2

The Uprooting

> My opinion is that if the Arab armies hadn't entered Palestine we wouldn't have left. In every Palestinian village they talked about what to do, that there was an enemy, that they must fight. But there was no planning. Every village was alone. If we had stayed we would have struggled, and had a successful revolution. The leaders in each village would have been a nucleus. But the leaders then, like Nuri Said and Abdullah, were bought, and Palestine lacked good leaders.
>
> Laundry worker, Bourj al-Barajneh Camp

Why Did the Palestinians Flee?

An extraordinary controversy has surrounded the question of why the mass of Palestinian peasants fled from their villages during the War of 1948, taking refuge in parts of Palestine still under Arab control or crossing the borders into Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Yet the reasons for their flight are so obvious that only deliberate mystification could have obscured them. The primary causes were: direct military attack on the villages; terrorism; lack of leadership; lack of arms; in short, chaos and fear. The myth that they left at the orders of the Arab leaders appears to have been invented in the Israeli Information Office in New York[1] many months after the end

of the war, at a time when Israel still needed international goodwill; it was never substantiated by documentary evidence. Only in the case of one or two cities, for instance Haifa, could local Arab authorities be said to have 'ordered' flight by organizing evacuation. But in most of the country there was not even this slight degree of organization. There was no single Palestinian authority, no united Arab leadership, no policy either of mass resistance or mass evacuation. Especially in the countryside, there were no other sources of organization than the villages' own defence committees. Supplies, information, instructions: all were totally lacking. How could the peasants have been ordered to flee when the smaller villages did not even have a radio?

Arab governments – the broken reed

In fact there is evidence that what radio directives there were (issued by the Arab Higher Committee in Damascus early in the fighting)[2] ordered the Palestinians to stay put in their homes, and there can be little doubt that the danger of mass flight, which began in April 1948 with the first phase of the Zionists' attack plan, was clearly perceived by the 'leadership'. But the leaders could not call on the masses to stand firm when they themselves were outside Palestine.[3]

By mid-1948, the Arab Higher Committee was hardly even attempting to organize a resistance struggle, even though, in the last six months of the Mandate, it had managed to raise £P167,000 from the Palestinians to buy arms, and had canvassed the Arab governments zealously to obtain them. But their efforts were fruitless. Every Palestinian attempt to enlist concrete Arab support was met by evasion and bland complacency. The Syrian president told a leading Palestinian, 'our Army and its equipment are of the highest order and well able to deal with a few Jews.' The Iraqi prime minister told him that all that was needed were 'a few brooms' to drive the Jews into the sea. Saudis close to King Ibn Saud revealed both overconfidence and dependence on their foreign connections: 'once we get the green light from the British we can easily throw out the Jews.'[4] It is not surprising that many Palestinians concluded, after the Disaster, that the refusal of the regimes to give them adequate support *before* 15 May, when the British finally withdrew

from Palestine and the armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria entered it, was caused by more than shortsightedness or stupidity. Many concluded that the Arab regimes, or individuals within them, were accomplices in an imperialist/Zionist conspiracy to remove them from their land.

The helplessness of the Palestinian leadership by April 1948 is made abundantly clear by the story of the *mukhtar* of the small village of al-Tabigha, in Eastern Galilee, one of the first areas to be attacked by the Zionists:

> Our tribe [*sic*] was very poorly armed. We had three hunting rifles. I had travelled to Syria on three different occasions to ask the Mufti for arms. The last time I went was a week before the village was captured... We were refused a meeting with the Mufti. We were asked to write down what arms we needed. We waited almost three hours ... our papers were returned to us with a note written on the back saying, 'Sorry, we have no arms.'[5]

In fact, long before this, control of the situation in Palestine (if it can be called control) had passed out of the hands of the Palestinian leadership and into those of the Arab regimes. It is significant that when in October 1947 the governments met in Aley (in Lebanon) to discuss the Palestine crisis, no Palestinian delegation was invited to attend. The legitimacy of the Arab Higher Committee was supported by some elements in the Arab League, but opposed by King Abdullah of Jordan, who had his own ambitions in Palestine.[6] Yet it was he who was nominated Supreme Commander of the Arab forces in Palestine by the Arab League in April.

Not only were the Arab regimes susceptible to Great Power pressure and divided by conflicting dynastic and regional motives, but there is every reason to doubt that they intended serious military intervention in Palestine. Early in 1948, the Political Committee of the Arab League advised members that massing Arab forces on the borders would convince the Great Powers to restrain the Zionists. Their military threat was political in purpose and it was with the greatest reluctance that the League finally took the decision to intervene, after Britain's announcement of its intention to complete withdrawal on 15 May. Egypt's intervention remained doubtful until three days before D-Day and, in the field, each army followed the directives of its home government, pursuing limited

objectives, without any overall strategy or coordination. Confusion in the direction of this most phoney of wars was compounded by the appointment within the Arab League of a Military Committee, nominally in charge of the Jaysh al-Inqadh,[7] or Arab Liberation Army (ALA), a Damascus-directed, pan-Arab force of irregulars led by a Lebanese professional soldier, Fawzi Qawukji.

None of the military forces present in Palestine during the year the war lasted had any clear policy towards the inhabitants of the country, whether of helping them to resist, or helping them to evacuate. This is clear from the memoirs of the war by men who fought in it, for example Fawzi Qawukji and Gamal Abdul Nasser,[8] as well as from the recollections of the peasant militants who tried to resist. By not joining forces with the latter, the professional soldiers in Palestine certainly contributed to their exodus. But that they ordered them to leave, or even gave them information that would encourage them to leave, goes against the norms of Arab behaviour. It is extremely unlikely that the regional commanders would have admitted to the villagers the true extent of Arab losses; usually they themselves did not know what was happening in other areas. Only in October, the last month of the war, is there clear evidence that ALA commanders in Northern Galilee warned villagers that they were about to withdraw, giving them a chance to escape to Lebanon before the border was closed.[9]

Yet, while the Arab forces present in Palestine never explicitly ordered a mass evacuation, there is a sense in which their presence, and the whole atmosphere of heated nationalism which accompanied Arab intervention in Palestine, helped to mystify the situation and to cloud Palestinians' understanding of what was really happening. False confidence in Arab promises to 'save' Palestine, inflated ideas of military strength, and inability to foresee the worst, all contributed something to the exodus (though not as much as did fear). There was no leader prescient or courageous enough to warn the Palestinians that, if they left their homes, it might be for ever. Hence the people stayed on in their villages, each village hoping that the war would not reach it; and when it became impossible to stay, they fled. Most had no time to think, as they fled under bombardment. But none had any idea of leaving Palestine for good, simply of finding a refuge near their village,

until the battle was over; and for most of the early part of the war, flight was within Palestine itself. But even those who crossed the borders into Lebanon, Syria, or Jordan never imagined that they could be prevented from returning to their homes once the war was over, even if the Arab armies did not win. They say, 'We thought we were leaving for one or two weeks'; 'We locked our door and kept the key, expecting to return.' This certainty of return carried over into exile, helping to sustain morale in the first year of the loss of their country and their land, only gradually fading as it became clear that neither the United Nations nor the Arab regimes could procure for them this elementary justice against Israel's will.

For a long time after 1948 – for many until 1967 – faith in ultimate Arab victory continued to exercise a pacifying effect on the Palestinian masses, creating a mood of patient, loyal waiting rather than one of anger and action. From the beginning, the 'Arabization' of the Palestinian struggle had always carried the danger that the delusion it gave of strength would deflate the Palestinians' own capacity for struggle.

