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RURAL REBELS AND URBAN NATIONALISTS
IN SYRIA AND PALESTINE, 1920-1939:
THE REBELLIONS OF SULTAN al-ATRASH
AND SHAYKH IZZ al-DIN al-QASSAM.

by

Dale Robert Martelli
B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1986

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
History

Dale Robert Martelli 1990
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March 1990

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RURAL REBELS AND URBAN NATIONALISTS IN SYRIA AND PALESTINE, 1920-1939:

THE REBELLIONS OF SULTAN AL-ATRASH AND SHAYKH IZZ AL-DIN AL-QASSAM

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the 1925 Syrian rebellion and the 1936 Palestinian rebellion and the respective roles of Sultan al-Atrash and Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam. The rebellions were both peasant revolts initiated by rural leaders. It is a matter of historical dispute the degree to which each rebellion and the respective heroic rebel leaders were inspired by tradition or modern nationalism. Sultan al-Atrash was a rural Druze notable who became president of the Syrian Provisional Government in 1925. Al-Qassam was a mosque teacher with a penchant for social work, religious reform, and political activism. Like Sultan al-Atrash, he adopted rebellion as the means to rid his country of the Mandatory authorities. Sultan al-Atrash, al-Qassam, and their rebellions represented the change and continuity of politics in Syria and Palestine, epitomizing the tension between tradition and modernization in the Arab Middle East.

Sources used include published British Mandatory documents, Royal Commission Reports, Reports and Minutes of the Permanent Mandates Commission. The work of French, Arab and American contemporary observers assisted in understanding perceptions of the events in Syria. The unpublished Tegart Papers, British CID reports on the activities of Palestinian militants, contributed to the analysis of the British response to al-Qassam's threat. All these documents, along with secondary sources, detail a complex situation and enigmatic leadership. The comparison and analysis of Sultan al-Atrash's and al-Qassam's responses to their respective situations disclose ideological tension, pragmatic self-interest, and political idealism.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude for the patience and guidance of my senior supervisor, Dr. William Cleveland.
NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION

The form of transliteration of Arabic terms and names is based primarily of the usage adopted by Philip Khoury in his book, *Syria and the French Mandate*.

LIST OF SPECIAL ABBREVIATIONS

AE Arab Executive
CUP Committee of Union and Progress
HAC Higher Arab Committee
MCA Muslim-Christian Association
PMC Permanent Mandates Commission
SMC Supreme Muslim Council
YMMA Young Men's Muslim Association.
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INTRODUCTION

On 5 June 1916, two sons of Sharif Husayn, Faysal and ‘Ali, proclaimed Arab independence in the Sharif’s name and so began the Arab revolt against Ottoman rule. Husayn set the revolt in motion because of Britain’s promise to support the establishment of an independent Arab state following victory in the war. This promise did not come without qualifications; Britain had to keep French interests in the Arab East in mind. But, apparently, France backed Arab independence. On 7 November 1918, both the French and British declared their mutual support for the creation of Arab national governments in the region of Greater Syria (which included Lebanon, Palestine, and what later became Transjordan) and Mesopotamia. Thus, with the conclusion of World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Husayn and his supporters had every reason to believe that an Arab state would be established.

Unfortunately for Husayn and the Arabs, the needs of the French and British Empires outweighed a few token promises made in the heat of battle. Syria and Mesopotamia were carved up as spoils of war. By 1920, France had effectively occupied Lebanon and a truncated Syria, while Britain occupied Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq. The idea of a pan-Arab state had barely


2 Anglo-French Declaration, Appendix E, Antonius, p. 435.
been conceived before it was eviscerated by French and British imperial strategic requirements.

Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq became class 'A' mandates under the auspices of the League of Nations. This, in theory, meant that Britain and France were charged with the task of preparing the Arabs in those regions for eventual independence and entry into the modern political world. In practice, the mandate system was a re-worked form of imperial domination, with the innovative twist that each mandatory power would be required to submit annual reports to the Permanent Mandates Commission (hereafter PMC) of the League. The Commission, as it happened, was made up of states possessing overseas territories or dreams of acquiring them. To what extent the mandate system operated as a new principle of trusteeship was undermined by the vested interests of each involved state.

Pan-Arabism, as the ideological framework for the concept of an Arab state, was therefore segmented into regional nationalist ideologies circumscribed by the mandate borders. In Syria and Palestine, this growing sense of regional national identity was frustrated by the French and British presence. The resulting discontent and resentment inevitably led to violent political upheaval for which, ironically, the nationalist agitators had little responsibility. In the case of these two mandates, two traditional leaders of rural origin ignited the frustration of the peasant into intense and protracted rebellion. On 18 July


4 MacCallum, pp. 6-8.
1925, Druze rebels led by Sultan al-Atrash fired on a French airplane, and on 21 July laid siege to Suwayda, the capital of Jebel Druze. On 21 November 1935, a Palestinian rebel band led by Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam was surrounded by British police, and in the ensuing exchange of fire, al-Qassam and several others of his rebel band were killed. Al-Qassam's funeral in Haifa was turned into a nationalist demonstration; his 'martyrdom' ignited the General Strike and Rebellion of 1936-1939. Just as al-Qassam's death incited the Palestinian rebellion, Sultan al-Atrash's attack in Suwayda inaugurated the Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927. Both rebellions began with peasants, revealing the strength and extent of opposition to France and Britain.

Specifically, the Syrian and Palestinian revolts demonstrated to the French and British that opposition to their rule did not rest only with the urban intellectuals and notables. In addition, the rebellions served to disseminate the rudimentary nationalist ideology being worked out by those very same urban intellectuals and notables. Through a comparative analysis of each revolt, this thesis will show how these national ideas spread from the cafes of Damascus to rural Syria and Palestine, focussing on the roles of Sultan al-Atrash and al-Qassam. Furthermore, an examination of the social and political nature of the rebellions will assist in understanding how peasant revolts inspired by communal tradition and religion were transformed into nationalist uprisings.

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The interpretation presented in this thesis is not without dispute. Both rebellions, according to several accounts, had little or no centralized control or coordination but managed sufficient unity to keep French and British forces at bay for several years. Explanations abound as to the ineptitude of the mandate security forces or administrative officials, explanations that perhaps attempt to undermine the notion that nationalism had any strong role to play in the rebellions. The debate here is whether the peasant rebel bands, which seemed to operate independently of each other, were composed of brigands inspired by the prospect of loot in a time of unrest or rebels inspired by traditional resistance to administrative centralization, foreign domination, and, most importantly, by the fledgling nationalist ideology propagated in the towns.

In the case of Syria, the question of Sultan al-Atrash's motivations is a matter of contention between Joyce Laverty Miller and Philip Khoury. For Miller, Sultan al-Atrash acted out of the traditional Druze ‘particularism’ that had always characterized Druze relations with the central authority. Most of the so-called ‘rebels’ who jumped on Sultan al-Atrash’s bandwagon were simple brigands. The revolt, according to Miller, was not the nationalist revolt of a united people against a French oppressor but a power struggle among and within divisive groups in an artificial state who could agree on only one thing: the French must go.\(^7\)

For Miller, Sultan al-Atrash was the most ambitious and most anti-French

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aspirant for power in the Atrash family, the leading Druze family.\(^8\) In her interpretation, Sultan al-Atrash rebelled in order to acquire power in the Jebel Druze and to preserve 'feudal' nobility that the French-induced modernizing trends threatened.

Khoury, on the other hand, argues that Sultan al-Atrash's revolt was inspired to a great extent by Syrian Arab nationalism and rebels, not brigands, were the main players in the rebellion. Although Sultan al-Atrash's motives were local in origin in that he sought to prevent the French from undermining the traditional power structure of the Druze mountain community, he was also motivated by the nationalist impulse to unify Syria. At the very least, Sultan al-Atrash was motivated by practical politics: to resist French domination effectively, Syria had to be unified to some degree. Given the complex social and religious structure of the country, Syrian Arab nationalism seemed to be the only available means to achieve unity of purpose.

Druze economic and political connections with Damascus had exposed Sultan al-Atrash to the Damascus nationalists; he had become "...increasingly infected by the idea of nationalism radiating from Damascus."\(^9\) The involvement of the urban nationalists in the subsequent mass uprising served to spread the idea of a Syrian political identity. By contrast, Miller characterizes the revolt as signalling "...the end of the Ottoman political organization in Syria and

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 552.

revealed that Syrian nationalism was both non-existent and non-viable in the
Syrian context."\textsuperscript{10} Khoury asserts that the revolt was a manifestation of an
emerging and viable popular nationalism in Syria. The revolt succeeded on two
counts. It forced the French authorities to re-evaluate their governing policies
and disseminated Syrian nationalism. The political failure of the revolt may
perhaps be seen in the context of the traditional Ottoman administrative
structure rather than in the non-viability of Syrian nationalism.

Because of limited objectives and relative weakness, the traditional
Ottoman system of rule allowed for local centres of autonomy based on
communal or sectarian divisions in Syria and Palestine. The Palestinian revolt,
like the Syrian revolt, was fraught with division and rivalry as a result of this
system. Yehoshua Porath has shown how this divisiveness weakened the
Palestinian revolt. The initial unity of the rebellion provided by al-Qassam's
death foundered on the lack of internal coherence and the rivalry of the
notable families. Ann Mosely Lesch has no argument with the nationalist
character of the revolt, but she argues that the national movement and the
revolt were undermined by a lack of commitment from surrounding Arab
countries. She mentions also the failure of diplomatic action, the failure of
British legislative council proposals to offer an effective Arab majority, and,
finally, simply the overwhelming British military superiority. In short, Porath
seems to stress internal factors while Lesch seems to stress external factors in
accounting for the political and military failure of the revolt. It may be

\textsuperscript{10} Miller, p. 546.
simplistic to suggest any emphasis. The disunity of the movement played as important a role as any one of the external factors analyzed by Lesch; rebel unity could have conceivably worn down British military superiority.

The disputes among historians led me to believe that a comparative study could clarify these and other issues. The similarities between the rebellions are sufficient to allow such an analysis and the differences illuminate the particular growth of Syrian and Palestinian nationalism.

There is no dispute regarding the fact that both rebellions were peasant in character and that the peasant rebels pre-empted and galvanized the urban nationalists who had up until that time sought political compromise. In analyzing the roles of Sultan al-Atrash and al-Qassam, I intend to address the question of "...who speaks to [and for] the peasant and what is it they communicate which moves the peasant to violent political action?" Furthermore, the role of the rural and urban notable as mediator between the peasant and a central authority will be examined, particularly in respect to the issue of control. On the ideological level, the growth of secular nationalism and its diffusion will be considered in respect to tradition and Islam. In short, this thesis will be thematically structured in terms of peasant rebellion, peasant-notable relations, and the role of nationalist ideology and charismatic leadership in Syria and Palestine.

Most writers stress the historical discontinuity of Syria and Palestine after 1918. Arab nationalism, the Ottoman collapse, and the European mandates are

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aspects of this apparent historical disjuncture. Because of this emphasis, the continuity of patterns and processes, such as traditional responses to changing circumstances and social relations, is overlooked.

In order to help redress this imbalance, the analysis of the revolts will be anchored in a brief discussion interlacing the social, economic and political background with ideological developments from the late Ottoman period to the post-war settlement. This first chapter will examine the trends of centralization and secularization set against centrifugal forces resistant to the changes inherent in these trends.

Sultan al-Atrash and the Syrian revolt will be discussed in the second chapter, encompassing the period from the "Day of Maysalun" (the fall of King Faysal and his Arab state in 1920), to the end of the revolt in 1927. Sources include the minutes and reports of the PMC sessions, as well as reports by contemporary observers. Secondary sources are limited with respect to this period of Syria's history, but the intent in comparing the two revolts is to offset this limitation. As my concentration is on Sultan al-Atrash in particular and the peasant rebellion in general, Eric Wolf's Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century greatly assisted in formulating the schema for this study. Wolf, as an anthropologist, approaches peasant rebellion from the 'bottom up'. He asks the question of "...what kinds of peasants we refer to when we speak'

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of peasant involvement in political upheaval.” An important difference between the Syrian and Palestinian revolts would have been missed if not for this question. The kind of peasant initially involved in Sultan al-Atrash’s rebellion was not the same ‘kind’ involved in al-Qassam’s movement.

The analysis of al-Qassam’s significance in the Palestinian peasant rebellion will follow Chapter Two. I will primarily focus on the period between the Wailing Wall riots of 1929 and al-Qassam’s death in 1935. Without going into great detail, the revolt will be discussed primarily in terms of the involvement of the Ikhwan al-Qassam, the Brotherhood of al-Qassam, in order to illustrate al-Qassam’s impact on the revolt. The Tegart Papers (British police reports) offer interesting insights into al-Qassam and his movement and the British perception of al-Qassam. The PMC minutes and reports, British Mandatory Reports, Jewish Agency Reports, and Arab Executive Reports flesh out the political context of this period and al-Qassam’s movement.

These reports, particularly those contained in the Tegart Papers, point out another major difference between al-Qassam’s movement and Sultan al-Atrash’s rebellion. This difference rests on how and what al-Qassam and Sultan al-Atrash communicated to the peasant that moved him to rebellion. Al-Qassam had coated his sermons with nationalist rhetoric, and after his death, the Ikhwan al-Qassam was noted for its extreme religious piety as well as its commitment to the national struggle. Thus, while Sultan al-Atrash’s call was

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13 Wolf, p. x.
14 Ibid., p. xii.
rooted in Druze particularism, al-Qassam's call was rooted in puritanical Islam. Tradition and Islam, however, stand in tense relation to an ideology that is essentially a western import. Clifford Geertz, another anthropologist, offers vital insights into the nature of this tension created by the continuity of a parochial theistic conception of the world in a period of social and political upheaval. From this period emerges a modern secular conception of social and political relations. In this sense, al-Qassam's and Sultan al-Atrash's appeal rested on this inherent tension and in the desire of the peasant to retain and protect his traditions. This desire was translated into rebellion when the traditional institutional edifice could no longer protect the peasant.

