy, benefiting employers through lower labor costs.

In *Comrades and Enemies*, Lockman (1996) examines Arab and Jewish labor movements in Palestine up to the partition. Two major labor unions existed during this period, the *Histadrut* and the Palestine Arab Workers Society (PAWS), a mostly Palestinian nationalist labor union founded in Haifa in 1925. Lockman (1996) and Joel Beinin (2001) document how these two unions were constantly engaged in competition over organizing workers; the *Histadrut* frequently had to grapple with the decision whether or not to allow Arab workers membership in the union, and both struggled to organize workers at various pressure points in the labor history of the region.

The first documented joint strike by Jewish and Arab workers occurred in 1924 during construction of the Nesher cement factory near Haifa (Lockman, 1996). Around 200 Jewish *Histadrut* construction workers labored side by side with approximately 80 Egyptian immigrant workers to build the factory. The Jewish workers soon became disillusioned with their poor wages, difficult working hours, and their management’s refusal to negotiate with their union. They eventually went on strike, demanding an hour less in their workday and a 5 piastre wage increase. However, it soon became apparent that they needed the cooperation of the Egyptian workers to have any success in the strike, and sought their support despite arguments to the contrary from the *Histadrut*. The Egyptian workers, who were already paid 10 Egyptian piastres less than the Jewish workers, joined them in a two-month long strike that eventually ended with marginal improvements for the Jewish workers but no recognition of the rights of Egyptian workers, who by then had been fired. The Jewish workers refused to go back to work until the Egyptian workers were rehired, which never happened. Despite the fact that the strike ended in a loss, it stands in contrast to essentialist narratives as an example of the transgression of nationalist sentiment in favor of class-based, anti-racist cooperation.

In another case of joint Arab-Jewish cooperation in the manufacturing industry, 100 male and female Arab and Jewish workers (roughly half Jewish and half Arab) declared a strike on February 17, 1927 at the Nur Match Factory in Acre after experiencing continuous dismal working conditions, low pay, dangerous exposure to flammable materials, and few results from negotiations with managers (Bernstein

133). The strike was led by Jewish workers who invited the Arab workers to join them, and lasted for nearly 5 months—one of the longest in Mandatory Palestine (Bernstein, 2000). Supported by the *Histadrut*, the Jewish workers demanded that the union also give aid to the Arab workers, although their support eventually waned further into the strike. It did end in a small victory for both workers however, and both Jewish and Arab workers' associations considered the strike a fine example of anational working-class solidarity. Yet the factory management soon rolled back many of the victories gained by the workers: wages were cut, Arab workers were excluded from benefits, and they were soon substituted for Jewish workers as a source of cheap labor.

In the port city of Haifa, hundreds of Jewish and Arab workers were employed as seamen, porters, stevedores, and other port-related labor (Bernstein 161). Despite the close proximity and large population of Jewish and Arab workers in the port, joint action was not common, due mostly to the fact that Jewish workers were attempting to transform a once Arab dominated labor sector into a predominately Jewish one. However, in the spring of 1932, Arab seamen employed by contractors Reno and Abu-Zeid went on strike after they were demoted from salaried employees to day-laborers (Bernstein 162). Six Jewish employees of Reno and Abu-Zeid from nearby *kibbutzim* learned of the strike secondhand and quickly joined the striking Arab seamen. Together they went first to the PAWS and then to the *Histadrut* seeking support. Reno and Abu-Zeid rejected all of the Arab workers' proposals, including an Arab-Jewish cooperative and the willingness to work as day-laborers for a short period of time if they were promised salaried employment again. The *Histadrut*, wary of representing Arab workers, and the PAWS, attempting to undermine the *Histadrut's* efforts, both led to the end of the strike. It did not result in a victory, and the seamen quickly returned to work unrewarded. In this case, the outcome of the strike is not as significant as the fact that it occurred with the support of Jewish workers—as in Haifa the majority of Arab seamen held hostile views towards Jewish emigrants usurping their jobs, which limited the possibilities for sustained cooperation.