Yet even if the peasants had taken the decision not to flee, could they have faced organized Zionist violence on their own, as the structures of their society crumbled around them? Later they would say that it would have been better to have been massacred in thousands rather than to have left Palestine: it would have been difficult for the Zionists to have killed so many, and those who survived would have created a new, peasant-based resistance. And, in fact, a minority did refuse to join the *hijra*,[10] staying on in the villages, preferring to live under Israeli domination rather than go into exile. But the terrorized majority, however they rationalized their decision, could not do anything but join the panic-stricken mass flight that a leading Zionist was to say 'miraculously simplified Israel's task'.[11]

Zionist Military Preparedness

Entirely contrary to Arab expectations of easy victory in Palestine against 'a few Jews' was the prediction of the commander of the British forces in Palestine, General D'Arcy, given in 1946 to an American journalist:

> We discussed with him what would happen if the British troops were withdrawn from Palestine. 'If you were to withdraw British troops, the Haganah[12] would take over all Palestine tomorrow', General D'Arcy replied flatly. 'But could the Haganah hold Palestine under such circumstances?' I asked. 'Certainly', he said. 'They could hold it against the entire Arab world.'[13]

The British commander was one of the few people qualified to give an accurate estimate of the balance of military forces between the two contestants, for, unlike today, Zionist military capabilities in 1948 were a well-kept secret, built up under the cover of the Jews' 2,000-year-old reputation for non-militancy. Until the mid-1930s, the Zionist movement had continued to depend principally on the British occupying forces for protection, while edging its way cautiously towards military preparedness. The building of the Haganah was skilfully carried out, partly with British help, partly in clandestinity, until it had reached a level of capability where the British occupation of Palestine was no longer a necessary protection, but had become instead an obstacle. The creation of Zionism's two principal terrorist organizations, the Irgun and the Stern, had two main objectives: to create an unacceptable level of losses within the British forces of occupation, so that public opinion in Britain would put pressure on the Home government for withdrawal; and to create an atmosphere of panic among the Arab population.

While Herzl, himself a founder of Zionism, had foreseen early on that military power would be essential to achieving a Zionist state in Palestine ('Immigration is futile unless based on an assured supremacy'),[14] the strategy of the Jewish Agency during the early part of the Mandate was to press for full implementation of the Balfour Declaration as they understood it – for the creation of a Jewish state – without taking account of the opposition of those 'non-Jewish communities' which the Declaration had also promised to protect.[15] Conflict between Zionist and British interpretations of the Declaration was inevitable, leading to the emergence of a more militant Zionism led by men like Jabotinsky and Begin whose links with the official leadership were tenuous, but who exercised a growing influence on immigrant Jewish youth. Yet even as moderate a Zionist as Chaim Arlosoroff, who was deeply opposed to the

Revisionists,[16] had already realized by 1932 that the established strategy of pressure on the British would not in itself lead to an Israeli state. Arlosoroff, who was secretary-general of the Political Office of the Jewish National Agency, listed four reasons why this strategy was becoming obsolete: (i) British policy was 'considerate to the sensibilities of the Arabs and Moslems', therefore would not help Zionism enough; (ii) the number of Jews employed in government was insufficient;[17] (iii) immigration quotas were insufficient; (iv) land available for Zionist purchase was insufficient. Further, Arlosoroff foresaw the approaching termination of the Mandate, the growing independence of the Arab states, the possibility of their uniting and the likelihood of world war. All these considerations suggested that,

> Under the present circumstances Zionism cannot be realized without a transition period during which the Jewish minority would exercise organized revolutionary rule. It is impossible to attain a Jewish majority or numerical equality between the two peoples ... by means of systematic immigration and colonization, without a transition period of minority rule during which the state apparatus, the administration and the military establishment would be in the hands of the minority, in order to eliminate the danger of domination by the non-Jewish majority and suppress rebellion against us (it would be impossible to suppress such a rebellion unless the state machinery and military forces were in our hands). During this period a systematic policy of immigration, colonization and development would be practised.[18]

The Zionist goal: 'transfer' the Palestinians

What was to happen, in terms of the Zionist leadership's strategy, to the indigenous population during and after 'organized revolutionary rule' by the Jewish minority? Although Zionist leaders had always emphasized their pacific intentions in their approaches to Palestinian and Arab leaders, the idea of the transfer of the Arab population was mooted early on in discussions with British sympathizers, and even earlier by militant Zionists. One of those who had fought in the Jewish Legion in World War I proposed 'the fantastic idea of resettling Palestinian Arabs back in the regions from which their forefathers had allegedly come to Palestine centuries ago'. In 1940 Joseph Weitz, an official in charge of colonization, wrote in his diary:

> Between ourselves it must be clear that there is no room for both peoples together in this country... We shall not achieve our goal of being an independent people with the Arabs in this small country. The only solution is a Palestine, at least Western Palestine [west of the Jordan river] without Arabs... And there is no other way than to transfer the Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries, to transfer all of them; not one village, not one tribe, should be left.[19]

So reasonable did the Zionists' 'transfer' concept appear to some sectors of world opinion that it began to crop up regularly in proposals for solutions to the 'Palestine problem'. The Peel Partition Plan of 1937 urged an 'exchange of land and population'. Several British colonial secretaries – Winston Churchill and William Ormsby-Gore – had openly supported it. In 1944, the National Executive of the British Labour Party officially adopted the idea: 'Palestine surely is a case, on human grounds and to promote a stable settlement, for a transfer of population. Let the Arabs be encouraged to move out, as the Jews move in.' Exactly how Palestinian Arabs were to be 'encouraged' to leave their homes and land was not spelled out in this extraordinary piece of imperialist thinking disguised as a 'human' solution. Utopian fuzziness and pro-Jewish sentiment made it possible for even anti-imperialist sectors of Western public opinion to remain blind to the means used by the Zionists to achieve their goal of a Jewish majority and statehood in Palestine. Not only to Zionists, but to many others, the flight of the Palestinians appeared as a 'miraculous simplification'. That the 'miracle' had been carefully planned, and produced by military force, was an idea too disturbing to the liberals, too natural to the reactionaries, to be questioned by anyone.

Britain helps the Haganah

The Arab Rebellion of 1936–39 had been useful to the Zionist movement in several ways: it had revealed the strength of Palestinian resistance to Zionism and British occupation; it had revealed the style and limitations of a peasants' war, and the absence of proper integration between the political and military wings of the national movement; but most of all, it had given the Zionists the chance to arm and train, at a time when the British were forcibly disarming the Palestinians. Although the Haganah had been ordered by the

Administration to disband and give up their arms at the end of the six-months' General Strike that preceded the Rebellion, the British Army Command urged that the order not be enforced. At the same time, two new forces were set up: the 'Special Night Squads' trained by Orde Wingate; and a Jewish police force, the Notrim, which 'provided an excellent framework for training the Haganah'.[20] Increased from 1,240 in June 1936 to 2,863 by September, the Notrim were trained by Army officers, not police:

> The Army Command agreed to help train the Notrim, as police training was not sufficient. Thus hundreds of Haganah members received partial military training with the aid of the British Army, and the lessons were passed on in secret to thousands of others both inside and outside the ranks of the force which remained until the end of the British Mandate.[21]

In 1938 the Notrim were reinforced by 3,000 special constables (Haganah members). In June, training in offensive methods began and mobile patrols (the Manin) were established. In 1939, ten companies of Jewish Settlement police, totalling 14,411, were formed, each company commanded by a British officer. In Tel Aviv there were 700 special constables, and in Haifa 1,000, all members of the Haganah. Through these and other paramilitary organizations almost all the Jewish population above the age of fourteen had received some degree of military training[22] by 1948, so that when war came the Zionist military command could count on a high level of mobilization from the civilian population. All the settlements also had their own trained militias.