What strongly linked Syrian and Palestinian nationalism and tempered the tension in the precarious relationship of a secular ideology to tradition and Islam was what Nadav Safran has described as the negative aspect of nationalism in dependent countries. In the cases of Syria and Palestine, this negative aspect was expressed in the attempt to drive out France and Britain. In this sense, Syrian and Palestinian nationalism were ideologically shallow during the mandate period. Very little was done in the way of constructing a specific and concrete ideology with a political and social vision of how society was to be built after independence was won. This, however, does not mean that a negative national ideology is without worth; as James Jankowski writes,


16 Wolf, p. xv.

"Ideological shallowness...does not necessarily mean ideological unimportance." While the rebellions differed in form and content, and the nationalism that would shape the goals of the rebels was expressed in negative terms, common grievances and problems were manifested that would do more than anything else to create a sense of national unity.

The final chapter will put into perspective the specific and general questions analyzed within the thematic structure of peasant rebellion, peasant-notable relations, ideology, and the charismatic rebel leader. Perhaps the Druze were simply attempting to realign political relations with France on a more favourable basis; things were going fairly smoothly at the outset of the mandate. And it may be that al-Qassam and his brotherhood were only fighting to throw out an infidel power. To what extent did each revolt adopt a nationalist character? Was this nationalism a factor in Sultan al-Atrash’s and al-Qassam’s call to arms? Are we dealing with ambitious power seekers or selfless nationalists? Perhaps, in the end, Sultan al-Atrash was merely seeking to entrench his position as Amir in the Druze mountain community and used the Damascene nationalists only to throw off rivals. And perhaps al-Qassam was simply a puritanical and fanatical preacher, as the British police deemed him to be. Could not his motives be determined solely by his abhorrence of Christian rule? In any case, how could al-Qassam, a Syrian political refugee, become a martyr for Palestinian nationalism?

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In linking up ideology with peasant rebellion through the persons of Sultan al-Atrash and Shaykh 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam, I will argue that an ambitious power seeker and a fanatical preacher can also be selfless nationalists, and that peasant guerrilla bands can be made up of both brigands and rebels. The broken promises of 1918 and the post-war settlement provided conditions amenable to rebellion, and I will show that Sultan al-Atrash and al-Qassam articulated the desire to be rid of those conditions and to construct a new social order within the framework of tradition, Islam, and a new secular ideology.
CHAPTER ONE

TRADITION AND MODERNIZATION
IN
OTTOMAN SYRIA AND PALESTINE, 1798-1918

In 1938, George Antonius published one of the first accounts of the Arab national movement. For Antonius, Arab nationalism stretched back to the schools and cafes of Beirut in the 1870s. In 1875, a group of educated young Christian Arabs formed a secret society which, for a few years, plastered placards to walls of Beirut denouncing Turkish rule and exhorting "...the Arab population to rise in rebellion and overthrow it." British consular despatches and the memory of one of the founders, Dr. Faris Nimr Pasha, provided Antonius with evidence that this society laid the basis for the development of a separate Arab political identity: "...the society's appeals were the first trumpet-call emitted by the infant Arab movement."

Despite his meticulous scholarship and lucid prose, there is an important flaw in Antonius's arguments. Until 1916, no Arab intellectual or politician seeking to define what constituted being an Arab sought to separate from the Ottoman Empire, except for Antonius's brash young men in 1875 Beirut. Arab intellectuals promoted a linguistic and cultural Arab revival within the Ottoman Empire. Autonomy not independence was their trumpet-call. Antonius, an

1 Antonius, pp. 79-80.
2 Ibid., pp. 81-85.
Arab nationalist, was perhaps constructing a mythical apparatus necessary to
the notion of Arab nationalism that emerged from the ruins of World War I.

Before 1918, Syria and Palestine were not distinct political regions. The
regions were geographically known as Suriyyah and Filastin but the people who
lived in the towns and countryside did not possess a Syrian or Palestinian
political identity. They were Muslims, Christians, Druze, or 'Alawites under
Ottoman rule. The legitimacy of the Ottoman state was based on local
traditions and Islam. The Sultan's right to rule was sanctioned by his ability
to defend the world of Islam from the infidel threat. The Empire provided a
sense of historical greatness, and the glory of the Ottoman Empire and
historical Islam was inextricably linked. This historical sense of glory secured
in loose but committed union the incredibly diverse elements of the Empire.3

The Muslim Arabs were loyal to the Islamic character of the Empire while the
assorted sectarian and confessional subject peoples went about their business
with little state interference, enjoying a sense of security that prominent
minority groups in Europe never achieved, even during the Enlightenment Era.

Historically, the Empire was not, in any modern European sense of the
word, centralized. The state was structured on a loose administrative basis.
Part of this structure was the millet system, which allowed non-Muslim Arabs
local autonomy in the affairs of their community. The concerns of Istanbul
rested mainly with tax collection, protecting the Hajj caravan route, military
levies and general maintenance of the social order. The ability of the central,

government to enforce these concerns ebbed and swelled with the fortunes of Empire. This ability was underscored by the limited manpower, small garrisons and moderate funds the central government afforded the regions of Syria and Palestine. Because of the millet system and the limited concerns of Istanbul, varying degrees of local autonomy existed throughout nineteenth-century Syria and Palestine.

Syria and Palestine were divided into vilayets (provinces) and sanjaks (districts), where rural and tribal shaykhs ruled the villages and countryside and notable families ruled the towns "...sometimes providing a degree of security which the imperial government could not maintain." The degree of autonomy of the shaykh intensified the farther he found himself from the urban centres, while the notable's power depended on his wealth and his traditional family prestige. The Bedouin tribes on the desert fringe and the 'Alawis, Druze, Mutawalis, and Kurds of the mountainous fringes resisted any attempt to delimit their local power. The loyalty of these groups to the Ottoman state depended on their ability to maintain their autonomy. In the nineteenth century, this state of affairs began to change and local autonomy was gradually weakened. By 1914, Istanbul, for the most part, succeeded in establishing central control over these groups through strengthening the bureaucratic and military apparatus in Syria and Palestine. This centralization undermined the regional centrifugal

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5 Ibid., p. 30.
tendencies that plagued Syria and Palestine and provided a necessary condition for the gradual development of allegiance to a Syrian or Palestinian nation rather than to a local region.

The notables and shaykhs of Syria and Palestine first experienced modernization at close hand during the years of the Egyptian occupation. In 1831, Ibrahim, the son of the Pasha of Egypt, invaded Syria and Palestine. By August 1832, he had achieved effective occupation of the region. Ibrahim immediately instituted the modern reforms his father had implemented in Egypt: administrative centralization, general conscription, and equality of political status for non-Muslims. His reforms, in effect, threatened the traditional power base of the urban notables and the rural shaykhs. The subsequent unrest and rebellion, assisted by British military and diplomatic intervention, forced Ibrahim out of Syria in 1840. However, Ibrahim did sufficiently shake up the traditional order of things in the towns and villages of Syria and Palestine to provide conditions necessary for future attempts at change.

The traditional authority of the shaykh rested on a network of complex kin relationships. Each ‘ashair (tribal clan) shaykh’s power and wealth was derived from the tax concession (‘iltizam) and the maintenance of security of life and property. The shaykh, because of this power and wealth, was the

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7 Ma'oz, "Society and State in Modern Syria", p. 33.

8 Smith, p. 11; Porath, *The Emergence...*, p. 13.
intermediary between the peasant and the Ottoman authorities. His relationship with his peasants appeared highly personalized and intimate:

This appearance in fact served to refract the underlying relations of exploitation, recasting them in terms consonant with the constitution of amicable interpersonal relations. Class antagonisms were also softened by the shared interests of shaykhs and peasants in defending highland villages from state intervention and in struggling against competing rural confederations.

Thus, until the late nineteenth century, the shaykh was the power broker in rural Syria and Palestine balancing the interests of the village and tribe with the interests of Istanbul.

This social order was essentially representative, allowing for communal and sectarian differences, of rural Syria as well. This traditional order was the basis for the shaykhs' rule over the villages and countryside of Syria and Palestine. It was undermined by the changes inflicted by Ibrahim, the Tanzimat reforms and European economic and political penetration. Syria and Palestine gradually became drawn into the European economic orbit, and the importation of capitalism fundamentally altered the economic and social order which

\[9\] Smith, p. 172.

\[10\] Both Ma'oz's "Society and State in Modern Syria" and Dominique's Chevallier's *La Societe du Mont Liban*, (Paris: Libraire Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1971) provide thorough analyses of the social relations in Syria and Mount Lebanon during the nineteenth century. The Druze shaykh's power was based on his kin relationships and his ability to mediate between his peasants and the central government. The case of Bashar II, discussed in K. S. Salibi's *The Modern History of Lebanon*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), was an example of how a shaykh's mediating ability was undermined by abandoning the interests of his peasants for the interests of a central government; in this case, that of Ibrahim. See also Iliya Harik, "The 'Itqa System in Lebanon: A Comparative 'Political View", *Middle East Journal*, 19(Autumn, 1965).
supported the authority of the shaykh. At the expense of the shaykh's power, the urban notable expanded his authority into the countryside.11

The urban notables, as a group, were made up of religious scholars, military garrison leaders, and secular dignitaries. The religious scholars were the 'ulama. The secular dignitaries, or 'ayan, were from families whose traditional power base rested on religious piety, social wealth and independent access to authority.12 As agriculture shifted from subsistence to market economy, the distance between town and village decreased. The 'ayan acquired control over the land because of the need for capital and changes in the tax concession. More land owned by the 'ayan, providing them with the wealth necessary to lease tax concessions, was one of the changes instituted by Ottoman reformers. The tax concessions further increased the wealth of the 'ayan and their ability to control the local bureaucracy.13 By the end of the nineteenth century, the urban notable in effect replaced the rural shaykh as the power broker, or mediating power, between peasant interests and government interests. The shaykh did retain vestigial prestige and power as the events of 1925 in Syria and of 1935 in Palestine would demonstrate.


12 Hourani, "Ottoman Reform...", p. 53.

13 Khoury, Syriā and the French Mandate, pp. 8-10.

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The reform attempts of the Tanzimat period, 1839-1876, were far from consistent. The aim of the reformers was "...to establish a uniform and centralized administration." The process itself was not uniform in its application, and the strength of resistance to the reforms greatly weakened their effective implementation. The capacity for resistance, however, was weakened—first by Ibrahim's occupation and second by European penetration.

European trade caused regional and local shifts in power, not just in terms of the shaykh and the notable. The Capitulation Treaties of 1740 allowed European merchant-consuls access to the wealth of Syria and Palestine. Christian Arabs, because of religious affinity, worked for the European trader as dragomen, or translators. As dragomen, Christian Arabs were given the commercial protection accorded the Europeans by the Capitulations. Privileges such as a lower rate of duty provided the dragoman with the means to become a merchant in his own right, competing with his former patrons and without the normal restrictions of the Muslim merchants.

Because the dragoman could enter into business activities without the need of relying on notable privilege, a middle class developed consisting of these merchants and workers in European factories. This middle class was abstracted from Ottoman society. Under this extension of the Capitulations, the dragoman-trader could be tried in European commercial courts despite

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14 Hourani, "Ottoman Reform...", p. 54.
15 Berkes, pp. 23-55.
remaining Ottoman subjects. Thus, along with the changes in power relations between the shaykh and the notable, a socially and economically abstracted middle class emerged that threatened the economic base of Muslim merchants and the notables. The Damascene merchant found it difficult to compete against the privileges granted to the Beiruti Christian dragoman-merchant.

The urban notables, because of their traditional privileges, the diminished power of the shaykh, their increased land-holding and access to authority were the only Muslim class to hold their own in the commercialization of Syria's economy. The Syrian peasant stood to suffer most from these changes. The traditional social structure of the village and patterns of cultivation would be drastically altered. Many peasants who had once been landholders became share-croppers, wage labourers, or were simply dispossessed.

Most of the cultivable land was mitri, or state land. The village held this land on a cooperative basis known as the musha system. Under this system, land was regularly redistributed according to the size of each household and taxes were collected in a joint form. The development of a market economy (requiring increased agricultural efficiency), changes in tax collection, land reform, and the growth of private property undermined this system that had historically provided security for the peasant-cultivator. The peasant now

17 Ibid., p. 46.
20 Cohen, pp. 5-7.
faced the vicissitudes of a free-market economy and, given the shaykh's loss of power, was forced to rely for protection on the urban notable who benefited by all those changes that threatened the peasant.

European economic pressures, Ottoman centralization, and the 'berat of the dragoman' (along with the sedentarization of the nomadic tribes and the trading shift from the interior to the coastal cities) initiated, therefore, a process that radically altered the traditional social and political fabric of Syria and Palestine. Land reforms concentrated land-wealth in the hands of the notables of Damascus, Aleppo, Haifa and Jerusalem. And through the process of bureaucratic reform, the central authorities, traditionally stronger in these cities because of the pilgrimage route, became more and more involved in local affairs.

The Ottoman Land Code, promulgated in 1858, was intended to provide state protection for the peasant while weakening the power of the 'ayan. The Hatt'i Serif of Gulhane, the first great Tanzimat reform edict proclaimed on 3 November 1839, abolished the hereditary 'iltizam replacing it with a personal income tax. Ibrahim had already introduced a personal income tax which, for the rural shaykhs, was a direct attack on their traditional fiscal obligations.


The Ottoman reformers had simply adopted Ibrahim's tax despite having made promises to the contrary during the occupation. Conservative opposition in the Porte as well as traditional peasant distrust of any kind of government interference in their lives crippled the implementation of the reform decree. The 'ayan acquired control over tax collection thus strengthening their position at the expense of the shaykh. The Land Code actually furthered this process: the 'ayan, because of the land acquired as a result of this decree, were able to maintain and extend their social and economic power.

The government encouraged peasants to register their lands in order to legalize and rationalize land ownership and protect the private property of the peasants. The reformers assumed that the peasants would want to register their lands. They did not take into account the traditional peasant distrust of government. Their second mistake was allowing the local administration to implement the Code. This blunder "...allowed the 'ayan to register large stretches of land in their own names--and to which they also held the 'iltizam rights." The implementation of the Land Code was thus distorted because "...its local interpretation and execution facilitated the acquisition of land by the very intermediaries Istanbul had set out to enfeeble."