Such joint strikes and efforts at organizing both Jewish and Arab workers would become commonplace during the mandate period, especially in the case of railway workers from 1919 to 1939 (Lockman, 1993; 1996). The railway system in Palestine, established first by the Ottoman empire and expanded by the British for military purposes during WWI, was an extensive system and one of the largest employers in mandatory Palestine (Lockman, 1996). At its height during

WWII, the Palestine Railways, Telegraph, and Telephone, a British mandatory agency that took control of the railway system after WWI, was employing close to 8,000 workers. The railway work was demanding physical labor, and the majority of railway workers were Arabs—either Palestinian or Egyptian and Syrian immigrants—Jewish workers often left in search of better work opportunities when possible. With the help of the Jewish workers that did remain, the Railway Workers Association (RWA) was formed in 1919. From then on, extensive debates over the issue of joint organizing of Arab and Jewish workers took place. Several leftist labor leaders and communist organizations began to politicize the Jewish workers employed in the railway sector, resulting in repeated instances of joint organization coupled with contention between the *Histadrut*, the PAWS, and the various leftist and communist groups. Throughout the inter-war period, a high degree of Jewish and Arab working-class contact and cooperation occurred, and the labor history of this sector is rife with struggles for solidarity and organizing between Jewish and Arab nationalist groups and left-leaning labor associations (Lockman, 1996:111–178; and Bernstein, 2000:186–205).

In September of 1945, three years before the partition, the Arab Workers Congress (AWC), a union with a more leftist/internationalist orientation organized, alongside the *Histadrut*, 1,300 workers at a British military installation (one of many that were at that time crucial to the British involvement in WWII) outside Tel Aviv for a week-long strike (Beinin, 2001). The Arab and Jewish workers together demanded a union contract and a living wage, picketing with the slogan “long live unity between Arab and Jewish workers” in Hebrew and Arabic (Beinin 125). Representatives of the AWC made a public statement differentiating Zionists from the broader Jewish population: “we distinguish between the Zionist movement as an exploitative movement and the Jews, and the Jewish workers specifically, as a minority [in Palestine].” (Lockman, 1996:323). The AWC criticized the labor movement, particularly the Arab nationalist movement, for making racist arguments against all Jews, thereby limiting prospects for mutual cooperation against colonialism and exploitation (Lockman, 1996).

One of the most prominent and successful cases of Arab-Jewish worker cooperation was the April 1946 general strike of postal, telephone, and telegraph government employees. These workers were organizing against government officials who frequently denied their demands, and began a general strike on April 9, 1946. The following day, all of Palestine's postal workers went on strike, and by April 14 they were joined by Arab and Jewish railway workers,

along with white-collar government employees. By April 15, 23,000 government employees were on strike, and leftist labor leaders sought but failed to organize oil refinery and military base employees as well. This week-long general strike was by far the largest the region had witnessed, and involved unprecedented Arab and Jewish worker cooperation (Lockman, 1996).

The partition of Palestine by the United Nations in 1948 soon resulted in massive public riots from Arab and Israeli nationalists, severely debilitating any prospects for sustainable cooperation between the two groups. Lockman notes, however, that the years leading up to partition (1945–47)—although marked by a growing tension between the two communities—did feature some of the highest incidences of joint cooperation during the mandatory period (Lockman, 1996:322). These transcendences of both nationalisms reaffirm that the incommensurable, primordial construct of the two nations has not been the region's sole historical narrative.

Conclusions

The imposition of colonial forms of modernity and capitalism was the catalyst for newly internalized conceptions of national belonging, nation-states, and social class in Palestine and elsewhere, but these processes were not uniformly distributed, internalized, or accepted without contestation, as this discussion of anational struggle demonstrates. To consider colonialism or modernity as something that happened to Palestine inevitably and uniformly would be to mistake socially constitutive and dynamic processes for monoliths, and to write history as an unavoidable, linear trajectory.

This brief overview of Arab-Jewish cooperation emphasizes the fluid and dynamic nature of social organization and does away with the notion of naturally defined national communities. Much of the literature on the Zionist-Palestinian conflict and Palestine's history fails to provide a class-based perspective, and instead accepts dominant Zionist and Palestinian nationalist narratives. Likewise, the conflict is often reduced to strictly national terms; *e.g.* Zionists vs. Palestinians, Arabs vs. Jews, or Jews vs. Muslims. However, anational cooperation has persisted throughout Palestine's turbulent history, a fact that corroborates an alternative, anational approach to the region's history as an essentialized conflict between Jews and Arabs.