The impact of Orde Wingate upon Zionism's military development was profound. It was under his influence, acting against directives from the British Army Command, that the Night Squads moved from their defensive function to attacks on Arab villages. It was Wingate who taught the advantages of surprise, of attacking at night and of avoiding conventional military methods. Patterns of Palestinian peasant action were carefully studied to enable attacks to succeed with minimal loss of Jewish life. Captured villagers were shot to make others reveal the places where arms were hidden.[23] All these characteristics were to become firmly rooted in Zionist militarism. Dayan, who was with him on the attack on an Arab village near the settlement of Hanita, said of Wingate:

> In some sense every leader of the Israeli Army even today is a disciple of Wingate. He gave us our technique, he was the inspiration of our tactics, he was our dynamic.[24]

Wingate became chief trainer in a course for young Haganah officers, but was removed after a few months by the Army Command. After his departure from Palestine the 'Night Squads' were broken up, but

> Wingate's work was not in vain. The Haganah's best officers were trained in the Special Night Squads, and Wingate's doctrines were taken over by the Israeli Defence Forces, which were established twelve days after the birth of the Jewish state.[25]

Although it was not easy for the Zionist movement to procure arms independently of those which the British Army of occupation gave or allowed them, it was not as hard as for the Palestinian Arabs. The Notrim had arms legally, 'modern and of good quality, and supplied in growing quantities'.[26] But besides legal arms, there were two illegal sources of supply: smuggling from abroad, and manufacture in underground workshops. Arms were obtained from Belgium until 1935, then in 1938 a Polish source was established, underground at both ends. During the war of 1948 the first large consignment of Czech arms arrived (in March), followed by a steady flow from many sources after the establishment of the state on 15 May. The Zionist movement was immeasurably helped in procuring arms by its international network, one branch of which, the Mossad, had the task of transporting immigrants from Europe to Palestine, while others specialized in locating arms suppliers. Besides procuring arms, the Zionist machine in Europe was able to block Arab attempts at arms purchase. As late as December 1947 a Czech arms deal with Syria was cancelled.[27]

Zionism armed

Jewish underground workshops first began to produce arms in 1937, turning out hand grenades, rifle grenades, explosives and 3-inch mortars. One of their most successful inventions was the 'Little Davids', bombs containing 60 lb of TNT projected to a distance of 300 yards. The inaccuracy of the Davidka was of little disadvantage in use against densely populated areas. Another masterpiece was

the barrel-bomb, filled with a mixture of explosives and petrol, which, when rolled downhill into villages or city quarters, produced 'an inferno of raging flames and endless explosions'.

The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry's Report[28] in 1946 listed Zionist military forces (the Haganah) as consisting of a full-time strike force (the elite Palmach[29]), numbering 2,000 in peace time, with 4,000 on reserve; a field army of 16,000 trained in military operations (the Notrim); and a static reserve force of 40,000 part-time fighters, settlers and townspeople. In addition, the Zionists had been allowed to introduce one year's compulsory military service for school leavers, starting in 1945. The Report estimated the underground terrorist organizations at 3,000 to 5,000 for the Irgun and 200 to 300 for the Stern.

By the time serious fighting broke out in 1948, the Zionists could count on 36,000 front-line troops; 32,000 second-line troops; 15,410 settlement police; 32,000 home guards; and around 4,000 underground fighters (Stern plus Irgun). Out of a total Jewish population of 590,000, around 120,000, or more than one in five, were armed and trained to fight.

As for arms on the eve of war, a semi-official estimate gives the Zionists as possessing: 10,000 rifles, 450 light machine guns, 180 heavier machine guns, 96 3-inch mortars, 67 2-inch mortars, two 65-mm field guns and an unknown quantity of smuggled and manufactured arms. After 15 May, 20 anti-aircraft guns arrived, along with a steady flow of light and heavy arms. The Jewish Defence Forces (JDF)[30] had also improvised 800 armoured cars (mobility was one of the secrets of their success), as well as two Sherman and two Cromwell tanks. They also had 21 second-hand light Auster aircraft, which were effectively used to provision distant Jewish settlements and to bomb Arab villages. While the Arab forces throughout the war 'sat' on their positions, the JDF used their land and air transport to erode these positions, and keep their own lines of communication open.

Plan Dalet

In what remained for many years the authoritative history of the 1948 War written by a military expert, Edgar O'Ballance makes passing reference to particular operations in the Zionists' overall

attack plan, but nowhere does he mention Plan Dalet itself. This is a serious omission, since Plan Dalet marked a crucial change in the Haganah High Command's military and political objectives. The earlier plan which Plan Dalet superseded had aimed only

> To gain control of the area allotted to the Jewish state and defend its borders, and those of the blocs of Jewish settlements and such Jewish populations as were outside those borders, against a regular or pararegular enemy operating from bases outside or inside the area of the Jewish state.[31]

Plan Dalet aimed, in a series of thirteen individually named operations, beginning on 1 April, to capture cities and villages in the part of Palestine which the Partition Plan of November 1947 had allotted to the Arabs, thus making impossible an Arab Palestinian state as proposed in that Plan and greatly enlarging the area of the proposed Jewish state, while emptying the whole Jewish occupied area of most of its Arab inhabitants. Lorch[32] says of this change that it was not 'a reversal of policy but a logical continuation'. In his study of the reasons why Palestinians in the Galilee area fled, Nafez Nazzal[33] states:

> Although Zionist historians dispute the contention that a number of these operations include provisions for the eviction of Arabs, the facts of the 1948 War, which resulted in the reluctant exile of the overwhelming majority of Palestinians from Jewish occupied areas, indicate that expulsion or incitement to leave was part of the policy put into practice.

Using Zionist sources, the Palestinian scholar Walid Khalidi was able to piece together the different operations that made up Plan Dalet, all carried out before the British withdrew from Palestine and the Arab armies entered it:

1. Operation Nachshon, 1 April: To carve out a corridor connecting Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and divide what would have been the Arab state under Partition into two;
2. Operation Harel, 15 April: A continuation of Nachshon but centred on Arab villages near Latrun;
3. Operation Misparayim, April 21: To capture Haifa and rout its Arab population;

4. Operation Chametz, 27 April: To destroy the Arab villages round Jaffa and so cut it off from contact with the rest of Palestine, facilitating its capture;
5. Operation Jevussi, 27 April: To isolate Jerusalem by destroying the surrounding Arab villages;
6. Operation Yiftach, April 28: To rid Eastern Galilee of Arabs;
7. Operation Matateh, 3 May: To destroy villages connecting Tiberias to Eastern Galilee;
8. Operation Maccabi, 7 May: To destroy the Arab villages near Latrun, and penetrate into the Ramallah district;
9. Operation Gideon, 11 May: To occupy Beisan and drive out the semi-sedentary *bedouin*;
10. Operation Barak, 12 May: To destroy the Arab villages round Bureir on the way to the Negev;
11. Operation Ben Ami, 14 May: To occupy Acre and clear Western Galilee of Arabs;
12. Operation Pitchfork, 14 May: To occupy the Arab residential quarters in the New City of Jerusalem;
13. Operation Schfifon, 14 May: To occupy the Old City of Jerusalem.[34]

Of these operations, not all succeeded: operations 1, 2, 5, 8 and 13 were defeated while 10 was only partly successful. But the destruction of Arab villages in the successful operations was enough to ensure that a large part of Palestine's Arab population were already refugees before the withdrawal of the British Army of occupation. The three major Arab coastal cities, Jaffa, Haifa and Acre, had already been 'de-arabized', while the two main cities of Eastern Galilee, Tiberias and Safed, were taken on 17–18 April and 9–10 May respectively. With the city centres in Zionist hands, the villages had no hope of resisting for longer than their ammunition supplies lasted.

Terror as a deliberate Zionist strategy

Plan Dalet succeeded because it was carefully worked out and based on a detailed knowledge of the terrain of each village acquired by the Zionist scouts, the Gadna, whom the peasants had so often found camping on their land in the last years of the Mandate.[35] The

psychology and customs of the peasants had been carefully studied, as well as the ties and relationships within and between villages. Terrorism was deliberately used not merely to create panic, but also to ensure that each man would be concerned primarily with the safety of his own family. Mass killing and rape were selectively used to build up an atmosphere in which men were forced to put the honour of their womenfolk and the lives of their children ahead of their patriotism. The Battle of Kabri[36] in March had mobilized men from many villages around, even though they had no modern communications system or transport. In April, men from several villages east of Jerusalem had joined Abdul Qader Hussaini's Jaysh al-Jihad al-Muqaddes,[37] which was trying to retake the strategic village of Kastel. Some of them were probably from the small village of Deir Yasseen, only a few kilometres from Kastel.

The massacre of Deir Yasseen on 8 April, in which at least 300 villagers were killed, attracted so much attention that it appeared an isolated atrocity, not closely connected with the general Zionist conduct of the war. At first the massacre was disowned by the Zionist leadership, and Ben Gurion sent a message of apology to King Abdullah, blaming the 'unofficial' terrorist groups. Yet a Palmach[38] unit had taken part in the assault, alongside the Irgun and Stern; and only three days after the massacre the Haganah and Irgun entered into an open alliance. Moreover there were other less publicized incidents of mass killing, carried out by ordinary units of the Haganah: Nasr al-Din near Tiberias; 'Ain al-Zeitouneh; al-Bi'na; al-Bassa; Safsaf; Hula, in Lebanon;[39] and doubtless others still unrecorded. Deir Yasseen was not an isolated, inexplicable atrocity in a war of defence against Arab invasion, as Zionist propaganda alleged, but part of a systematic campaign to terrorize the Palestinian peasants and force them to give up resistance.