It has been argued that given the increasing political and economic interference of the Europeans, the traditional notables began to lose ground to

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24 Ma'oz, Ottoman Reform... pp. 16; 62n; and 70.
25 Smith, p. 13.
26 Porath, The Emergence... p. 12.
27 Khoury, Urban Notables... p. 27.
the consulates and the seaport merchants after 1860. The Ottoman authorities did rely more on the consulates as intermediaries between the confessional groups and themselves (for example, the French had adopted the Maronites and the British, through a consular agent Richard Wood, had adopted the Druze). But, as the historian Khoury shows, the traditional secular notable did not take long to retreat and adapt. With the process of private appropriation of property intensified by the Land Code and agrarian commercialization, and the development of modern communication and transport, a new interrelated network of urban notables emerged. As well as the traditional sources of political influence (religious piety, social wealth, and independent access to authority), the power of this new class of 'ayan rested on land ownership and access to public office.

By the turn of the century, the local power of this class overshadowed that of any other social group. These notables, in spite of competition from the European trader-consuls and the Beirut or Haifa dragoman-merchant, successfully entrenched themselves as the leaders of Syrian and Palestinian society. They would be of vital importance to the emergence of Syrian and Palestinian Arab nationalism.

Under Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909) the administration of the Empire was, in relative terms, successfully centralized. Through the expansion

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28 Hourani, "Ottoman Reform...", p. 67.


30 Khoury, Urban Notables..., p. 5.
of roads, the construction of the railroad and the telegraph, and the reinforcement of the garrisons, Abdul Hamid was able to extend his authority farther and deeper into the fringes of his empire. As a consequence, the Empire's bureaucracy expanded and thus the state school system had to expand to meet the needs of the bureaucracy. The refashioned class of notables, because of their wealth and power in the rural and urban areas, managed to monopolize the new administrative posts. Their sons went to the new state schools, graduating into the bureaucracy or the army.

The religious families of the 'ulama were eclipsed by the landowning bureaucratic notables. They were only able to hold their own through control of the religious offices, the 'awqaf (religious lands and money for mosques and other religious institutions), and by following suit by sending their sons up the same school-bureaucratic ladder. The landowning bureaucratic elite, whether 'ayan or 'ulama, sacrificed a great deal of autonomy but succeeded in dominating Syrian and Palestinian society. Land, when combined with public office, produced "...for a family and its individual members unrivalled power on the local scene." From this class of notables emerged the Arab nationalist ideologues after World War I. Until 1918, however, the dominant ideology of the landowning

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32 Khoury, Urban Notables..., p. 30.
bureaucratic notables was "Ottomanism." Two currents of thought characterized Ottomanism: one conservative, idealizing the glories of early Islam; the other modernist, stressing the need to regain the rational element of early Islam in order to modernize the Empire. Both currents had a common basis in the commitment to the Ottoman Empire. Ottomanism, whether conservative or modernist, sought to strengthen the Islamic character of the Empire, combat the European encroachment, and regain a world power position for the Empire.

The essential principle of Ottomanist thought was pan-Islamic in character. Abdul Hamid II used the pan-Islamic basis of Ottomanism to support his claim to the Caliphate. Abdul Hamid's use of conservative Ottomanism to cement ideologically his position and prop-up his policy of administrative centralization did not go unopposed. A positive impetus, also pan-Islamic, did not support the idea that an autocrat was necessary for the unity and revitalization of the Empire. The source for this impetus came from a charismatic and militant activist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897). Al-Afghani's thought and actions would deeply affect the intellectuals of Beirut, Damascus and Cairo and the development of modernist Ottomanism.

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34 Hourani, Arabic Thought..., pp. 106-7. The Sultan's role as Caliph had never been legitimized.

35 Khadduri, pp. 56-7.
Beginning in the 1870s, al-Afghani travelled widely throughout the Empire and Europe. During the course of his travels, his presence often caused some form of social disturbance. He was not an intellectual bystander. Al-Afghani was a political agitator as well as a writer and when his writings did not land him in difficulties, his political activities in cities like Cairo, Baghdad or Istanbul guaranteed trouble. Al-Afghani held that the Empire and Islam were not inherently weak; rather, the Muslim people, especially the 'ulama, had fallen from the true nature of Islam.

Al-Afghani argued that Islam had all the necessary elements to revitalize itself without returning to some romantically obscured past. Islam had lost *ijtihad*, the ability of the individual adherent to interpret rationally and independently the tenets of his religion. He was arguing from a 'fallen from grace' position but he was not advocating return to some pristine state of belief. Modern Islam had lost its historic rationality. For al-Afghani, the strength and unity of Islamic civilization could be restored by the reason implicit in the faith. He argued that Islam was the most rational of all faiths and, unlike Christendom, Islamic civilization did not need a Reformation to reassert reason. Islam was more than a faith; it was the one true civilization. All that was needed was the resurrection of *ijtihad*, reason and unity in the *umma*.

Al-Afghani's principle disciple, Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), turned from the political activism of his youth and his mentor to the elaboration of

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al-Afghani's modernist ideology of Ottomanism. Though adopting al-Afghani's views for the most part, Abduh diverged on the question of Islam and modern science. Like al-Afghani, he argued that Islam was inherently rational. Abduh, however, argued that religion and science must not be one and the same:

...Islam was perverted by intertwining science and reason which ought to be kept separate; so that in the end the Moslems ceased to exercise reason.37

In a modern Islamic society, science would flourish with Islam acting as the "principle of restraint" in determining the direction of social change.38 Abduh asserted the superiority of Islam, but by separating science and reason from faith, he made possible the development of secular Arab nationalism.

Abduh also held that the fundamental reform of Islam required a revival of Arabic studies. Because the Koran was written in Arabic, the Arabic language was essential to any revitalization of Islamic civilization.39 Hence, along with intellectually opening Islamic society to secularism, his emphasis on the Arab essence of Islam provided a second precondition for the development of secular Arab nationalism in its theoretical form. But we should not mistake Abduh for anything but a modern Ottomanist; despite his strong sense of being Egyptian and his stress on Arabic, he was committed to the Ottoman Empire.40 For him, the Ottoman Empire was the only viable context for the reformation and revival of the umma.

37 Dawn, From Ottomanism... p. 134.
38 Hourani, Arabic Thought... p. 140.
39 Dawn, From Ottomanism... p. 136.
40 Hourani, Arabic Thought... p. 156.
Abduh's student, Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935), was the next link in the ideological chain between Ottomanism and Arabism. Like Abduh, Rida stressed the importance of Arabic and the essential Arabic character of Islam. But he rejected the implicit dualism in Abduh's thought. He was acutely aware of the influx of secular ideas and chose to adopt a defensive stance.\(^1\) Rida stood opposed to the modernists who were prepared to consign Islam to matters outside the realm of everyday experience but he still worked within the ideological framework of modernist Ottomanism. He sought an Islamic revival based on the teaching of the Prophet and the "Elders" (salaf); as a Sunni, or orthodox Muslim, his interpretation was inspired by the tradition of strict Hanbalism.\(^2\) This revival would be carried out under the auspices of the Ottoman Empire. In this way, he remained committed to the Ottoman polity and, because he accepted that science and Islam were not mutually exclusive, Rida remained a modernist.

Rida was very concerned with the secularization of Islamic society and particularly with the generation of young men who had been trained in the new schools and taught within a secular curriculum. His strict Hanbalism brought him into contact with Damascus 'ulama who shared his concerns and his traditionalism.\(^3\) These salafi adherents, who were influenced by Rida, were

\(^1\) Khadduri, p. 65.

\(^2\) Hourani, Arabic Thought..., pp. 229-31. Hanbalism was "...strongly opposed to all attempts at reducing the principles of Islam to a construction of the human intelligence, but showed great flexibility in applying them to the problems of social life". (p. 18).

\(^3\) Commins, p. 408.
middle 'ulama. They worked as prayer leaders and teachers in the Damascus mosques. Their positions were the most vulnerable to secularization. As the 'ulama declined in social fortunes, those who did not hold official religious posts were the first to find themselves without a job. They were understandably concerned with government school graduates who were inclined to support secular changes to society. The salafi advocates, like Rida, were motivated by their deep religious piety. But they were also concerned with maintaining their position in Damascus society.

Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi (1868-1914) and Tahir al-Jaza'iri (1852-1920) were the most influential advocates of the Syrian salafiyyah. Their beliefs that Islam was intrinsically rational and the exercise of reason through the revival of ijtihad would strengthen and unify the Empire conformed with Rida's arguments. Both al-Qasimi and al-Jaza'iri were affected by the changes wrought by European economic and political power and the secular reforms of the Tanzimat. As middle 'ulama, they were concerned with their diminishing importance in Syrian society in contrast to the 'ayan. But it was not simply the loss of social prestige and power that concerned them. Al-Qasimi and al-Jaza'iri saw their social marginalization in religious terms. It would not be difficult to conceive that in their view, as their social roles became less important, so did the role of Islam. How could the two be separated?

Ibid., p. 409.

Ibid., p. 409.

Ibid., p. 402-409.
Al-Qasimi and al-Jaza'iri met with like-minded young men in the Damascus cafes at the turn of the century. These young men, unlike the salafi advocates, came from the 'ayan class. In discussions with al-Jaza'iri and al-Qasimi, they were exposed to the tenets of salafi-Ottomanism. Most of them had graduated from the new state schools only to find themselves without prospects of employment. As a consequence, they probably shared similar fears and interests with the salafi advocates. Their class background, however, distinguished them from the salafiyyah and the concomitant social and political differences brought them under the influence of another Syrian salafi thinker.

'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1854-1902), influenced by al-Afghani, Abduh and Rida, promoted the salafi tenets of modernist Ottomanism with an ideological twist. He attacked the Ottoman state more forcibly than any of the other writers as the cause for the decay of Islamic civilization. Al-Kawakibi's writings "...differentiated between the Arab movement and the general pan-Islamic revival preached by Jamaluddin al-Afghani." He called for the restoration of the Caliphate in Arab hands and asserted the Arab essence of Islam. This did not make him very popular with Abdul Hamid II. He went so far as to argue that the Turks and their despotic rule were responsible for the weakness of Islam in the face of European power. The Arabs were "...the pre-eminent Moslem people because the Prophet was an Arab and the

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47 Ibid., p. 412.
48 Ibid., pp. 411-412.
49 Antonius, p. 97.
50 Hourani, Arabic Thought..., p. 272.
Koran was an Arabic book." The Arabs were in the best position to restore the greatness of Islam. In his concentration on things Arab, al-Kawakibi based political loyalty on Arab identity, not Islamic identity. Al-Afghani had talked of Islam as a civilization instead of as a religion. Al-Kawakibi put the priority on the Arab character of Islamic civilization.

The historian Khaldun al-Husry suggests that al-Kawakibi was the first Arab thinker to evolve the modern concept of Arab nationalism. Al-Kawakibi did emphasize the special place of Arabs and Arabic in Islam. He did vehemently oppose the rule of Abdul Hamid II in particular and distrust Turkish rule in general. Socialism did seem to have some influence on his thought. In these ways, he was necessary for the development of Arab nationalist ideology. At no time, however, did he call for Arab separation from the Empire. He fought to put the Arabs back into a central position within the Empire.

Al-Kawakibi, like Abduh and Rida, stressed language as the binding factor for Arabs. In this way, he contributed to the development of Arab nationalism because Arabic, in its special relationship with Islam, could provide a means to attract devout Muslims to a secular ideology.

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51 Dawn, From Ottomanism..., p. 84.
53 Ibid., p. 78.
54 Khadduri, p. 16; Hourani, Arabic Thought..., pp. 272-3.
Because of the influence of al-Kawakibi, al-Jaza'iri's young notables became known as Arabists. In no way should Arabism before 1918 be construed as anything but an ideological and generational variant from Ottomanism. Ottomanism was the dominant ideology of the Arabists' fathers and they were still committed to a weak version of salafi-inspired modernist Ottomanism.

The Arabists came from a particular faction of the landowning bureaucratic 'ayan. Generally from the less wealthy Muslim families of Damascus, they graduated from Abdul Hamid II's educational system or western schools unable to compete in the bidding for posts which was based on available cash rather than on merit. Unemployment left these young men alienated and frustrated. The bonds between these young notables and the Ottoman state were frayed at the edges.

Al-Kawakibi's strong Arab emphasis and the salafiyyah synthesis of modernity and tradition provided these frustrated young intellectuals with the outlines of an ideology and an identity. Western superiority and the heavy-handed implementation of state centralization angered them. The failure of the conservative upper class to resist the central government and the family conflict arising in part out of Porte-inspired manipulation created a sense of dismay. Rising expectations undermined by underemployment compounded their anger and fears. All these factors ran roughshod over the already battered Muslim identity. Al-Kawakibi and Arabism offered al-Jaza'iri's young notables an

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55 Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate, pp. 66-8; Commins, p. 412.
alternative. Asserting the primacy of Arab language and culture, the Arabists, while not advocating secession, called for decentralization in opposition to the policies emanating from Istanbul, especially after 1908.56

The Young Turk coup d'état of 1908 initiated a process of state reform and centralization that would further estrange the young Arabists. The government made Turkish the official language of the schools and the bureaucracy and thus a prerequisite for holding public office. For the Arabists, this was tantamount to a direct attack on their call for the reassertion of Arabic in the Empire. This change, whether or not part of a deliberate 'turkification' process, only served to alienate the Arabists. Their initial celebration of the Constitutionalist Movement of the Young Turks petered out by 1914. The Arabists failed to take into account the suspicion the Young Turks would have of Arab notables. Any group who had served Abdul Hamid II was suspect. The Arabists had hoped that a constitution and a parliament would be the means to restore the central position of Arabs in the Empire.57 Any such hopes were soon dashed. The fears of the conservative upper class ulama, in their opposition to the secular policies of the "Committee for Union and Progress" (hereafter CUP), were proved legitimate. Without sufficient capital and fluency in Turkish, the prospects of the Arabists became even dimmer and their Arabism became their ideological shelter.58

57 Commens, p. 413.
58 Antonius, pp. 105-7.
The Arabists had miscalculated. The CUP, especially after the unsuccessful counter-coup in April 1909, continued Abdul Hamid II's centralization process, replacing his pan-Islam with an emphasis on the Turkish language and culture and thus appeared to de-emphasize Islam. To attempt to replace Islam with Turkish nationalism was anathema to the salafi and Arabist alike. Enthusiasm evolved into resentment as this policy was pushed even harder after 1911.59

In June 1913 an Arab Congress was convened in Paris. Independence was not an issue. Against the policies of centralization and Turkification, the Congress argued for a policy of administrative decentralization. The Arab nation was emphasized within the framework of the Empire. The Congress, in essence, desired the reestablishment of traditional local autonomy.60 Most representatives to the Congress were notables and given their traditional social station, wanted the politics of mediation restored.