To conclude, I would like to avoid making an “if-only” argument as Lockman describes (Lockman, 1996:20), suggesting that if only more cooperation had occurred, the

outcome of the conflict may have been different. He correctly explains that the two nationalist movements “sought irreconcilable objectives and were on a collision course from the very start” (Lockman, 1993:624). Because the collective strikes were largely unfruitful, and because the conflicting nationalist movements eventually superseded efforts at cooperation during the British Mandate, Lockman avers that one should not view the history of the region as one of “missed opportunities” where anationalists could have but failed to triumph over the nationalist movements (Lockman 1993:624). Instead, I have tried to emphasize that the nationalist narratives were not the only political currents that the region's population embraced; anational, anti-racist cooperation and activity was evident in the cases of joint strikes and labor organization by Jewish and Arab workers who rejected the exclusivity of the nationalist narratives. I have also highlighted the ways in which both nationalist groups influenced each other, reevaluating the dominant acceptance of isolated communities inconsequential to the respective policies, discourses, and activities of their Others. Thus, this analysis refutes the notion of an essentialized historical rivalry between Palestine's Jewish and Arab populations, and may open up possibilities for anational political organization in the future to relieve the national tensions and brutalities of the conflict in which the region is currently engaged.

Acknowledgements

This essay is dedicated to all who have and continue to struggle for Arab-Jewish cooperation and justice in Palestine. Dr. Charles O'Connell's unpublished essay on the subject has been an invaluable influence, and his insights and suggestions have been very much appreciated. Frederick Cooper's *Colonialism In Question* has provided me with the theoretical backbone to writing history in this essay, and Zachary Lockman's *Comrades and Enemies* has informed much of my discussion of the region's historical record. Dr. Sheila O'Rourke provided perceptive critiques and helped with my initial draft of this essay, for which I am very grateful. Importantly, my research could not have been completed without the friendship and encouragement of Abiha Bilgrami, Suleman Ahmed, Joel Montano, Carla Osorio, Liliana Rodriguez, Dennis Lopez, Fernando Chirino, Ana Chirino, Eliana Olivarez, Andrea De La Riva, Gabriel Varela, Moosa Azadian, Aida Ashouri, Rachel Vo, Omar Kurdi, Mohamad Abdelfattah, Raul Perez, and Mukul Kumar. Special thanks to Amina Yassine for her generosity and unwavering assistance with my Arabic instruction, to Kevin Moloney and Ghada Edwan and her family for their support, and to Dick Platkin for his mentorship and incisive

analyses of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. Thanks to the World History Association and to UROP for the opportunities they have provided me, and to Professors Karen Leonard and Roxanne Varzi for their help along the way. And lastly, my gratitude to my advisors, Bill Maurer, Laura Mitchell, and Selim Shahine, whose continued support has made this essay and much more possible.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London, New York: Verso, 1983, 1991.
- Beinin, Joel. Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Balibar, Etienne and Immanuel Wallerstein. Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities. London: Verso, 1991.
- Bernstein, Deborah S. Constructing Boundaries: Jewish and Arab Workers in Mandatory Palestine. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.
- Bonacich, Edna. "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market." American Sociological Review, 37 (1972):547-59.
- Brenner, Michael. Zionism, A Brief History. Princeton: Markus Weiner, 2003.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- . "Marxism and Modern India." History Today, 42 (1992):48-51.
- Chatterjee, Partha. "The Nation in Heterogeneous Time." Futures, 37 (2005):925-942.
- Cleveland, William L. A History of the Modern Middle East. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000.
- Cooper, Frederick. Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. Ethnicity and Nationalism. London: Pluto Press, 2002.
- Geertz, Clifford, "Primordial Ties," in Ethnicity. J. Hutchinson and A. D. Smith, eds. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Gelvin, James L. The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Horowitz, David. The Palestine Economy and Its Development. Tel Aviv: Mossad Bialik, 1948.
- Hourani, Albert. A History of the Arab Peoples. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Khalidi, Rashid. Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Lockman, Zachary. Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- . "Railway Workers and Relational History: Arabs and Jews in British-Ruled Palestine." Comparative Studies in Society and History, 35.3 (1993):601-627.
- Malkki, Liisa. "Citizens of Humanity: Internationalism and the Imagined Community of Nations." Diaspora, 3.1 (1994):41-61.
- Massad, Joseph A. The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Mathews, Weldon. Confronting an Empire, Constructing a Nation: Arab Nationalists and Popular Politics in Mandate Palestine. London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006.
- Muslih, Muhammad Y. The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Nugent, David. "Before History and Prior to Politics: Time, Space, and Territory in the Modern Peruvian Nation-State." in States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State. T. B. Hansen and F. Stepputat, eds. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001. pp. 257-283.

- O'Connell, Charles. "Arab-Jewish Cooperation in Palestine Before 1948." Unpublished Essay. University of California, Irvine, 2006.
- Schulz, Helena Lindholm. The Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism: Between Revolution and Statehood. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.
- Shafir, Gershon. Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Torpey, John. The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Viyas Mongia, Radhika. "Race, Nationality, Mobility: A History of the Passport." in After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation. Antoinette Burton, ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