Contemporary observers were puzzled that Deir Yasseen should be selected for attack, since it had always had peaceful relations with the Jewish settlements around it, and was even said to have driven away Arab fighters who wanted to shelter there. The only arms the village watchmen had were a few old Turkish and German hunting rifles. Most likely Deir Yasseen was chosen precisely because it could be taken with minimum casualties; and the purpose of the atrocities committed there was to put pressure on peasant

militants fighting at Kastel to disperse and return temporarily to their villages. Kastel was finally lost to the Palmach on 11 April, two days after the massacre, and Abdul Qader Hussaini, the leader of the Jaysh al-Jihad al-Muqaddes, was killed. With his death, the last hope of Palestinian resistance faded.

Survivors from the Deir Yasseen massacre (some of whom were driven in a triumphal procession round Jewish Jerusalem and then shot) gave chilling descriptions of individual atrocities to investigating Red Cross and British Mandate officials. The British investigator, Richard Catling, describes how difficult it was to persuade terrified and humiliated girls and women to describe what had been done to them, and to others who did not survive:

> I interviewed many of the womenfolk in order to glean some information on any atrocities committed in Deir Yasseen but the majority of those women are very shy and reluctant to relate their experiences especially in matters concerning sexual assault and they need great coaxing before they will divulge any information.[40] The recording of statements is hampered also by the hysterical state of the women who often break down ... whilst the statement is being recorded. There is, however, no doubt that many sexual atrocities were committed by the attacking Jews. Many young schoolgirls were raped and later slaughtered. Old women were also molested. One story is current concerning a case in which a young girl was literally torn in two. Many infants were also butchered and killed.[41]

An atrocity particularly calculated to horrify Arab peasants was the cutting open of the womb of a nine months' pregnant woman. This was the clearest of messages warning them that the Arab code of war, according to which women, children and old people were protected, no longer held good in Palestine. Men now had to choose: their country or their family. It was through such methods that a people with a thirty-year tradition of resistance to British occupation and Zionist immigration were terrorized into flight.

While the Zionist organizations were anxious that the outside world should not know the details of what had happened at Deir Yasseen (and would have succeeded if it had not been for the courageous obstinacy of one Red Cross official),[42] they made sure that the news spread through the Palestinian population, both through the Jerusalem parade and through the leaving of a few survivors.

In the following months Zionist radio stations and loudspeaker vans were to make good use of the emotive words 'Deir Yasseen' to panic villages about to be attacked. Once an atmosphere of terror had been created, it was easy to exploit it to swell the exodus, with minimal losses to the attackers.

One of the ways that terror was used to avoid confrontation is described by Yigal Allon (a member of every Israeli Cabinet since 1961, and deputy prime minister after 1967):

> We saw a need to clean the inner Galilee and to create a Jewish territorial succession in the entire area of the Upper Galilee... We therefore looked for means which did not force us into employing force, in order to cause the tens of thousands of sulky [*sic*] Arabs who remained in Galilee to flee... We tried to use a tactic which took advantage of the impression created by the fall of Safed and the [Arab] defeat in the area which was cleaned by Operation Metateh – a tactic which worked miraculously well!
>
> I gathered all the Jewish *mukhtars*, who have contacts with Arabs in different villages, and asked them to whisper in the ears of some Arabs, that a great Jewish reinforcement has arrived in Galilee and that it is going to burn all the villages of Huleh. They should suggest to these Arabs, as their friends, to escape while there is still time.[43]

O'Ballance's semi-official history of the 1948 War faithfully records the Zionist myth that Palestinians left their homes at the orders of their leaders, yet even he admits that the Zionist forces exercised some kind of pressure to promote what he calls 'an unusual feature' of the 1948 War, that is 'the complete and voluntary evacuation of the Arabs from their towns and villages as the Jews advanced'. He notes in passing the expulsion from villages and their destruction with dynamite, but emphasizes the use of 'psychological' methods, blandly concluding:

> It was Jewish policy to *encourage* the Arabs to quit their homes, and they used *psychological* warfare in *urging* [*sic*] them to do so. Later, as the war wore on, they *ejected* those Arabs who clung to their villages. This policy, which had such amazing success, had two distinct advantages. First, it gave the Arab countries a vast refugee problem to cope with, which their elementary economy and administrative machinery were in no way capable of attacking, and secondly, it ensured that the Jews had no fifth column in their midst.[44]

Palestinian and Arab Forces

The Jaysh al-Jihad al-Muqaddes

The only purely Palestinian military force present in Palestine in 1948, the Jaysh al-Jihad al-Muqaddes, had been formed by the Mufti (Hajj Amin Hussaini) late in 1947, partly as a riposte to the Arab League-sponsored Jaysh al-Inqadh. The Mufti put at the head of the Jaysh al-Jihad his nephew Abdul Qader, who had accompanied him on his forced wanderings in the last decade of the Mandate.[45] Abdul Qader may have had some slight experience of war with the German Army, but he had never had any formal military training. He was an honest patriot, almost the only member of the ruling class ready to fight, and who possessed real qualities of leadership. But he was prevented from returning to Palestine until December 1947, too late to organize effective resistance. The Jaysh al-Jihad is thought to have numbered not more than 5,000 men at most, about the size of the Irgun and Stern combined, less than one-twentieth of the combined Jewish Defence Forces.

Lack of modern weapons was only one of the difficulties faced by the Jaysh al-Jihad. Finance was not totally lacking, since the Mufti received a subsidy from the Arab League as well as the contributions collected in Palestine by the National Fund. But procuring arms was much harder then finding money. No 'legal' sources were available, and the officials of the Arab governments were not courageous or nationalistic enough to risk British disapproval by supplying arms to the Palestinians. In fact, the Mufti's main source of supply was the *bedouin* of Libya and Egypt. In 1948, as in 1936, the Palestinians fought with weapons discarded in earlier wars, mostly rifles. Since even the transmission of messages between the Arab Higher Committee in Damascus and its personnel in Palestine was fraught with difficulty, it can be imagined how much harder it was to deliver arms to the fighters inside.[46]

The Jaysh al-Inqadh

The second Arab armed force present in Palestine before 15 May, 1948 was the pan-Arab Jaysh al-Inqadh (or Arab Liberation Army), numbering between 3,000 and 4,000 men, of whom 1,500 were Palestinians. Its recruiting and training centre was Damascus, the

only Arab capital considered by nationalists to be relatively free of British influence. Its leader, Fawzi al-Qawukji, had already begun to call for volunteers before the Military Committee of the Arab League decided to co-opt him, after it had been charged by an Arab League meeting to take the defence of Palestine in hand. The Mufti was opposed to Qawukji's appointment because he had connections with Iraq and the Hashemite dynasty. Nor were Qawukji's relations with the Military Committee that nominally controlled the Arab Liberation Army (ALA) any better than with the Mufti's Arab Higher Committee; throughout the war he seldom replied to messages from headquarters in Damascus; he, in turn, seldom received the arms he urgently requested. The confusions bred by this tragi-comedy of a war are well illustrated by the incident Qawukji describes in his memoirs[47] when he tried to cross the Syrian–Jordanian border at Deraa with the First Yarmouk Battalion in January 1948. His entry was supposed to have been cleared by headquarters in Damascus, but Qawukji met unexpected Jordanian opposition, with the Governor of Irbed angrily asking him, 'How dare you cross without informing me in advance and giving us sufficient time to study the situation, especially as you know that we have a treaty with Britain which imposes certain obligations on us in cases like this?'[48] Headquarters advised him to force an entry, which he refused to do, eventually gaining permission to move openly through Jordan and cross the Allenby bridge 'not stealthily by night, and not piecemeal, but in broad daylight'. This open crossing of Allenby bridge was Qawukji's only triumph in Palestine.

Poorly trained both militarily and politically, lacking the formation necessary for mobilizing popular resistance, the ALA cadres gave no help at all to the villagers they had supposedly entered Palestine to defend. Palestinians dubbed them the Jaysh al-Rikad (the 'Run Away Army') and years afterwards still remembered that force's invariable response to their requests for arms, directives, or military support: '*Maku awamer*' ('There are no orders').