However repressive Abdul Hamid II's reign may have been, at least he possessed the historical religious sanction the Young Turks seemed intent on undermining. Like Ibrahim's administrative reforms in the 1830s and the Tanzimat reforms that followed, the notables and peasants balked at the increased interference in their affairs. The fact that this interference did not possess the necessary religious sanction made things even worse.61 The Young

59 Ibid., pp. 194-5.
60 Hourani, Arabic Thought..., p. 293.
61 Khalidi, p. 204.
Turk's administrative improvements appeared to be direct secular attacks on traditional local autonomy and the Islamic order of things. Arabism, despite its own secular tendencies, became a defensive front against the CUP's secularization policies.

Between 1908 and 1912, a free press developed providing a forum for the dissemination of Arabist views. The impact of the CUP reforms assisted the ease of dissemination. Though most peasants and townspeople were illiterate, newspapers were common centrepieces of discussion in the cafes of Damascus and Jerusalem. Someone literate would read to those who were not. Arabist ideology was transmitted beyond scholarly works, Paris journals and the notable class through these cafe debates. After 1912, the CUP muzzled the press, thereby furnishing one more item for the accumulating store of resentment and frustration.

Whether or not the CUP government was in fact motivated by Turkish patriotism, the dismissals and transfers of Arab officials in late 1909 fostered the conviction that the Young Turks sought to establish Turkish national supremacy in the Empire. In the face of this conviction, the public movement for Arab rights came under the coordination of the "Ottoman Decentralization Party". Secret societies such as al-Fatat (Young Arab Society) and al-Ahd (Covenant Society) were formed to provide support for the decentralization

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62 Ibid., p. 203.
64 Antonius, p. 105.
65 Khalidi, p. 218.
push against CUP policies. Neither the Decentralization Party nor the secret societies, except perhaps the al-Fatat, worked overtly towards Arab independence.66

In 1908, the CUP government appointed Husayn ibn 'Ali as Sharif of Mecca in the Hejaz. When war broke out in 1914, Husayn found himself between the British and the Turks. There was a strong possibility that this war would mean the end of the Ottoman Empire. Through correspondence with Sir Henry McMahon, the High Commissioner for Egypt and the Sudan, Husayn extracted a British promise to assist in the creation of an Arab state after the war in return for an Arab revolt.67 The Syrian Arabists enthusiastically supported the revolt but few Palestinian notables came out in support of Husayn.68 The Ottoman government portrayed Husayn's rebellion as an act against the faith while Husayn had declared jihad (holy war) against the Young Turks. Hence, both the government and Husayn used Islam in their appeals to the Arabs.69 Any claim for political loyalty was meaningless unless it was framed as a traditional Islamic appeal. The Arab Revolt had marginal success in galvanizing the population but became an important mythical facet in the evolution of Arab nationalism after the war.

66 Dawn, From Ottomanism..., pp. 149-50; Antonius, pp. 109-12.

67 Antonius, pp. 164-83.


With the victory of the Allies in 1918, the Ottoman Empire was dissolved. Husayn and his sons looked to Britain to fulfill the promise of Arab independence. Husayn did not take into account war-time expediency. Britain’s promises to the French and the Zionists qualified those promises McMahon had made in 1915. The impulses of mission civilisatrice and the "white man’s burden", along with the needs of Empire, were paramount over the needs of a ‘semi-civilized’ race. France gained control over Lebanon and Syria. Britain gained control over Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq. Lord Kitchener, War Minister 1914-1916, had advocated since 1912 that British Egypt needed a buffer state carved out of Syria and Palestine. McMahon’s vague exception of "...portions of Syria lying to the west of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo" to his promises was used to justify the creation of a British-controlled Palestine.

Ideologically, Ottomanism was now bankrupt. There was no longer an Ottoman state to attach political and religious loyalty. Into the consequent intellectual vacuum, Arabism refashioned itself, and Arab nationalism emerged. But just as this ideology surfaced, the Arab nation was carved up with the imposition of the French and British Mandates. Arab nationalism continued to exist only in the romantic yearnings of intellectual idealists, while more pragmatic individuals reshaped it to fit the Mandate borders.

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70 Khalidi, pp. 307; 346-7; and 368-70.

71 "Sir Henry McMahon's Second Note to the Sharif Husain", (Cairo, October 24, 1915), Appendix 4 in Antonius, p. 419.
This chapter illustrates both the continuity and discontinuity of political, social, economic and ideological developments from the early nineteenth century, to Mandate Syria and Palestine. The penetration of Europe through missionaries, traders and consuls effected a process of social, political and economic dislocation. European modernization was culturally and socially at variance with traditional Islamic values because it presupposed secularism and political nationalism, both alien and disruptive concepts for Islam. The intensity of the penetration undermined, more importantly, the traditional basis of Ottoman legitimacy. It became increasingly apparent that the Ottoman state was impotent in the face of European penetration. The Ottoman government took the brunt of a growing frustration with the strength of the European intrusion and with the relative weakness of the Empire to do very much about it.

Attempts to catch up with Europe were very lopsided and created an asymmetrical social and political development in the nineteenth century. The emergence of a non-Muslim middle class abstracted from Ottoman society manifests this skewed growth. The modernization attempts of the Tanzimat lacked the necessary concomitant social changes. Hence the ideological dislocation: either the Islamic bonds would have to be reforged or somehow adapted to the externally-induced social changes. If this could not be accomplished, perhaps it would be necessary to adopt modernization fully and overhaul Ottoman society by relegating Islam to the unenviable position of Christian religions in the West.
There is thus a direct link between the notion of geographical patriotism and the salafi-inspired Ottoman Arabists. They were all evolving responses to the social change set in motion by European traders, consuls, missionaries and generals. And from Arabist Ottomanism emerged Arab nationalism:

Arabism, then, grew out of modernist Ottomanism and in response to the same stimulus...the modernist justification of the Islamic East created a basis for Arab nationalist theory.72

The ideological responses to the stimulus of modernization connect the incipient Syrian and Palestinian nationalism of the 1920s and the initial penetration of Western technology and ideas.

Al-Afghani, Abduh and Rida provided the intellectual conditions for the development of regional nationalism in Mandate Syria and Palestine. Rida's conservative salafi-modernism was the crucial ideological connection. Rida influenced al-Qasimi and al-Jaza'iri, the Damascus middle-level 'ulama who passed on al-Afghani's, Abduh's and Rida's ideological tenets to young unemployed notables. Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam, also a Syrian middle-level 'alim, studied at al-Azhar University in Cairo where both Abduh and Rida taught. His strict adherence to Islam in the Hanbalist tradition, which he shared in common with Rida and al-Jaza'iri, and his salafi sense of reform would merge in an Islamic and nationalist call for rebellion in Palestine. The leading urban Palestinian nationalist of the 1920s and 1930s, Mufti al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, also studied with Rida.73 Al-Qassam and al-Husayni were the links

72 Dawn, From Ottomanism..., pp. 143 and 145.
73 Mattar, p. 9.
between the teachings of al-Afghani and the Damascus cafes, to the Palestinian peasants of the 1930s.

Before the Palestinian revolt, Sultan al-Atrash, in 1925, led a Druze revolt against the French which turned into a Syrian nationalist revolt. Abd al-Rahman al-Shahbandar was one of those young unemployed notables who discussed Arab politics and Islamic reform in the Damascus cafes with al-Qasimi and al-Jaza'iri. Through the war years, al-Shahbandar was an active Arabist and after the war he became a militant Syrian Arab nationalist. It was through al-Shahbandar that Sultan al-Atrash became politicized in Syrian nationalism and was able to turn a local revolt into a national rebellion. Al-Shahbandar was the link between al-Jaza'iri to al-Atrash and the Syrian rebellion of 1925.
The sustained revolt of 1925-1927 in the French Mandate of Syria had its origins in the last weeks of World War I. The interests of French imperialism and Arab nationalism clashed, and the French acquired control over Syria. In obtaining Syria, the French directly contributed to the development of Syrian nationalism and to the outbreak of a country-wide revolt. In other words, the French occupation provided the necessary ground for disseminating regional nationalism over a multitude of disparate social, religious and communal groups. The political opposition to French rule created the conditions for the bringing these groups together under the banner of Syrian nationalism, and in 1925 Syrian rebels and nationalists attempted to force France to recognise demands for greater control of the political future of Syria. In this respect, the Syrian revolt was a violent manifestation of this emerging nationalism.

Sharif Husayn's son Faysal entered Damascus on 3 October 1918 in conjunction with General Allenby's forces. Despite the order that he was to keep strictly to his military role, Faysal moved towards establishing an Arab State. In November 1918, Faysal went to London and Paris as head of the Arab Delegation to the Peace Conference and returned in May 1919 finally disillusioned with his allies. Faysal initiated the formation of the General Syrian Congress under the chairmanship of Rashid Rida. The representatives who attended the congress were the traditional power brokers of Syria. Faysal wanted to show the Allies that there was popular support for his government.
He possibly hoped that an appeal to their democratic feelings might work where all else had failed. But on 15 September 1919, an agreement was reached between France and Britain on the evacuation of British forces from the Lebanon and Damascus zones. In effect, Faysal was abandoned by the British, and he could not survive without a French guarantee of his independence.

The Congress proclaimed the creation of an United Syrian Kingdom on 8 March 1920. This proclamation manifested the emerging sentiments of Arab nationalism as the Arabists reformulated their ideology to fit the present state of affairs. As Sati al-Husri wrote:

...the principle of Arab unity not only was not ignored but was clearly referred to in the resolution. Emir Faysal in his opening address to the Syrian Congress on March 6, 1920 said: "And before I close my remarks at this immortal session, I should like to remind you of your Iraqi brethren who fought beside you and suffered so much for the fatherland."

Presumably, al-Husri was referring to Faysal's use of the term 'fatherland'. Though the term itself is rather vacuous, and lacking in concrete reference, Faysal was appealing to sentiments of political loyalty to the notion of an Arab state. The weakness of such sentiments is underscored by Faysal's actual reminder. His salute to the 'Iraqi brethren' indicates the strength of regional identity; would the fatherland become Arab or Iraqi? Faysal was concerned not only with the British occupation of Iraq. The Arabs had resisted centralization under the Ottomans; would they be any more inclined to accept it from an Hejazi prince? For the Palestinian nationalists, the unity of

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"...Palestine and Syria would have meant Faysal's usurpation of their power."

This implied recognition of the strength of regional sentiments underscores the lack of reality in the notion of "greater Arab unity". And this is why the Congress's resolution stressed decentralization as government policy.

In fact, the internal centrifugal forces in Damascus made Faysal's task that much more difficult. In a sense, he was a mediator in a very tough power-broker situation. In order to attain some semblance of Arab independence and maintain his political position, Faysal had to balance the interests of the French and the British with those of his entourage, the Congress delegates, and the indigenous Damascene notables. Faysal faced a stacked deck.

Some of Faysal's supporters, including the young Arabist and now Doctor, Abd al-Rahman al-Shahbandar, had tried to push Faysal into a more militant stance since his Paris agreement. But in April 1920, the San Remo Conference (the Allied division of spoils) awarded France a 'Mandate' for Syria. Al-Shahbandar's faction attained some measure of success when Faysal rejected the Mandate. On 14 July, General Gouraud, the High Commissioner of the Lebanon and Syria, was forced to deliver an ultimatum to Faysal. Faysal accepted Gouraud's terms knowing full well that the Syrians were no match for Gouraud's forces; even al-Shahbandar recognized this fact. Unfortunately, Faysal's reply was too late. On 25 July 1920, his forces fell to

\[2\] Mattar, p. 6.
the French. The Mandate became reality while Arab independence dissipated in the wind.

The bittersweet rule of Faysal was commingled with the ravages of war, the dissolution of a Muslim Empire and the political impotence of the Arab Revolt in a stew of disappointment, frustration and alienation. Ironically, the Mandates created the conditions for the emergence of Syrian and Palestinian regional nationalism. The idea of Arab nationalism, similar to the experience of Ottomanism, was emptied of any feasible or meaningful reference. Its ideological framework and legacy, however, gave birth to a modern nationalist ideology shaped by the Mandate borders and animated by opposition to foreign rule.

The Mandate borders did mirror to some extent areas that had possessed a historical, albeit weak, geographical sense of identity. The Mandates reinforced this identity in the ideological context provided by the ephemeral notion of Arab nationalism and the traditional tenets of Islam or communal/sectarian autonomy. The Mandates also fused the social dislocation caused by the war and the occupation within this refashioned nationalist identity. From the traditional autonomous system of Ottoman rule to the ideological and religious responses to modernization, Syrian and Palestinian

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3 Husri, p. 64 and p. 79; MacCallum, pp. 30–32; Joadder, pp. 48–49; and Longrigg, pp. 102–4.
Arab nationalism developed from the salafi-inspired Ottomanism and the secularized and decentralist Arabism of the war years.\(^4\)

In Syria, secular Arabism was the strongest influence on the intellectuals. As Elie Kedourie contends, "At that time [the immediate post-war period] it was fashionable to look upon 'pan-Islamism' as nefarious and upon the national principle as its efficacious antidote."\(^5\) What Kedourie means by the 'national principle' is the European constructed notion detached from religious inspiration. Al-Shahbandar, the "...most influential and controversial nationalist leader of the early Mandate", had rejected the idea that Islam could provide the principles for governing a modern, independent nation state.\(^6\) He was a graduate of al-Jaza'iri's caffé circle and worked as a student leader on the campus of the Syrian Protestant College. Alienated by the "Turkification" program of the CUP government, he joined the pre-war Arabists. During the war, he worked in Cairo developing close contacts with British officials.\(^7\) As a key member of Faysal's government, al-Shahbandar began the attempt to create a secular Syrian Arab national identity that would attract a Muslim or Druze-Syrian. He had to deal with the fact that Syrian nationalism devoid of Islamic content would not appeal to a Maydan Quarter grain merchant or to a peasant in the hills of Latakia. On the other hand, he was aware that an Islamic

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\(^4\) Dawn, From Ottomanism..., p. 143; Hourani, Arabic Thought..., p. 298; and Khoury, Urban Notables..., p. 61.