Although supposedly an irregular force, the ALA had ranks and a hierarchy of command similar to those of the Arab armies, and like them had a narrow professional elitist concept of war, taken over from the imperialist armies on whose pattern the new

Arab armies were being formed. To them, anyone not in uniform was a 'civilian', intrinsically incapable of an active role in war. War was a serious business for professionals only – how could ignorant peasants fight? When the *mukhtar* of Lubiya went to the ALA to ask for arms, he was refused because 'they have no men in uniform'.[49] Although the villagers themselves sometimes went to help ALA units (e.g. at Sejera in Lower Galilee), there is only one recorded instance of the ALA assisting them in return. The only members of the Jaysh al-Inqadh who fought with the peasants were deserters whose pay cheques were subsequently suspended. In the Battle of Kabri, a nearby ALA unit refused to join the action until late afternoon, when women from the village were sent to shame them. And then, it is reported, they took from the people of Kabri all the weapons captured on the battlefield.[50]

When Saffuriyeh, a village in Lower Galilee, was bombed from the air and then shelled, the men took their families to a nearby wood and returned to defend their village:

> We counted on the ALA, stationed at Nazareth about six kilometres away, to come to our rescue ... they did not. We were disorganized... We fought independently, every man for himself. There was no communication or co-ordination among us.[51]

In all the cities, where the ALA were stationed in some strength, there was less resistance to Jewish Defence Force attacks than in many villages. Acre fell overnight, enabling the JDF to 'clean' all the villages of Western Galilee in little more than a week. When the JDF attacked Safed on the night of 9/10 May, the three top Arab commanders were not in the city, and rumours spread rapidly that the ALA was withdrawing. The fall of Safed, considered an Arab stronghold, caused panic throughout the villages of Eastern Galilee.

Looking back at their experience of the ALA, Palestinian villagers accuse it not merely of passivity, but also in certain cases of collaborating with the enemy, or with the UN Truce Commission, in handing over villages without a fight. The inhabitants of Al-Birwa, who had succeeded in retaking their village after its first capture by the JDF, were persuaded by the commander of an ALA

unit stationed nearby to hand it over to them. One of the villagers recalled:

> We were certain that he was sincere and trusted the soldiers of the ALA to protect the village... [We] were confident that our Arab brothers, who were well armed, would withstand a Jewish attack. But before long we saw them retreating from the village. We could not believe our eyes... They came to aid us and protect our village; instead, they handed over the village to the enemy.

In the most detailed description yet written of a single Palestinian village during the year of the war, Elias Shoufani[52] shows how bad relations initially were between the inhabitants of Mi'ilya and the ALA units quartered near them. The first contingent was Jordanian; and, arriving on a feast day, its soldiers entered the church to requisition people to help them unload their trucks, cook them food, bring water. Later, the Jordanians were replaced by Yemenis, whose attitude to the villagers was not at first any less arrogant:

> It was immediately obvious from the Yemenis' behaviour that they were hostile to the local farmers, even despised them. From their headquarters in the school, they commandeered the village. They had no regard whatsoever for the property or work of those they had ostensibly come to liberate. A sort of *corvee* was imposed on the farmers. They were to dig trenches, bring firewood, supply water, and so forth. To supervise the working men, and because the soldiers had decided it was too tiring for them actively to patrol, the horses were conscripted.[53]

However – and this is the main point of Shoufani's paper – relations between the village militia and the ALA improved greatly during Mi'ilya's prolonged siege, particularly after the Haganah launched a strong attack in August, which was repulsed by the village militia fighting side by side with the ALA:

> The battle welded the village, the militia, and the ALA into an integrated body. Every soldier was at the front fighting. Every man in the village was busy lending a hand in the common effort. The militia fought hand in hand with the ALA. Other men transported ammunition and supplies to the front. Women carried food and water to the embattled men.
>
> When the villagers finally evacuated their homes some months later, the soldiers helped families carry out their children and belongings. By the end of the year's struggle the villagers and the Yemeni contingent

> had forged together a people's war of sorts against their common enemy.[54]

Shoufani remarks that the ALA soldiers had eventually even helped the farmers with their agricultural work. To the credit of the ALA rank and file, Shoufani distinguishes between them and their leadership. Many of the ordinary soldiers only retreated after stubborn battles, with the greatest reluctance, and after hearing that their leaders had withdrawn. He recalls meeting Sergeant Salah on the day Mi'ilya fell:

> We were told that the commander-in-chief for the area, an Iraqi called al-Azmah, had failed to notify Salah of the impending withdrawal from the area of all ALA forces... Today, twenty-four years later, nowhere in the hills of Western Galilee, where Salah and his fellow-fighters held out in repeated battles, is there a memorial to these men.[55]

The Jaysh al-Jihad al-Muqaddes and the Jaysh al-Inqadh were the only Arab military forces present in Palestine before the British withdrawal on 14 May, by which time large areas of the country – the coastal plain, Eastern and Western Galilee and all the cities except Old Jerusalem, Gaza, and those of the West Bank – had already been 'cleaned' of most of their Arab inhabitants. At this point the armies of five Arab states entered Palestine, numbering altogether some 15,000 men (about one-eighth of the number of the Jewish Defence Forces), their heaviest armour being twenty-two light tanks and fourteen Spitfires. Estimates of the size and equipment of the Arab armies published in the press were greatly inflated, probably as part of the Arab regimes' policy of using threats so as to avoid actual confrontation. None had battle experience, knowledge of the terrain, or understanding of the enemy they were confronting. Their moves were dictated by governments anxious for a negotiated settlement of the 'Palestine problem', and whose principal military purpose in Palestine was to prevent one another from gaining an advantage. In 1948, as was to happen more dramatically in 1967, the usefulness of an inflated Arab military threat to the Zionists was to make the latter appear on the defensive against an invasion, providing a screen behind which their essentially aggressive action against the Palestinians passed practically unnoticed.

War Comes to the Villages

The indifference of the outside world to what had really happened in Palestine during 1948, and the destruction of Palestinian national institutions, meant that many years were to pass before survivors of that war were able to record their experiences. If what happened to them had happened to the Jews, or to Armenians, the whole 'civilized' world would have been vibrating with horror and disapproval. But because this time the persecutors were Jews, and the victims Arabs, no one wanted to know. European observers on the scene minimized the scale of the Palestinian tragedy; for example, a report in *The Economist* of 2 October 1948 estimated the number of refugees at 360,000, though they were at least double that figure, and called for humanitarian aid rather than investigation of the reasons behind the exodus. From the beginning this was to be the main Western reaction to the Palestinian refugee problem: extend material aid to the survivors; ignore the political causes! *The Economist* article also carries a brief eyewitness description of the state of expelled Palestinians in the first months of their destitution:

> Probably the most affecting sight in the hills is at Bir Zeit, north of Jerusalem, where about 14,000 destitutes are ranged on terrace upon terrace under the olive trees – a tree to a family – and are forced to consume the bark and burn the living wood that has meant a livelihood for generations. Here and at Nablus, where the organization is slightly more systematic, there is at present so little milk for babies that abortion seems the kindest way out.[56]

Another chilling description of Palestinian suffering in the year of the Disaster is given by Count Bernadotte in his memoirs:

> I have made the acquaintance of a great many refugee camps; but I have never seen a more ghastly sight than that which met my eyes here, at Ramallah. The car was literally stormed by excited masses shouting with Oriental fervour that they wanted food and wanted to return to their homes. There were plenty of frightening faces in the sea of suffering humanity. I remember not least a group of scabby and helpless old men with tangled beards who thrust their emaciated faces into the car and held out scraps of bread that would certainly have been considered uneatable by ordinary people, but was their only food.[57]

These are both descriptions by outsiders, vivid and moderately sympathetic, but lacking the essential element of subjectivity. What had been the concrete experiences of these thousands of expelled Palestinian peasants, *bedouin* and workers whom the world was henceforward to know, through UNRWA brochures, as 'the Arab refugees'? Nobody thought of asking them until 1973, when a young Palestinian scholar, Nafez Nazzal, decided to focus his Ph.D. thesis on why the Palestinians had left their homes in 1948. To discover this he undertook wide-scale interviews among survivors of the 1948 War living in camps in Lebanon and Syria. Most of them had been agricultural in occupation, but they included policemen, teachers, shopkeepers, mechanics, *mukhtars*, bus drivers, housewives, a doctor and a judge. From this wide coverage it is possible for the first time to build a first-hand picture of what happened when the war of 1948 came to the villages of Galilee.