\(^5\) Cited in Cleveland, "The Role of Islam...", p. 46.

\(^6\) Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate, pp. 119-121.

\(^7\) Ibid., pp. 120-121.
Syrian nationalism would not captivate a Jabal Druze notable or an Alawite peasant.  

Al-Shahbandar recognized that the secularization of Syrian Arab nationalism was necessary given the sectarian and confessional diversity of the country. And the capability for resisting secularization had been diminished. The 'ulama's relations with the peasants and the authorities had been weakened with the social and political ascension of the secular 'ayan, thereby weakening their power to mobilize support in opposition to secularization. But, paradoxically, Islam could not be disregarded. Syrian nationalism could not be anything but Arab in essence. The sense of being Arab was not geographical but historical in principle. Arab identity rested on the glory of the Islamic explosion of tribal unity in the seventh century. Despite the practical necessity for a secular national identity, Syrian (or Palestinian) nationalism could not be separated from its historical Arab character and, therefore, could not be severed from Islam: "...secularism was necessary as a system of government but how was complete secularism compatible with the existence of an Arab sentiment?"

The evolution of Syrian and Palestinian nationalism initially involved three common principles: achieve self-government; keep alive the idea of Arab unity; and oppose Jewish immigration to Palestine. National differences, however, were already apparent during Faysal's rule. His entourage was made up of

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8 Hourani, Arabic Thought..., pp. 295-7.
9 Ibid., p. 297.
Iraqis, Palestinians, Syrians and Hejazi tribesmen, and these young officers monopolized administrative posts in Faysal's brief reign. The indigenous notable families resented this state of affairs. The notables had come to regard their peasants, not their land, as the domain of exploitation and this exploitation was only made possible by access to the state bureaucracy. Faysal's young officers threatened the power base of the notable families. The notable's patron-client relationship with the peasants was put at risk if they could not provide the political benefits of mediation to the peasants. Palestinian and Iraqi bureaucrats were not welcome accompaniments of Arab unity for the Damascene 'ayan. The Syrian Arabists may have continued to espouse Arabism but the reality was the fact that political loyalty extended from the family to the class, to the town and, perhaps, to the region. Brother to cousin was a considerable step in the descending order of political loyalties. Al-Shahbandar may have held on to the hope that one day a pan-Arab state would be created but in the meantime, he began to turn in the direction of Syrian nationalism.

Damascus politics carried on into the Mandate. Any hope that the French would threaten any less the notable-peasant relations and notable power was soon dashed. The instability and illegitimacy of French rule was underscored by the Mandatory government's self-destructive and imprudent political and economic policies. Al-Shahbandar's task of propagating a wide-

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11 Ibid., p. 13.
spread and popular Syrian Arab nationalist ideology was made much easier by
the French.

Between 1920 and 1922, General Henri Gouraud, the High
Commissioner, cut up Syria into the autonomous states of Greater Lebanon,
Aleppo, Jabal Ansariyya, Damascus and Jabal Druze. This segmentation was
justified on the grounds that Syria was not a coherent society and therefore the
interests of the minorities must be protected by the Mandatory authorities.\(^\text{12}\)
One official stated that the "...federal system created in Syria should eventually
lead to a unitary state."\(^\text{13}\) The French representative to the PMC, M. Rappard,
argued at a meeting on 8 August 1922 that

...various expressions of desire among the Syrian
populations for internal unity had been brought to his
notice by appeals, delegations, etc. The report [the
French Mandatory Report of 1922], on the other hand,
showed that the Syrian populations were so far removed
from favouring national unity that they would resist
anything but the loosest federation.\(^\text{14}\)

As one contemporary Frenchman, Robert de Beauplan, observed, "...la nation
syrienne est un mythe."\(^\text{15}\) These views obviously ran counter to the interests
of the nationalists in Damascus and Aleppo. The efforts of the urban
nationalists to create a sense of national identity were undercut by Gouraud's
amputations as his policy had intended. The partition isolated the nationalists

\(^{12}\) Rabinovich, p. 697.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 698.

\(^{14}\) PMC Minutes and Reports, C.170, m. 26 1922 III(CPM), p. 12.

\(^{15}\) Robert de Beauplan, Ou va la Syrie?, (Paris: Editions
and imperiled any potential rural support for the nationalist platform. Muslim policy experts in France understood the development of Syrian nationalism as a threat to French interests in North Africa and therefore sought to contain it. Thus, in order to contain Syrian nationalism, the separatist tendencies of sectarian and confessional groups in Syria were encouraged. To effect this process of destabilization, the Mandate was established along the lines of the administrative system erected by Marchel Lyautey in Morocco.

In applying the Moroccan model to Syria, Gouraud was relying on his past experiences as Lyautey's chief understudy and not on any substantial understanding of the nature of Syrian society. Lyautey's system was ideally anchored in knowledge of the structures of the administered society, and Gouraud, in his ignorance of Syria's political and social conditions, failed to adapt his imported Moroccan system to Syrian conditions. Even if it was actually feasible in the first place, Gouraud was contradicting his mentor's key governing principle. It would appear that Gouraud and his colleagues assumed that any amount of social and political differences between Morocco and Syria was irrelevant to the application of Lyautey's system.

From the outset of the French imperial presence in Syria, the form of political domination bore little resemblance to that of Morocco despite pretensions to the contrary. Syria was a class 'A' Mandate which in theory

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16 Antonius, p. 372.


18 Rabinovich, p. 698.
meant that Syria could be provisionally recognised as an independent nation.

Under Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, the Mandate system was described as a means for "...applying the principle that the well-being and development of peoples not able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world formed a sacred trust of civilization."\(^{19}\) By definition, French rule was supposed to be transitory; Syria was not a colony like Algeria or a protectorate like Morocco. Arabic newspapers in Damascus and Aleppo did not quite see the situation in the same light as either the League or France. The Mandate was characterized as a subterfuge "...whereby the Mandated territories may effectively be prevented from attaining an independent state."\(^{20}\) The nationalists knew of Article 22 and failed to see how Gouraud's partition and other related policies enhanced the well-being of a 'provisionally recognized independent state'. Resistance to the Mandatory authorities could be framed in the very principles they were sworn to uphold.

Without sufficient consideration to the differences and problems inherent to Mandated Syria, Gouraud's attempt to apply Lyautey's system to the letter was flawed from the start. The necessity of countering nationalism and Syrian unity, products of Ottoman centralization, Islamic reformists and Faysal's brief reign, obscured any real appreciations of both the internal social and political differences and the external differences concomitant with a class 'A' Mandate

\(^{19}\) MacCallum, pp. 3-4.

\(^{20}\) Longrigg, pp. 112-3; MacCallum, p. 5.
status. What worked in Morocco must be able to work in Syria. Like the Moroccans, Syrians would be made to see the benefits of French rule.

Lyautey's system was predicated on the assumption that effective colonial administration was indirect in application. Through native affairs officers, cognizant of native languages, religion and customs, a rural native elite could be strengthened in respect to urban notables that would help frame, support and implement French colonial policy. By subtle manipulation, the waste and cost of protracted conventional wars of pacification could be avoided. The Lyautey system meant "rule by association"; the intention of this system was to develop colonial policy along native lines. This system seemed ideal for the expectations of Mandate rule. In Syria, the French, however, did not keep a comfortable distance between central authority and local affairs and did not enjoy the support of traditional shaykhs and urban nationalists.

The negative impact of territorial partition, a misapplied system of rule, and mal-administration was compounded by one-dimensional economic policies. The authorities forced the exchange of paper for gold currency and concentrated the gold in the basement of the Banque de Syrie and Lebanon in Beirut "...enriching its stockholders at the expense of the Syrians." The new Syrian currency was linked to a weak and unstable franc; an aspect of the


23 Ibid., p. 55.

24 Husri, p. 5.
post-war depreciation of currency in France. The Bank also tended to favour Lebanese Christians and French companies in granting monopolies and concessions. These aspects of French economic policy in Syria created considerable discontent among Syrian merchants and notables. Gouraud, in an article in the Revue de France cited by Edmund Burke III, stressed the economic benefits for Syria: "...railroads, port modernization, experimental farms, agricultural credit services, irrigation works and veterinary service, as well as road building, aqueducts, and bridges." But the French monetary and investment policies, in part, effected a process of economic impoverishment.

The Mandatory authorities also attempted to transform agrarian relations between the notable and the peasant. This was consistent with Lyautey's principle of strengthening the rural element at the expense of urban elites. Lyautey's principle ideally involved respect and understanding of traditional rural life. But it was more a matter of trying to buy the peasants off with improved services and disproportionate representative interests. And it did work for awhile: "The first election of October 1923 showed this balance of forces, as support for France came chiefly from the rural populations who had most benefited from French rule." The authorities were trying to destroy the rural political base of the nationalist notables. The new

25 Antonius, p. 373.


27 Longrigg, p. 134.

28 Burke, p. 183.

29 Ibid., p. 183.
tax system was designed to sever the relations between the landowning notable and the peasant and break up the 'musha tenure system into family units regularizing land registry.' As the Ottoman authorities experienced in 1858, the peasants began to resist French attempts to interfere with their lives:

...the illiterate and conservative peasantry, especially in the extensively cultivated grain belts of central Syria and the Hawran, was clearly suspicious of French intentions which were regarded as attempts to disrupt a traditional way of life. France failed to undermine the notable's relationship with the peasant and the French authorities were left with the "...sole possibility of playing rural-based landowners and tribal shaykhs against city notables and those notables against each other." The revolt would forestall any such attempts.

The Moroccan-inspired officials furthered the process of administrative alienation through the imposition of a new court system, non-Muslim control of the 'awqaf, and compulsory teaching of French in schools. This last policy intensified discontent to the same degree as the CUP's language policy after 1909. The imposition of French was a direct attack on the supremacy of Arabic. Policies were enacted to break the back of nationalism not foster cultural association between Syria and France.

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30 Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate, pp. 61-3.
31 Ibid., p. 64.
32 Ibid., p. 66.
33 Longrigg, pp. 135-8.
34 Rabinovich, p. 698.
The French Mandate administration created the conditions for the reformulation of Arabist ideology. Because Syria was separated from Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan and saddled with inept French rule, the ideology of Arabism, which was intended to include all Arabs, was regionally fragmented within the Mandate borders. The obstacles, concerns and goals of the nationalist leaders in Damascus, Beirut and Jerusalem became isolated and particular to the respective mandatory situations. The call of the Syrian General Congress on 8 March 1920 for an Arab Federation remained a dead letter and became further removed from the realm of possibility as historical circumstances altered the evolution of national identity.\textsuperscript{33}

Instead of promoting stability and building a solid economic infrastructure as the Mandate dictated in principle, Gouraud and his administration directly contributed to the intensification of nationalist ties. Arabism was recast and became the ideological tool used by the notables to strengthen their bonds with the peasantry and unify the confessional and sectarian groups within the common resentment to French rule.

The intensification of nationalist ties between the disparate confessional and sectarian communities and the urban centres of nationalist activity spread along the economic connections fostered by the rise of a market economy. As Syria was pulled into the world economy, the traditionally self-sufficient communities in the Syrian hinterland relied more and more on the urban markets in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama and Beirut. In particular, the

\textsuperscript{33} Dawn, \textit{From Ottomanism...}, p. 151.
Jabal Druze, ruled by the Atrash family, had become increasingly dependent on the grain merchants of the Maydan Quarter in Damascus. This economic link was complemented by the Druze Agency in Damascus run by Nasib al-Bakri, a supporter of Sharif Husayn and Faysal. Al-Bakri had organized a band of Druze against the Ottoman authorities in 1916. Sultan al-Atrash was involved in the Arab Revolt with al-Bakri who was later appointed by Faysal to be his special emissary to the Druze. Largely because of his association with al-Bakri, Sultan al-Atrash gave his support to Faysal. The Druze Agency was maintained into the Mandate and, thus, exposed rural Druze leaders, particularly Sultan al-Atrash, to the fledgling nationalist ideology promoted by al-Shahbandar.

The opposition the French created to their rule cemented the interconnections between rural fears and urban aspirations despite the administration's attempts to foster regional socio-political autonomy. Syrian nationalism was ideologically negative in that it developed in reaction to foreign rule and did not immediately create a substantial political and social blueprint. Sultan al-Atrash epitomized this negative focus. His reaction to the French did not contain any positive political vision or ideological content envisaging what Syria and the Druze would become after the French occupation. This is not to deny ideological import to his actions. As will be shown, Sultan al-

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38 Ibid., pp. 161-2.
Atrash reacted within the ideological framework established by the Damascene nationalists and, along with self-interest and Druze tradition, his motivation and method were inspired by the nationalism of al-Shahbandar and his compatriots. The French, because they grossly underestimated the appeal of nationalism to elements outside the urban centres, "...ironically ended up fostering rather, than retarding, the nationalist movement."39

Sultan al-Atrash's rebellion of 1925 was not the first act of violent resistance to French rule. Ibrahim Bey Hananu, an Aleppine nationalist, led sporadic uprisings against the French in 1920. Alawite resistance to French rule, led by Shaykh Salih al-Ali, managed to survive until October 1921. The visits of Charles Crane, a self-appointed representative of the U.S. government, provoked several demonstrations in 1922. And for nearly a year in 1923, Sultan al-Atrash fought the French throughout the Jabal Druze, declaring himself a nationalist during this first Druze uprising.40

When the French reached an agreement with the Turks, Hananu and al-Ali's revolts petered out as Turkish aid ended. Aware that their fortunes no longer were tied with the Turkish nationalists, Hananu and the Aleppine nationalists turned to Damascus.41 In 1922, the French authorities, more than likely because of overconfidence, aided this reorientation by joining the Alawite,

39 Khoury, "Factionalism among..."; p. 443.
41 Ibid., p. 112.
Aleppo and Damascus states in the Syrian Federation.\textsuperscript{42} The Jabal Druze was
excluded from this federation and in July 1922, Sultan al-Atrash rebelled.

An incident involving a nationalist agitator was the pretext for Sultan al-
Atrash's rebellion. Given his close ties to Damascus, he may have been
motivated less by the arrest of this nationalist than by the exclusion of the
Jabal Druze from the Syrian Federation. This interpretation is inferential and
conjectural. It is not clear at this period the extent to which Sultan al-Atrash
was tied into the nationalists. The uprising, however, did serve to tighten his
connections to Damascus.

It has been argued by some historians that Sultan al-Atrash was only
seeking to secure his position in the Jabal Druze and realign the power
balance between the Druze and the French. Khoury, however, asserts that
Sultan al-Atrash considered himself a nationalist and proclaimed his revolt in
the name of Syrian independence and the Jabal's reunification with Damascus.\textsuperscript{43}

The problem becomes one of degree. Was Sultan al-Atrash simply a self-
interested, traditionally motivated Druze notable or was he becoming a Syrian
nationalist? It is the contention of this study that he was acting as a
traditional Druze shaykh but he was using a new tool. Ideological commitment
does not preclude self-interest. It was only a question of whether or not the
tool would reshape the interests of its exploiter. To understand how Sultan al-
Atrash and his community were vulnerable to nationalist ideology requires an

\textsuperscript{42} Longrigg, p. 129.

\textsuperscript{43} Khoury, \textit{Syria and the French Mandate}, p. 154.
understanding of the Druze and the changes the community underwent before 1918.

The Druze are war-like mountain dwellers with a distinct religious character. The religion of the Druze is as distinct from orthodox Islam as Mormons are distinct from the Catholic orthodoxy. The Druze religion was a "...logical if extreme development from the Isma'ili sect." Hamza, who established the religion in the twelfth century, hated his contemporaneous organized religion. He looked upon all previous sharia (religious laws) as "...necessary but chiefly false historical phenomena which his own revelation explains and supercedes." Hamza was obviously not terribly popular with the orthodox 'ulama and the Druze were pushed into the Syrian mountains where they developed their fierce sense of autonomy and exclusion.

The Druze religion, however, "...defined and justified the social and political structure of Druze society." The Druze community did divide along family lines of rivalry but these rivalries could be quickly overcome in the face of any threat to their political autonomy. Druze particularism, the sense of being something different and special, was grounded in their traditions and mountains.

The autonomy of the Druze had been severely delimited by the Ottomans. In 1910, the centralizing policies of the CUP government had

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46 Miller, p. 551.
pushed the Druze into revolt but the government was successful in putting it down. The government also attempted to bring the Druze religious leaders, the 'uqqal, closer to orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{47} Because the Ottoman government had been successful in breaking down Druze autonomy, the Druze were not in the position after the war to reassert their autonomy. The Atrash clan had dominated the Jabal since 1860 and maintained the relations with the British established during the 1830s.\textsuperscript{48} After the war, the clan aligned the political relations of the Jabal with Faysal and Damascus.\textsuperscript{49} It is not surprising that the French were wary of the Atrash clan.

In 1922, the French threatened the position of the Atrash clan. Internal tribal and clan friction, in part manipulated by the French, endangered the Atrash's alignment with the Damascene nationalists. The French had developed ties with the 'Amr clan in the late nineteenth century in order to undermine British influence in the Jabal.\textsuperscript{50} The 'Amr clan itself sought out the French because of British support for the Ottoman state.\textsuperscript{51} After 1920, the French used the 'Amr clan to undercut Atrash influence. In reaction, Sultan al-Atrash used the Khanjar incident to reassert Atrash dominance in the Jabal and to repulse French meddling.

The incident was the arrest of the Lebanese activist Adhan Khanjar who was believed to have nationalist connections and was accused of participating

\textsuperscript{47} Rabinovich, p. 694-5.
\textsuperscript{48} Miller, p. 551.
\textsuperscript{49} Rabinovich, pp. 700-701.
\textsuperscript{50} Khoury, \textit{Syria and the French Mandate}, p. 152n.
in an assassination attempt on Gouraud. He was on his way to visit Sultan al-Atrash when he was arrested. As Druze custom dictated, Sultan al-Atrash asked the French authorities in Suwayda to place Khanjar in his custody.\(^1\)\(^2\) Commandant Trenga, the senior French official in Suwayda, refused his request and Sultan al-Atrash responded by attacking the armed convoy transferring Khanjar to Damascus. MacCallum reported that Sultan al-Atrash apparently attacked "...one of the cars singlehandedly, dispatching with his sword two Frenchmen."\(^3\)\(^2\) As with all myth-building, the fact of whether or not this personal act of courage actually occurred is irrelevant. Sultan al-Atrash's leadership was bolstered by the belief that he possessed great personal courage. This revolt, sustained for over a year, brought him closer to the nationalist cause if not for the unity of Syria then for the removal of the French.

Despite very different interpretations, Joyce Laverty Miller and Philip Khoury agree that Sultan al-Atrash did have contact with the Damascus nationalists. Miller saw this contact as an attempt by the nationalists to manipulate events while Khoury argues that Sultan al-Atrash was committed to promoting the nationalist cause.\(^3\)\(^3\) Miller seems to agree with the statement made by Robert de Caix, the French PMC delegate and past Secretary-General under Gouraud, before a PMC session: "In any case, the little state of Djebel-

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\(^{51}\) Ibid., p. 154.

\(^{52}\) MacCallum, p. 108-9.

Druze [is] of small importance and [had] only about 50,000 inhabitants. Apparenty ignoring the economic and social changes of the past 60 years, Miller argues that there were "...no nationalist activities in the state, only a fierce determination to remain autonomous should a national state of Syria be created." She seems to ignore the fact that Sultan al-Atrash, in his opposition to the French, had in fact long standing connections with several Damascus nationalists including Nasib al-Bakri and, most importantly, Dr. Abd al-Rahman al-Shahbandar.

Whereas Sultan al-Atrash was a rural chieftain, al-Shahbandar was a Western-educated intellectual, son of a prosperous Damascus merchant and married to the daughter of a local notable family. After the fall of Faysal, al-Shahbandar participated in the formation of the Syrian-Palestinian Congress. In 1921, al-Shahbandar returned to Syria and, with the financial backing of the Congress, organized the "Iron Hand Society". Al-Shahbandar and the Society incited demonstrations during the second visit of the King-Crane Commission of Inquiry in April 1922. He was arrested, sentenced to 20 years, and interred on Arwad Island. The Crane demonstrations were the beginning of urban resistance to French rule and the Iron Hand Society continued to coordinate nationalist activity in Damascus until May 1922 when the French managed to

54 PMC, Minutes and Reports, 4th Session, (Geneva 1924), p. 31 quoted in Laverty Miller, p. 551.
55 Miller, p. 551.
56 Rabinovich, p. 701.
57 Longrigg, p. 147n.
58 Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate, pp. 124-5.
destroy the society.\(^59\)

With al-Shahbandar in prison and Sultan al-Atrash subdued, the situation in Syria seemed to be settling down. Most French officials became complacent, assuming that the benefits of French rule had taken the steam out of nationalist agitation. The new High Commissioner, General Sarrail, felt secure enough to allow al-Shahbandar to return to Syria and encourage the formation of the first legal political party in Syria.\(^60\) On 9 February 1925, the "Parti du Peuple" was founded. Al-Shahbandar referred to the Party as "...an instrument of liberation which would shatter the despotic rule Syria was forced to live under."\(^61\) The address of Faris Bey al-Khury, the Party's Vice-President, enumerated the six principles of the Party platform and was, however, a restrained appeal; militant action was not espoused.\(^62\) Yet, if the calm of Sarrail and the French authorities was not disturbed, then they were misreading the extent to which nationalism had spread beyond the urban notable classes and the impact the Party would have on the populace.

The Party was financially supported by landowners, merchants, professional associations, the Syrian-Palestinian Congress and Syrian-American emigres.\(^63\) Unquestionably, the Syrian nationalism espoused by the Party was an instrument of the Syrian urban upper- and middle-classes. The nationalists were either of

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59 Ibid., p. 126.
60 MacCallam, pp. 18-19.
notable origin or were connected to notable interests. Self-interest was certainly a vital element in the opposition of the notable families to the Mandate. Through al-Shahbandar's Party, the notables sought to guarantee that they would inherit power in independent Syria. Nationalism, as the product of Arabism and the post-war Arab world, offered the notables a way to retain their traditional position in the modern circumstances of a Syrian state.

The Syrian nationalism of the Party, in this transitional period, lacked coherence. The Party was secular in its orientation. This was al-Shahbandar's pragmatic and ideological acceptance of the sectarian and confessional diversity of Syria. But the Party did employ Islamic symbols in order to politicize and mobilize the majority Sunni population. The Party had to counter the French attempts to "...play off the rural populations against the nationalists in the cities." To attract the rural Sunni population, the Party had to use traditional Islamic symbols but the vital difference between the Ottoman past and the present state of affairs was that these symbols became part of the nationalist doctrine. The urban notables in the Party were responding to a very complex political situation. The Party leaders had to adopt whatever political means available to salvage the idea of a centralized and united Syria set in motion by the Arab Revolt and the Arab Kingdom of Faysal.

Like al-Shahbandar, most of the Party leaders were Arabists of the war years and had participated in Faysal's brief reign. They still clung to the vision of a pan-Arab state but had to accommodate themselves to the Mandate borders. Most believed that Syrian independence would only be a step towards

64 Burke, p. 182.
attaining eventual Arab independence. Hope for a pan-Arab state, an essential principle of nationalist rhetoric fashioned in Faysal's Arab Kingdom, was difficult to discard. The hardening of regional differences and sentiments would undermine any vision of a pan-Arab state but this did not happen overnight.

Were the nationalists "grasping at straws" as Miller suggests? The Party did not have a positive, fleshed out vision of what an independent Syrian state would look like. Does its negative content, in the sense that the Party possessed only the vision of the political removal of the French, lessen the importance of the movement? The Syrian (and the Palestinian) nationalists had to deal with personal, familial and ideological divisions and the imposition of foreign controlled borders. It would be absurd to assume that the nationalists were selfless activists seeking the removal of foreign domination. As sons of notable families, the traditions of mediation and power were influential and simply could not be overturned by a new ideology of political power. But to argue that the nationalists were only seeking to secure personal power and only paying lip service to the nationalist creed is equally absurd. One would have to ignore the impact of Ottoman centralization, Arabist Ottomanism, Faysal and the Mandate. Al-Shahbandar may have been motivated by self-interest. While acknowledging his "zealous dedication to the cause of Arabism", Miller intimates that al-Shahbandar was ambitious for political power. What nationalist activist would not be politically ambitious? Al-Shahbandar inherited his ideology from his cafe discussions with Jaza'iri; the secular schools he attended in Istanbul; and his subsequent alienation with the Ottoman government. His activism was

65 Miller, pp. 558-9.
formed in response to Faysal and the creation of the Mandate. Of course, al-Shahbandar and his fellow nationalists were ambitious power-seekers; this, again, does not undermine ideological commitment.

What undermined the Party and the national movement was the inability to achieve political cohesion. The personal, familial and ideological divisions crippled the effectiveness of the movement. Fairly successful in disseminating nationalist ideology in the coffee-houses and the mosques and gaining popular support, the Party was nonetheless ineffective in confronting French schemes.66 Focussing on the grievances of the people but unable to do very much about their problems, the Party suffered a loss of prestige; consequently, the constitutionalist program lost credibility. The notables had much to fear from militant action. It could very well threaten their social and political position if they could not control its course.

The Party leaders were acting out the power-broker role in their constitutionalist program. It was an example of political continuity with a twist; the twist being the nationalist ideology. As with Sultan al-Atrash, al-Shahbandar and the urban nationalists bridged the gap between tradition and modernity. And to a significant degree, their traditional interests and roles were to be reshaped by their new political tool.

Sultan al-Atrash's revolt in 1925 caught the nationalists off guard and forced al-Shahbandar and his colleagues to adopt "unconstitutional" resistance.67 Miller characterized the revolt as "...signalling the end of the Ottoman Empire's

67 MacCallum, p. 20.
political organization in Syria and revealed that Syrian nationalism was both nonexistent and nonviable in the Syrian context."  

Sultan al-Atrash, in her view, sought only to preserve Druze autonomy against the modernizing trends of the mandate administration. The urban notables, in a similar way, saw French policies as a threat to their traditional power and prestige. The radical nationalists, like al-Shahbandar, did call for the outright independence and creation of a Syrian nation. In many respects, Miller's characterization of the political manifestations of the Revolt is quite valid. To argue, however, that the Revolt as initiated by Sultan al-Atrash was without nationalist motivation is to again ignore his connections with al-Bakri, al-Shahbandar and thus the nationalist movement. His revolt did become fragmented by parochial interests, owing to the very nature of Syrian society, but this does not preclude the fact that the Revolt also manifested popular Syrian nationalism however crudely or immaturity developed.

Sultan al-Atrash's motives were, in part, local in origin. He did rebel to prevent the French from breaking the traditional power structure of the Jabal. At the same time, he was acting from a nationalist impulse to free and unify Syria. This impulse had emerged in his political and economic dealings with Faysal, al-Bakri, and al-Shahbandar. Sultan al-Atrash had become "...increasingly infected by the idea of nationalism radiating from Damascus."  

To assume that his rebellious intentions were inspired by Druze particularism and self-interest alone carries the taint of reductionism. One cannot depend

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68 Miller, p. 546.