Although each village had its own unique war history, Nazzal's interviews reveal certain common themes: the village militias have old weapons, very little ammunition, and little training;[58] the early fall of the cities has a demoralizing effect; each village is isolated, cut off from news and organization; there is no national authority to give directives; the Arab military forces present in Palestine do not help to defend the villages; there are divisions within villages about whether it is better to resist, surrender, or take refuge.

Resistance must have appeared so hopeless without established channels of arms supplies that most village militias put up little more than a token fight before withdrawing to rejoin their families in nearby woods or villages. But a minority of villages resisted stubbornly, particularly in the early part of the war, before demoralization had reached its lowest point. The inhabitants of al-Birwa and al-Sha'b both succeeded in retaking their villages after the first attack. Miyar is another village remembered for its resistance. Even allowing for an element of exaggeration, it is clear that the will to resist was there and could have been used by a leadership capable of rallying resistance.

Zionist tactics

The form of attack used by the Jewish Defence Forces was rather uniform, though there is a clear difference between the early part

of the war when Jewish military forces were overstretched and arms supplies still limited, and the final phase when it became possible for them to bomb villages from the air and use heavy artillery. In the early phase, in Western and Eastern Galilee, villages were attacked from two or three sides, leaving a road open north or east for flight. Attacks were usually launched one at a time, and villages not immediately affected often had the illusion that they would not be attacked at all. For instance the town of Nazareth, as late as 16 July, was 'not worried' because it had 400 militia and relatively good arms. Even later, on 29 October, most of the inhabitants of Mejd al-Kroom, 18 kilometres east of Acre, were still in their village, and only decided to evacuate when they saw the ALA retreating.

Although the JDF appeared amateur compared with European armies, they were infinitely more mobile and better armed than the villagers. In particular they had automatic weapons, which very few villages had, as well as mortars and a wide range of explosives. Although village militia resistance rarely lasted more than a few hours, casualties were heavy, and in certain cases (for instance al-Ghabsiyeh) shelling was directed at fleeing villagers.[59] After occupying a village, the JDF would usually begin to dynamite its houses, for example in al-Zib:

> I slipped into the village about a month after it had fallen into Jewish hands, to bring a few things from my home. I talked to the elderly people who had remained;[60] they were all placed in Abu Saleh's house; they said that the Jewish soldiers had destroyed most of the al-Ramel area south of the village, and the eastern section.[61]

Harry Levin, a Haganah reporter, described a Palmach attack on Kolonia (Qalunia), a village near Kastel, on 12 April: 'When I left, sappers were blowing up houses. One after another. The solid stone buildings, Some built in elaborate city style, exploded and crashed.'[62]

The ploy described by Allon, of using Jewish or Druze *mukhtars* to warn other villages about to be attacked so that they would evacuate, was much used in the early part of the war, for instance at al-Birwa. Another device was disguise. In the case of al-Sumeiriyeh near Acre, one of the first villages in West Galilee to be attacked, an officer purporting to be from an ALA unit stationed in Acre prom-

ised that help would be sent in case of Jewish attack. As the JDF attack began at dawn the next day, the families of al-Sumeiriyeh began to flee, leaving thirty-five armed men to defend the village:

> At sunrise ... the villagers saw an armoured unit approaching from the south, along the road from Acre. Believing it to be the Arab force coming to their rescue (the men wore the red and white Arab headdress), Saleh Sa'id Ka'boush, positioned south of the village, began to fire in the air in welcome. But when he was fired upon and instantly killed, the villagers entrenched east of the village realized that the armoured unit was the enemy's and began to withdraw.[63]

Even after the fall of a village, some inhabitants did not escape but tried to stay on. Their fate was varied. In certain cases, for example al-Bassa, Kabri, Safsaf, Mejd al-Kroom, al-Bi'na, mass killing was used to encourage complete evacuation. Sometimes only old people were allowed to stay, or removed to other villages. Mass deportation was the means of removing many villagers who managed to stay on as refugees in Druze villages after the end of the war. In rare cases, perhaps only in the case of Mi'ilya, inhabitants were allowed to return after leaving. Arrest, imprisonment and deportation were the lot of most individuals who attempted to stay,[64] or were caught trying to return to their homes.

Villagers' reactions: fight or flight?

In many cases artillery attack began at night, without warning. Kweikat, a few kilometres east of Acre, had repelled at least one attempt at capture, but on the night of 9–10 July the JDF surrounded the village and began to shell it:

> We were awakened by the loudest noise we had ever heard, shells exploding and artillery fire ... the whole village was in panic... Most of the villagers began to flee with their pyjamas on. The wife of Qassim Ahmad Said fled carrying a pillow in her arms instead of her child.[65]

Someone from the same village, now a middle-aged woman in Bourj al-Barajneh camp, gave me her recollections of the attack:

> It was the first night of Ramadan and we were sleeping on the roof. You know that we have *suhoor* at around 3 a.m. during Ramadan. Well, we had made tea, and my mother had just begun to lay the table.

> I remember that we had *bamieh.* That was when they started shelling the village. We left just as we were, some of us jumping from the roof, others from the stairs.

In the panic of mass flight, it was common for families to become separated and children to get lost. A man from Nahr al-Bared camp recalled how this had happened to his infant daughter:

> When our village was attacked, the women and children and old people left first. Because I had been in the police before 1948, I was one of those defending the village. When it was all over [i.e. the village fell] I came to the olive orchard, where the villagers were gathered, to look for my wife and children. I had a small daughter of three and a half, and in the fighting she had got separated from her mother. Some people said they'd seen her going up to a Druze village called Yerqa. I went on searching until morning without finding the girl. In the morning I went up to Yerqa. There were children playing in the square, and I saw my daughter standing there in front of a boy eating bread. She was hungry and she was asking the boy 'Give me bread' and he was taking no notice of her. I came up behind her and clasped her in my arms, and I couldn't speak for tears. There she was, not with her father and mother, not in her house, not in anyone's house, alone and hungry. In twelve hours we had been changed from dignity to humiliation.

Deeply torn between fear of losing their homes and fear for the lives of their children, families sometimes sent children ahead of them to Lebanon. R.H., as a boy of twelve, had been sent with an uncle to Bint Jbeil because he was the eldest in the family and his parents wanted to be sure he survived, in case they all perished. A woman originally from Kabri, a village which anticipated particularly fierce attack because of the successful ambush it had carried out in March,[66] described to me how she had walked, a child of eight with a younger brother, all the way from Kabri to Tyre in Lebanon; somewhere on the way, she had dropped the blanket-roll her mother had given her. The terrible dilemma, whether to stay or to flee, split the old from the young, and sometimes even divided husbands and wives. Many were never to see each other again:

> My father, brother, wife and children stayed with me on the outskirts of the village of Farradiya, southwest of our village. My mother, sister, cousin and nephew remained in Safsaf. We stayed there until the Jews

> bombed the village of 'Ailaboon, forcing its people to flee north ... there we learned that the Jews had also bombed Safsaf. My mother, sister, and other relatives were amongst those killed there.[67]

Though old people were sometimes allowed to stay on in their villages, or in caves nearby, this was not always the case. A man in Bourj al-Barajneh told Nazzal of the last news he had had of his parents, given him by other old people who had stayed on with them in al-Bi'na, until December, when Jews put them in an open truck and drove them to Zububa, near Jenin:

> When they reached the border the Jews ordered them to cross the border to the Arab side. Many of the villagers were too sick to walk and were left behind in the rain. No one knows what happened to Nimr's parents.[68]

Z.K., the man whose grandfather had wanted to attack the Jews with his stick, told me what had happened to his family after the fall of al-Sha'b:

> When we left the village, my paternal and maternal grandfather was taken by the Jews and thrown out to Jordan, he and two of his sons. Two other of my uncles died on the way, near Jenin, but my grandfather, who was by now about 110 years old, went on to Aleppo where he had some relations with whom he stayed for a while, and then he joined us in Baalbeek [camp]. It was very cold in Baalback for an old man, so we returned to Tyre. There, he decided to go back to Palestine. My father tried to convince him that he's an old man, and that he can't make it. That was in 1950. But he insisted on going, and without telling anyone he bought a donkey and hired a guide, and he got back to Palestine and reached our village. There he had a very difficult life since he was forbidden from staying, and had to hide in the fields in the daytime. My grandmother was in Mejd al-Kroom and couldn't reach him. After many attempts she managed to get to him. By then he was ill, and blind. Four or five years later he died.