69 Khoury, "Factionalism among Syrian Nationalists...", p. 455.
on French sources to prove Sultan al-Atrash was not a nationalist. It would be the last thing the Mandate authorities would want Sultan al-Atrash to become. Until unbiased proof to the contrary is found, it is safe to infer from Sultan al-Atrash's past actions and connections that he had more on his plate than his own interests.

On 18 July 1925, Druze rebels led by Sultan al-Atrash fired on a French airplane and on 21 July, they laid siege to Suwayda. The arrest of three Druze chiefs on 11 July was Sultan al-Atrash's immediate provocation. Sarrail had refused to accept Sultan al-Atrash's leadership and had attempted to undermine his position in the Jabal. He had invited the Atrash clan chiefs to Damascus on the pretext of dealing with the grievances that had arisen over the rule of Captain Carbillet over the Jabal Druze. Atrash knew that Sarrail did not intend to hear grievances but rather to remove him from the Jabal. The arrests forced his hand. Knowing that he faced a similar fate, rebellion was his only option.

70 Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate, p. 152.
71 Response a M. Ponsot, Haut-Commissaire de la Republique en Syrie et au Liban, (Imprimerie de Y'Eclair-Alep, 1933), p. 68.
Captain Carbillet had acquired control of the Jabal through an internal Druze power struggle caused by the resignation and death of Sultan al-Atrash's father, Salim al-Atrash, in 1923. Commandant Trenga, as the highest-ranking French official in the Jabal, took control of the community. Sultan al-Atrash was in Transjordan at the time. During his absence, the Atrash clan failed to settle on a successor and the Druze majlis (council), through the machinations of the 'Amr clan, chose Carbillet, Trenga's successor, as a temporary compromise. Carbillet was a Lyautey disciple but he turned Lyautey's method on its head. Speaking Arabic and an ardent admirer of all things Druze, Carbillet leapt into his role with gusto. He set out to transform the community along modern lines. He built schools and roads, collected taxes in full and disarmed the community. These changes did not endear him to the community. He refused to operate within the framework of Druze political tradition thus undercutting the position of the majlis that had chosen him: "Carbillet's land reforms and personal rule were undermining [the Atrash's] material base in land and the traditional system of political bargaining and decision-making." Carbillet was in effect attempting to destroy the traditional system of rule in the Jabal Druze. Ibrahim Pasha had attempted similar changes in 1833. And, of course, the Druze reaction was similar.

72 Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate, pp. 154-5.
73 Miller, p. 552; MacCallum, p. 110.
74 MacCallum, p. 110.
75 Miller, p. 552.
76 Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate, p. 157.
Carbillet failed to win the peasant support which was necessary if his transformation of the Druze community was to succeed. Despite trying to effect land reform to the benefit of the individual peasant cultivator, Carbillet managed only to create a defiant and sullen air among the peasants. MacCallum claimed that Carbillet, more than any one person, created the immediate conditions for the Druze revolt. French authorities in subsequent years denied that Carbillet had any role to play in serving up the revolt. The French claimed that the clans exploited the peasants which contributed to peasant hostility culminating into the revolt. Peasants, however, resented the outside interference. They would rather put up with 'exploitation' from the clans than from the French. The Druze peasants, as rural small landholders or tenant farmers, were a conservative and suspicious social group. They did not see their social structure in the same light that Carbillet saw it. For the peasants, their relationship with the notables was supported by tradition and any attempt to change this relationship was an attack on tradition. Because tradition provides security, the more Carbillet threatened tradition, the more insecure the peasants became.

But Carbillet, as a man, was symbolic of French rule in Syria. His actions during his rule over the Druze did contribute to the outbreak of rebellion but, as Khoury argues, "...lest blame for the massive Syria-wide revolt that was to follow be laid unfairly on the shoulders of one man, it must again be emphasized that the cause of the Druze, as of the Syrian discontent lay in

77 Ibid., p. 110.
78 De Bleauplan, p. 71.
France's persistence in applying methods learned in North Africa to a very different Syrian situation.⁷⁹ Like his fellow administrators, Carbillot did not understand the nature of the society he was dealing with and he failed to consider the resistance of peasants to change to their traditional way of life. The extent to which the revolt spread throughout rural Syria demonstrates that peasant disaffection with French rule went beyond the Druze community and that Carbillot could not be held accountable for the Revolt as a whole.

By July 1925, economic conditions had worsened. Because of the loss of Turkish markets, unemployment had become critical.⁸⁰ In the summer of 1925, the peasants faced extreme drought. Famine and disease decimated the rural population. The peasants hung onto their land and barely survived. There were no jobs in the cities and therefore no choice for the small landholder or tenant farmer but to stay on their piece of dried up land.⁸¹ These conditions of drought, famine and disease could only intensify rural antagonism to the French. The Mandate administration was held accountable for the deplorable conditions in rural Syria and the peasants were primed for rebellion.

A rapid depreciation in currency contributed to the deepening economic crisis.⁸² French economic policies favouring French interests to the detriment of Syrian Muslim interests, seemed bent on dragging Syria down. Incoherent and insensitive political policies coupled with this worsening economic situation

⁸⁰ MacCallum, p. 82.
⁸² Husri, p. 9.
brought the situation to a firing point. Sultan al-Atrash initiated not only a Druze rebellion, but a Syrian rebellion. The Druze, whether peasant or notable, were not the only community affected by Mandatory policies. These conditions, shared by all Syrians, served as the basis for Sultan al-Atrash's rebellion to spread throughout Syria.

Carbillet was instructed on 23 May 1925 to take a vacation. He was replaced by Captain Reynaud who had cultivated a friendship with Sultan al-Atrash. Reynaud warned Sarrail of the strong likelihood of a revolt and French Intelligence in Damascus backed him up. The warnings, ignored by Sarrail for whatever lack of perspicacity, bore fruit in Sultan al-Atrash's siege of Suwayda.

On 2 August, a French relief column sent to Suwayda was attacked by Sultan al-Atrash. General Michaud, commanding the column, left the field and in the subsequent retreat, over 800 Frenchmen were killed or wounded. Before this attack, Sultan al-Atrash's siege was considered only a 'local incident'. The destruction of Michaud's column enriched the power and prestige of Sultan al-Atrash and intensified the country's restlessness. The French reacted to the attack by bombing local villages and thus forcing peasants to take up arms in support of Sultan al-Atrash. The French failure to immediately quell the revolt demoralized French troops while spreading a sense of insecurity throughout the country. Indiscriminate bombing only served

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83 Longrigg, p. 154.
84 MacCallum, pp. 119-20.
85 Miller, pp. 554-5.
to intensify and expand the rebellion.

From the beginning, Sultan al-Atrash had proclaimed his revolt in the name of Syrian independence, and despite French assertions that there was no national uprising, the Druze rebellion became a popular national revolt however sporadic and disorganized. The People's Party under al-Shahbandar, though caught off-guard, joined with Sultan al-Atrash. His rebellion left the urban politicians with little choice. Their fears of a peasant rebellion were superceded by the need to regain control of the nationalist initiative and not lose their political legitimacy. Al-Shahbandar knew that the rebellion, if transformed into a national uprising, would spread nationalist ideology more than any amount of political action. The peasants, impoverished, insecure and inflamed, could be politicized through Sultan al-Atrash because his action represented a traditional rural response to an external threat.

Sultan al-Atrash's appeal rested with his apparent ability to galvanize people to action to protect tradition and to fight for independence. Going right back to the Khanjar incident, Sultan al-Atrash possessed or created all the necessary attributes of charismatic leadership. He was able to inspire peasants because of who he was and what he was prepared to do. The kind of peasant that this Druze notable inspired was the small landholder or tenant farmer who was prepared to fight to hold on to what little he had. His traditions and land tenure were under seige by the changes wrought, either by design or by coincidence, under French rule.

Al-Shahbandar brought Sultan al-Atrash into the fold of his Party. By

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86 Longrigg, p. 156.
uniting with Sultan al-Atrash, al-Shahbandar fused the rural rebellion with urban nationalism. In more concrete terms, he provided the means for control of the revolt by the urban nationalists. But to what extent this control was ever achieved is not as important as the fact that the political and military alliance of the two leaders reshaped the contours of the revolt. It was no longer a local, rural rebellion. Al-Shahbandar thus "...deserves the most credit for transforming a local, isolated rebellion in the Jebel Druze... into a nationwide popular revolt against the French in Syria." By early September 1925, a provisional government was set up with Sultan al-Atrash as president and al-Shahbandar as vice-president with the same flag that flew over the Syrian Congress headquarters in Damascus in 1920.

Miller suggests that al-Shahbandar and the urban nationalists considered the Druze rebels and their "outlaw" allies as a "...primitive race, backward and uncivilized." De Caix denied before the PMC that the Damascus nationalists "...had had continuous relations with the chiefs of the Druzes... very reliable witness [informed de Caix] that the nationalists of Damascus had persisted in their despising the Druzes." This assertion, again, does not account for the social and economic changes that had affected relations between the Jabal Druze and Damascus. The conditions created by the French Mandate overrode many class barriers. The People's Party, an elitist organization of intellectuals.

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87 Khoury, "Factionalism among...", p. 447.
88 MacCallum, p. 124.
89 Miller, p. 556.
90 PMC, Minutes and Reports, 8th Meeting, (Geneva, 22 February 1926).
and notables, shared a common ground with the Maydan grain merchant, Druze chieftain, and peasant cultivator. This ground was the resentment engendered by French Mandatory policies that were as much a threat to the traditional basis of power and prestige of urban notables as to the traditional way of life of the peasant. The Syrian merchant and peasant joined Sultan al-Atrash’s rebellion not because of nationalist rhetoric emanating out of Damascus. They joined because their precarious hold on their livelihood and traditions were threatened by the French.

The Muslim merchants in the quarters of Damascus were closely tied to the ‘ayan. These merchants, shut out of the European market by the dragoman-merchant, distributed locally-produced manufactured goods and agricultural products. Education and politics, not wealth, separated the merchants from the notables. Since 1909 and the Young Turks, the merchants had moved closer to the group of notable Arab activists who were to become the nationalists of the 1920s. On the basis of many criminal court registers, Khoury shows that merchants, along with notables, artisans, middle-class intellectuals and peasants, were active participants in the rebellion. In fact, Khoury asserts that some of the most "...vehemently anti-French Syrians during the Mandate were the local grain merchants of Damascus; having realized that the Druze wheat crop was lost and buoyed by the early successes of Sultan al-Atrash, the Maydan and Shaghur Quarter merchants were the first to come out

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92 Ibid., p. 205.
fully in support of the revolt.\(^{93}\)

Merchants and notables were not monolithic classes. Weak participants in the nationalist or rebel ranks often broke from the revolt to curry favour with the French. Vacillating merchants or notables were thus suspect and open to rebel attacks. As would occur in the Palestinian Revolt, the rebels were as active in prodding fickle Syrians as in attacking French garrisons.\(^{94}\)

In a political rebellion, this prodding is not a unique tendency. The initial French failure to protect the population did not simply serve to create a feeling of sympathy for the rebels, as Miller suggests, but acted as one of the primary reasons to actively support the revolt. When the French became more successful in containing the rebels, the more fickle became the merchants and notables as a matter of political survival. The rebels, because they could not afford any loss of support, intensified their prodding.

Sultan al-Atrash’s revolt engulfed the countryside and, given that the French were the strongest in the towns, the nationalists were forced out into the countryside, particularly the Jabal Druze, to escape arrest. The notable class, if not al-Shahbandar in particular, had a lot to lose if they were to rebel. The political route had always seemed the most attractive. Sultan al-Atrash forced their hand and whatever their choice, their social fortunes were threatened either by the French or by the rebels.\(^{95}\)

Armed peasant bands were a landowner’s worst nightmare. Because

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93 Ibid., p. 211.

94 Miller, p. 555.

French Mandatory policies attempted to create a wedge between peasant and notable, the traditional matrix of relations between the peasants and his patrons was threatened. Peasants became rebels in the attempt to redress these wrongs. What the notables feared was the transition from rebellion to attempted overthrow of society itself. When Sultan al-Atrash's local rural revolt became a country-wide peasant rebellion, property was in jeopardy. To protect their property, disseminate their nationalist ideology, and control the revolt, the urban nationalists had to join Sultan al-Atrash's revolt.

Peasants, like merchants and notables, were not a homogeneous class. Peasants could range from wealthy cultivators to landed poor to sharecroppers. Because the economic and social change in Syria had not yet resulted in any extensive rural displacement, Syrian peasants still, for the most part, worked the land. Unlike Palestine in 1935, Syria had not experienced any substantial migration of rural peasants to the urban centres. The peasants drawn into the Palestinian revolt were the young men who had left their villages and farms for opportunities in the cities only to find themselves living in hovels on the urban edges, working, at best, on a day to day basis. In 1925, the Syrian peasant, for the most part, either owned a small plot of land or worked for an absentee landowner. Either way, Syrian peasants still possessed a sense of belonging to a piece of land and they were prepared to fight for this security. The Palestinian peasants, for reasons that will be discussed, lost this security and they rebelled in 1936 because of this loss. The Syrian rebel could be seen as someone Eric Wolf describes as a 'middle peasant'.