Another man who tried to stay on was R.M., later to become a Resistance Movement leader.[69] His account is interesting because it shows that there were attempts at local and regional organization as Palestine crumbled, though surely they were not capable of stemming the flood of refugees, nor aiding them once they had left their villages:

> In each village there was a local council, and out of all of them was formed a central committee. I was the vice-president of Sohmata's committee and became secretary of the central committee of Galilee. We started trying to organize civil affairs. We had to look to Lebanon to answer our needs because Acre was no longer available to us. The Zionists had occupied most of Palestine, and the ALA had withdrawn to Aiteroun. Our struggle continued until October; that was when the Zionists attacked and took all of Galilee and our people were thrown out into Lebanon.
>
> I was one of the people who was against evacuation and because I believed this I stayed in my village until the people left. I suggested to them staying in the fields instead of the houses because of the danger of bombardment, and then go back and face our fate, even if it was to be killed. When the Zionists occupied our village, I was one of those arrested.
>
> One of the political errors of our leadership was that they didn't prevent evacuation. We should have stayed. I had a rifle and a Sten gun. My father told me, 'The Zionists are coming, you know what they do to girls, take your two sisters and go to Lebanon.' I said, 'I prefer to shoot my sisters, and shoot you all, and keep the last bullet for myself. This would be better than leaving.' Then they took our village and I was arrested, and they left. But our leadership was outside in Cairo, Damascus and Beirut. When the leaders are out they can't tell the people to stay.

Along with others from his village, R.M. was arrested and imprisoned. He was moved from place to place inside Palestine and then, finally, thrown over the border at Mansoorah, with the words: 'You no longer have any place in Palestine. Go wherever you like. If you come back, you will be shot.'

That the mass of peasants were terrified not just of military attack, but also of rape, comes out clearly in R.M.'s account. The obligation of brothers to guard their sisters became a cause of conflict in many families, particularly when this obligation clashed with the young men's patriotism. One person, who was an adolescent girl at the time of the Uprooting, remembers a similar conflict in her own family:

> I had a brother in the army in Palestine. When we left he said, 'I'm not leaving.' He told my father: 'I won't leave. This is my land and as long as I'm in my home no one can come and take it.' My father talked to him about honour and his sisters – there was no political consciousness among the old generation – so my brother said: 'If you are worried about

such things, you can go into the fields.' He insisted on staying, though there were bombardments and air-raids. Then a cousin who worked as a telephone operator with the ALA got hit in an air-raid, and my brother was obliged to take him to Bint Jbeil. Then Sohmata fell, and all the villages around it. My father insisted that we should leave, like all the other people, so we went to the Druze village of Hurfeish. We didn't feel at home there. The Druzes kept threatening us that the Jews would come, so as to get rid of us. We wanted to go back to Sohmata, but we found no one to accompany us. So we took my brother's children with us and went to Rmeish. We had nothing but the clothes we stood up in. I remember that the children were thirsty and wanted to drink, and we had to drink from the same pools as the cattle.

Refugees in Palestine

Not all villagers joined the streams of people flowing northwards to Lebanon and eastwards to the West Bank and Jordan. Though it is impossible to gauge this with any precision, it seems that the majority moved about within Palestine for as long as possible, seeking refuge with kin in safer villages, rather than leaving immediately for the neighbouring countries. One of Nazzal's informants, from al-Sumeiriyeh, took his family to Acre when the village fell; from Acre they went to al-Ghabisiyeh until it fell, then to the village of 'Amqa. From there, they went to Abu Sinan, until it surrendered, then to Tasheeha until its fall at the end of October. Only then did they cross over into Lebanon. A man who had been wounded in the Battle of Kabri told me:

I was the last to leave our village [Saffouriyeh]. I stayed in Nasra until the Jews took it, then I took refuge in Hmeimeh. I didn't want to go to Lebanon, because I knew Lebanon and Syria from 1936 when I used to go to buy guns there. From Hmeimeh I went back to Acre, from Acre back to Saffouriyeh, I and my wife, then from Saffouriyeh to Aloot. My brother advised me to go to Bint Jbeil but I said, 'I don't want to see Lebanon.' Then the Jews began to search all the houses, looking for men who had fought in '36 and '48. As I had been in hospital a long time, and many people had visited me, I began to fear for my life. It was only then that I decided to leave.

In some cases, Druze villagers were generous and hospitable to the refugees, but more often it was their cool reception that gave fleeing villagers their first taste of what it would mean to be

homeless and stateless. The man who went to the Druze village of Yerqa to look for his daughter met there a man whom he had once helped in prison:

> I said, 'Hallo Muhanna.' He saluted me, but he didn't say, 'Tfaddal.' I said, 'Please, if you don't mind, a piece of bread for this child. I don't want any for myself.' He said, 'Wait here.' Then he went to his house and brought a piece of bread, with five olives in it.

While hovering as near as they dared to their villages, most attempted to infiltrate back to bring away food, blankets or jewellery, abandoned in the first panic flight. This was usually not difficult, particularly in the early phase of the war, when the JDF could only leave small units to occupy villages that had been captured:

> I took my family to Lebanon, but there was nothing for us to do there. I decided to return to the village [al-Khalisa] to dig up some money I had hidden in the courtyard. I had to return even though I knew it might cost me my life.[70]
>
> I left my village without harvesting my grain... I returned to collect some of our tobacco and grain to keep my family from starving... At the village we found that the Jews had burned and destroyed our houses.
>
> I returned to bring a few blankets, some pillows and food for my family. We left in such a hurry that I was unable to take anything with me.[71]

The woman from Kweikat whose family had been about to eat *bamieh* on the night of the attack spent a longer time than most as a refugee in her own country, Palestine:

> I was twelve when we left our village. We went to a village called Abu Sinan. We were a family, three girls, three boys, mother, father and grandfather, and we had nothing to eat. I used to take my younger brother and sister and creep back to get things from our home. My mother used to punish me for it, but I wasn't afraid of the Jews. I used to go in and get soap, flour, food to eat. One time when I was carrying a heavy sack of flour I trod on an electric wire which rang an alarm bell. That's when I fell and hurt my back. Another time the soldiers nearly caught us in our house, but we hid in a cupboard. It was our country, but we had become thieves in it!
>
> We used to get watermelon, okra, tomatoes and corn from our village. It was our land, we had sowed it, and we wanted to harvest it. Sometimes my mother and my aunt used to go at night – it was about

> eight or ten kilometres' walk. Once when they went, the guards saw them and shot my aunt through the head. You've seen her husband, Abu Saleh, and her daughter Amineh. What a hard life she's had!'We didn't have money to rent from the Druzes. It was summer and we slept on the ground. When the winter came we rented a very small room, three metres by two. We stayed the whole winter in Abu Sinan and then, in March, the Israelis started pressing on the 'refugees' – we were refugees in our own country! – to leave. They came at five o'clock at night, surrounded the village, and started looking at ID cards. If anyone was a refugee they told him to fetch his family and get into the trucks. We weren't allowed to take anything with us. They filled nine big trucks, and then they took us and threw us over the border, on the Merj al-Amer road.

In at least one case, the peasants' determination to harvest their crops spurred them into recapturing their village from the relatively small force of JDF that held it. Nazzal tells the story of al-Birwa in some detail:[72]

> The people of al-Birwa waited for about thirteen days [after the first fall of their village on 11 June]. During this time they depended upon the hospitality of the neighbouring villages. On the morning of June 23, the villagers decided to recapture their village. It was almost the end of the harvest time, and they wanted to harvest their fields before the crop was ruined. The news of the plan spread throughout the surrounding villages. My informants report that over two hundred men and women assembled and made preparations to fight for their village and their harvest. About ninety-six men were armed with different makes of rifles, and they had thirty to forty-five rounds of ammunition each. Officer Jassem, an Iraqi of the Arab Liberation Army stationed at Tell al-Liyat, gave the villagers some ammunition, but told them he could not join them because he had no orders.

Taken by surprise, the Jewish force withdrew to positions west of al-Birwa, abandoning seven mechanical harvesters with which they had begun to harvest the villagers' grain crop. How al-Birwa was subsequently handed over to the ALA, who withdrew from it again almost immediately, has already been described.[73]

The villagers of al-Birwa remained in the neighbourhood for some time after the second fall of their village:

> Najib Sa'd's family stayed on in the outskirts of the village for almost a week before deciding to go north to Lebanon. His wife refused to go

> anywhere, hoping they would return to their home soon. Haj 'Ali Fayyad stayed on a month [at al-Bi'na] after the village had been occupied a second time, before deciding to leave to Lebanon.

Najib Sa'd told Nazzal of his attempt to slip back to the village to 'steal' some of his belongings:

> We took refuge in Lebanon and life was not what we expected it to be. Conditions were bad. We had nothing to live on. I became desperate, and one night I decided to leave my family and go back to the village to bring some money I had buried outside my house before the Jews attacked... But I never reached my village. I was caught by the Jews and put in jail. I did not stay long in jail. One day the Jews filled a truck with prisoners, blindfolded us, and drove us to the borders of Gaza... On our way, the Jews beat us and took our watches and rings. When we arrived at our destination, they assembled us, chose a man at random, and shot him in front of us. They ordered us to run as fast as possible to the other side of the border and not to look back. They were shooting in the air, and I ran as I had never run before.

Terror and expulsion

There is no doubt that the JDF used mass killing whenever they wished to clear a village or area completely of its inhabitants, some of whom, in spite of their fear of the Zionists, were even more afraid of abandoning their homes. In the case of a few villages, for example Kabri and al-Sha'b, JDF behaviour was particularly vindictive because there were old accounts to settle. But in other cases, for example al-Bassa, which had always had peaceful relations with neighbouring Jewish settlements, terror was used strategically, to hold or destroy strongpoints, or to induce mass flight.

'Ain al-Zeitouneh in Eastern Galilee was one of the first villages to be attacked in Operation Yiftach. The Palmach's first assault was by rolling barrels filled with explosives and hand grenades down the hillside into the village. The village tried to surrender since its women and children had not been able to evacuate before the attack. But surrender made no difference. Thirty-seven of the village's young men were taken away and never seen again. Then the men and women of the village were separated into two groups, the women and children ordered to leave and the men told to follow them or be killed.[74]

The mainly Christian village of al-Bassa, near the Lebanese border, was not known for its militancy although it had taken part in the 1936–39 Uprising and had been bombed by the British. Many of its families had already taken refuge in Lebanon by May 14, leaving only about forty armed men, some old people, and the usual minority who refused to leave:

> The people of al-Bassa did not expect any trouble from their Jewish neighbours at Ma'sub and Hanita; the Jews had assured the *mukhtars* of the village that they wished them no harm. They were in the habit of visiting the village from time to time and must have known that its people harboured no ill will towards Jews.[75]

One of those who survived described what happened in al-Bassa after it was occupied by the JDF on May 14:

> The day the village fell, Jewish soldiers ordered all those who remained in the village to gather in the church. They took a few young people ... outside the church and shot them dead. Soon after, they ordered us to bury them. During the following day, we were transferred to al-Mazra'... There we met other elderly people gathered from the surrounding villages.[76]

People from al-Bassa who tried to 'infiltrate' back to retrieve their belongings were mostly killed by Jewish snipers entrenched at Jubeil, overlooking al-Bassa.

The village of Kabri, unlike al-Bassa, expected harsh treatment; therefore many of the villagers left before JDF shelling started. A woman survivor, Amina Musa, told Nazzal her story:

> My husband and I left Kabri the day before it fell. We walked a few hours to the east on the main Kabri–Tarshiha road. As it got dark, my husband suggested that we spend the night in the village orchard... At dawn while my husband was preparing for his morning prayer, our friend Rajeh passed us and urged us to proceed, urging that we run. My husband made his prayers, then we started to walk towards Tarshiha. It was not long before we were met by the Jews, who were coming from the north and the south towards Kabri. They stopped us and searched us. We had no weapons. They took my jewellery – gold earrings, a necklace and four bracelets ... and forty pounds we had with us.[77]

At that moment, the shelling of Kabri started, 'destroying everything'. The Jewish soldiers took the woman and her husband, along

with a few other captured villagers, to an officer who interrogated them about where they came from. They told him they were from Sheikh Dawud, but an Arab collaborator told the officer that they were from Kabri. The men were then led away and subsequently shot, their wives abandoned on the Kabri–Tarshiha road. The next morning, Amina Musa found her husband's body and, with another woman's help, carried him to the cemetery and attempted to bury him in the correct position ('Until today I worry and pray that I buried him in the right way'). Six days later she left Kabri for Syria to look for a sister who had fled earlier.

Al-Bi'na was a village where refugees from many other villages had gathered. A survivor told Nazzal:

> The Jews grouped us with the other villagers, separating us from our women. We remained all day in the village courtyard ... we were thirsty and hungry. Two villagers asked permission to bring water to the elderly and the children. The Jews took the men to get water, but they shot them instead. The Jews searched us, took what little money we had, our rings and our watches, and chose about 200 men at random and drove away with them in trucks towards Er-Rama. We do not know what happened to them. The rest of us were to proceed north to Lebanon. It was almost night. Al-Bi'na's *mukhtar* asked the Jews to permit us to stay overnight, promising to leave in the morning, rather than travel at night with our old men, women and children. The Jews rejected the *mukhtar*'s request and gave us half an hour to leave... When the half hour passed the Jews began to shoot in the air, injuring my nine year old son in the knee. We walked a few hours until we reached Sajur... We were terrified, the road was full of people in every direction you looked ... all in a hurry to get to Lebanon... I could not find the few loaves of bread I had brought with me to feed my children. They slept hungry that night.[78]

In the case of Mejd al-Kroom, too, twelve men were picked at random and shot in front of the rest.

In the last phase of the war, the capture of Safsaf was crucial in completing the 'cleaning' of Northern and Central Galilee. After its forty- to sixty-man militia had withdrawn, leaving many dead and wounded, the J-D.F. entered the village and shot seventy men in front of the rest of the villagers who had remained behind. It was said that four girls were raped. The effect of the massacre of Safsaf

on the villages around was predictable. A man from nearby Sa'sa' told me:

> My village, Sa'sa', didn't leave because of a battle. There was fighting around, there were air-raids and bombardments. But the reason we left was the news of the massacre of Safsaf, where fifty young men were killed. There were other massacres – Jish, Deir Yasseen – and there were stories of attacks on women's honour. Our villagers were especially concerned to protect their women, and because of this fear, many of the northern villages evacuated even before the war reached them.

Sceptics might suggest that fears for the honour of women merely provided a respectable reason for flight, compared with the outright fear of death. This may be so since Palestinian peasants attach great importance to courage. Yet such distinctions have no value since what really caused the peasants' mass flight was the fact that they found themselves attacked by organized violence on a scale far beyond their means to resist. If in Palestine there had been a remote, inaccessible area that the peasants could have withdrawn to, as the Chinese communists withdrew to Yunnan or the Algerians to the Aures, there is no doubt that Palestinian peasant fighters would never have crossed the borders into the neighbouring Arab countries. But Palestine was so small that Zionist military forces could easily control the three-quarters of it that they had succeeded in capturing during the course of 1948. Deserted by their leadership, betrayed by the negligence and short-sighted selfishness of the Arab regimes, what else could the Palestinians do but flee? Villages that surrendered had no better fate than villages that resisted. Only collaborators had their survival guaranteed. Although Zionists continue to protest that Palestinians left Palestine of their own accord,[79] without pressure, the testimony of 800,000 refugees refutes them.

It seems reasonable to summarize the effects of the war of 1948, during which the State of Israel was established, by saying that the Zionist movement succeeded, through organized violence, in transferring Jewish dispersion and statelessness on to the Arabs of Palestine.