Wolf characterizes the middle peasant as someone between a poor or
landless peasant and a rich peasant as someone allied with the notable or merchant-class interests. The Palestinian rebels, unlike the Syrian rural rebel, were landless peasants while Sultan al-Atrash’s revolt drew support from the middle peasantry. In rebelling to hold on to their land and tradition, these ‘middle’ peasants actually created the conditions for social change. For one thing, the peasants were brought into contact with urban nationalists and their ideology. And, more importantly, the very violence of the rebellion altered relationships between notable and peasant and the rural lands to the urban centres. It is ironic that in the very act of fighting to protect tradition, the basis for political and social change is created. Peasants joined merchants and notables in violent rejection of French administration. This violent rejection, however successful in political or military terms, probably had more impact on Syrian society than all the years of French rule. As Wolf argues, "...it is the

96 Wolf, p. 290-2.
very attempt of the middle and free peasant to remain traditional which makes him revolutionary."\footnote{97}

By the end of August 1925, Sarrail had 10,000 reinforcements at hand but he still could not contain Sultan al-Atrash's rebellion.\footnote{98} With the formation of the Syrian Provisional Government, the rebellion was formalized and Sarrail only looked to the end of his term.\footnote{99} In the summer of 1925, crops were destroyed by pests and French bombing. The ranks of the rebels swelled and the countryside seethed with armed peasant bands. These bands were considered by the authorities to be outlaw bands while these outlaws, for the most part, considered themselves patriots.\footnote{100} These patriot-bandits managed to keep the French locked up in the towns and even on occasion succeeded in penetrating the towns in small raids. The tide began to turn in favour of the French after General Gamelin, Michaud's replacement, lifted the seige of Suwayda for a short time on 24 September. By mid-November, Sultan al-Atrash and his rebels controlled the countryside while the French held the cities. In December 1925, Sarrail was replaced by a civilian administrator, Henri de Jouvenal. On 7 February 1926, de Jouvenal established direct rule and the French slowly regained control over the countryside. Druze resistance was not overcome until June 1927. Sultan al-Atrash had retreated to Transjordan in the winter but he was kicked out by the British in the spring.

\footnote{97}{Ibid., p. 292.}
\footnote{98}{MacCallum, p. 125.}
\footnote{99}{Ibid., p. 127.}
\footnote{100}{MacCallum, p. 129; Longrigg, p. 156; Miller, p. 555.}
momentarily reigniting the rebellion. In June, along with 600 of his followers, he was forced to flee to Saudi Arabia. With his final defeat, the revolt in Syria ended.\textsuperscript{101}

During the course of the revolt, French severity attracted not only the attention of the rebel leaders and the Syrian-Palestinian Congress but also of the world. The PMC, in the 8th Session of 1926, criticized the territorial organization of Syria and, in a rare exercise of its power, rejected the French report for 1925. The Commission decided to:

\ldots postpone its examination of the report on the administration of the Mandatory Power for the present, since this report, which covers the year 1924, does not provide any information on the [rebellion]...[the commission] hoped that in the special report it would examine at its extraordinary session in February 1926, it would find explanation of the causes of the present trouble and the remedies which the Mandatory Power proposed to apply...\textsuperscript{102}

The intense French bombardment of Damascus beginning on 18 October 1925, coinciding with Abd al-Krim's successes in Morocco, galvanized the Muslim population and petitions and protests flooded the PMC. The Mufti Amin al-Husayni, the nationalist leader in Jerusalem, was among the most prolific. On 5 September 1925, the Mufti wrote to the PMC drawing attention to the "...atrocities of Mandatory Syria perpetuated against those fighting for application of article twenty-two of the League's covenant."\textsuperscript{103} He knew that the British were concerned with the French handling of the revolt and the

\textsuperscript{101} MacCallum, pp. 159-172; Longrigg, pp. 162-169.
\textsuperscript{102} PMC, Minutes and Reports, 8th Session (Geneva, 1925), CPM 312.
\textsuperscript{103} Cited in PMC, Minutes and Reports, (Geneva, 1925/1926), CPM 271.
possibility that it would spill over to Palestine. The Mufti's pan-Arab sympathies were fueled by the desire to cement his political position in Palestinian society.

Newspapers in New York, London and Paris condemned the French government. On 13 January 1926, New York's *Nation* accused the French military administration of being "...arbitrary, unsympathetic and occasionally brutal." On 30 October 1926, the *Boston Globe* reported that "...France is carrying out this 'sacred trust' with the aid of armoured cars, tanks, artillery, bombs and troops...the Syrian trouble puts the League of Nations once more on trial...until they decide that there is no meaning in the clause in the covenant which speaks of the 'sacred trust' of civilization." The *Daily Press* reported fears that the revolt would "...probably affect the Arabs in Palestine, who are by no means satisfied with their subjection to the Zionist regime which has been imposed upon them in the Mandatory area for which the people of this country have been made responsible." Though surely invested with self-interest, these observations indicate that Sultan al-Atrash's 'local' rebellion had an impact far beyond Mandatory Syria's borders. Unfortunately for the Syrians, these public protestations of shock and dismay did little for their cause.

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104 Cited in PMC, Minutes and Reports, (Geneva 1926), CPM 329.
105 Cited in PMC, Minutes and Reports, CPM 329.
106 Cited in PMC, Minutes and Reports, CPM 329.
The Revolt failed in part because it lacked strong and unified leadership and internal coherence. The traditional competition and rivalry between the urban families of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Hama undermined Sultan al-Atrash's and al-Shahbandar's attempt to create a unified provisional government. During the revolt, the urban notables in these four centres spent as much time quarrelling with each other as with the French. Notables were not unified in their rejection of the French administration and even those who did want the French out were not in agreement that the rebellion was the best means. Because the Revolt came from the bottom up, the notables would have had very little sense of leadership and were more threatened than encouraged by the rebellion. In any event, the rebellion did go a long way to breaking down some of the traditional rivalries of the urban notables but, for the most part, failed to unify this class especially when things got worse for the rebels. The only leadership that the rebellion possessed was in the persons of Sultan al-Atrash and al-Shahbandar but this was not enough to ensure the success of the rebellion.

As for the actual operation of the revolt, communication lines were difficult to set up and maintain because of the very nature of the rebellion. Roving bands of peasant rebels were difficult to coordinate and made it nearly impossible to maintain some sort of communication centre. To some extent, as Wolf argues, it is in the very nature of peasant rebellion to lack military organization. For all appearances, the Syrian rebellion lacked any such organization. The rebel bands operated fairly autonomously and whatever little

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107 Miller, p. 549.
direction or coordination that Sultan al-Atrash was able to give was overshadowed by the need to be mobile. The fractured nature of Syrian society in terms of its minority communities lent itself to this lack of military coordination. To overcome these divisions required revolution.

To say all this is not to accept Marx's thesis that peasants without a political vanguard to supply military and organization cannot make a revolution. In Syria, it was the ineffective and divided notables who perhaps may have been able to form such a vanguard that undermined the rebellion. Syria was a politically and culturally complex society and when peasant rebellion takes place in such a society "...already caught up in commercialization and industrialization, [it] tends to be self-limiting, and, hence, anachronistic." Syrian peasants had always resisted any attempts of the State to alter their social order which "...they believe can be run without the State; hence peasants in rebellion are natural anarchists." Sultan al-Atrash and al-Shahbandar, however, provided the ideological and political caste for the rebellion. Sultan al-Atrash was successful in inciting the peasantry to armed rebellion because his actions were consistent with tradition. He rebelled to rid the Jabal of French interference in the same way the Druze rebelled against Ibrahim in 1840. He also possessed a personal mythical status of great courage. And he acted from a motivation that superceded his traditional Druze particularism when he took the office of president in the provisional government. Sultan al-Atrash's appeal, because of these factors, went beyond the Jabal Druze. Where the urban

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108 Wolf, p. 294.
109 Ibid., p. 294.
nationalists had failed, he succeeded. He was the medium for the dissemination of Syrian nationalism because he bridged both worlds. Sultan al-Atrash was not a Syrian nationalist. He was not a traditional Druze notable. He was an amalgam of both, and his rebellion reflected this amalgam with all its internal tensions. Along with al-Shahbandar, Sultan al-Atrash, although unable to achieve military coordination and political cohesion, did keep in check any anarchist tendencies the peasant rebels may have possessed because of his charismatic leadership and in his participation in the nationalist vision of an independent Syria.

Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam would also be symbolic of this tension when, with his death, he would ignite the Palestinian Revolt in 1936. Syrian nationalism paralleled the development of Palestinian nationalism. Both evolved from Arabism and salafi-pan-Islamism but were cut off by the imposition of the Mandate borders. The urban notables, their position made untenable by Mandatory policies, found in the nationalist ideology a tool to bolster support and protect their positions in their changing societies. Like the Palestinians and the British, the Syrians, whether Druze chieftain, Latakia peasant or Damascus merchant, shared in common the opposition to Infidel rule. Al-Qassam would galvanize Palestinians with an Islamic call for jihad laced with nationalist rhetoric. Sultan al-Atrash incited the Syrian Revolt through traditional resistance to state interference within the framework supplied by the Damascus nationalists.

The revolt successfully disseminated the crude idea of a Syrian national

110 Khoury, "Factionalism among...", pp. 441-2.
state and forced the French authorities to reappraise their policies. Thus the
two aspects of its traditional and modern structure were actualized. The
modern aspect was realized in the adoption of Syrian Arab nationalism as the
revolt's meager basis of unity. The traditional aspect came about with the
French reappraisal; the rebels were successful in forcing a realignment of their
relations with the central power. The immediate political failure of the revolt
can be understood within the context of the traditional Ottoman structure. It
would take time to overcome the divisive effects of the millet system, the
Capitulations and a weak central authority however appropriate these factors
may have been in their time. European interference and the implementation
of the Mandates only served to exacerbate these centrifugal social and political
forces. Syrian Arab nationalism emerged out of the ideological milieu of the
late Ottoman period and surfaced in Sultan al-Atrash's revolt as a negative
response to the conditions of modern notable politics and Mandatory rule.
Ten years after Sultan al-Atrash had fired on the French airplanes near Suwayda, Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam and several of his followers were surrounded by British police in a cave in the Galilee hills. The hills had served many a bandit in past times but they failed al-Qassam. On 20 November 1935, a British police sergeant had fatally stumbled onto his hiding place. Al-Qassam, having declared jihad against the British and the Zionists and committing his followers to fight to the death, was killed on 21 November in a police battle.

His death, like Sultan al-Atrash's attack, sparked a general strike and a peasant rebellion that engulfed Palestine. The rebellion became a spontaneous nationalist uprising for which the urban nationalist leaders had little immediate responsibility. Like the Damascene or Aleppine Syrian nationalists, the Palestinian notable politicians feared a peasant rebellion and for many of the same reasons. Land sales to the Zionists contributed to the outbreak of the rebellion and many notables who espoused nationalism had benefitted from these sales. They could as easily be a target of peasant militancy as the Zionists and the British. The Palestinian nationalists of Jerusalem were seeking a political solution and doing their utmost to avoid militant action. Al-Qassam's martyrdom ignited a popular uprising that rejected the political programme of the nationalist leaders.
Both al-Qassam's and Sultan al-Atrash's rebellions were rooted in the conditions of the Tanzimat, European penetration, the Young Turks, the Arab Revolt and the Mandate. Both leaders possessed charisma in the form of the traditional appeal of defending autonomy or Islam. They melded tradition and nationalism in their violent rejection of foreign rule. Religion, communal devotion and unacceptable government interference were the ingredients that in varying degrees served up Sultan al-Atrash and al-Qassam. They were not nationalists in the strict sense, but they used nationalism as an instrument of appeal made necessary by the Mandate conditions. Again, the question is when does such an ideological instrument infiltrate the beliefs and actions of those who lead and those who are led.

Al-Qassam's militancy became manifest during his participation in the Alawite uprising of 1921 in Syria. He took refuge in Palestine where he had little trouble working his way into nationalist circles. The lines emerging between being Syrian or Palestinian were still overshadowed by the common bonds of being Arab and under foreign rule. Yet Palestine was regionally different from Syria despite sharing a common historical ground. Al-Qassam's political militancy developed within the Palestinian milieu where these regional differences were accentuated by British rule and Zionist settlement. His actions in 1935 can only be understood within this historical framework.

Whereas Aleppo and Damascus were traditionally important because of the caravan and the Hajj route, Jerusalem was one of the three sanctified cities in the Islamic world. After Salah al-Din reconquered Jerusalem in 1187, the religious and historical significance of the city from which Muhammad departed
for his night journey to heaven was entrenched throughout the Islamic world. This significance was gradually extended to the whole of the ‘Holy Land’. The borders were not precise but the Palestine of the Mandate years occupied the core of this ‘Holy Land’. Palestine was never a strictly politically defined area in the Ottoman Empire but was part of Greater Syria. A distinct regional identity, however, grew around al-Nebi Musa, a pilgrimage and religious celebration centered around the site of the tomb of Moses in Jericho.

The political, social and economic pressures which Syria experienced also affected Palestine. By the 1870s, cotton, traditionally the most important crop, lost importance as Palestine’s economy changed with commercialization. Citrus crops, particularly Jaffa oranges, became the dominant export. The central government treasury took most of the profits leaving only a small share for the peasant-cultivators. This small share was to be whittled down by the expansion of absentee landholding inadvertently encouraged by the 1858 Land Code. The commercialization of agriculture benefited the notable families and the emerging commercial class of the dragomen-merchant at the expense of peasant autonomy. There was, however, one vital difference between the Syrian and Palestinian experience: the immigration of European Jews to Palestine in the late nineteenth century with the rise of Zionism, the political movement of Jewish

1 Porath, The Emergence of..., p. 4.

2 Ibid., p. 6.

nationalism. The Zionists would benefit from and intensify the commercialization process. These immigrants did not intend simply to make a profit like the European consul-traders; their objective was the resurrection of a Jewish state in Palestine.

Palestine was considered barren of civilization and thus of any people worthy of consideration. The Zionists viewed the Palestinian Arabs as scattered and unproductive farmers and herders who had occupied land rightfully Jewish. They were interlopers who at best presented a nuisance but could be ignored. The reality of Palestinian Arab social and economic development must have engendered some consternation among those first Jewish settlers. The first wave of immigration in the 1880s settled in plantation-like estates supported by the Rothschilds, a wealthy European Jewish family. The Arabs were employed on these estates. The second wave after 1905 brought idealistic socialist Jews from Russia who rejected the plantation existence and established communal farms called kibbutzim. Arabs were not employed on the kibbutzim. As Jewish immigration and settlement increased and Jewish nationalism intensified on Palestinian soil, the Arabs became increasingly aware of the threat the Jews posed to Palestine. With the emergence of Arabism, this threat took on ideological proportions.

As Europeans, the Zionists were not welcomed with open arms. Palestinians knew Jews. Many lived in Safad and Jerusalem. But Zionists were not the Jews of Safad and Jerusalem. From the start of the Zionist enterprise, Palestinians were suspicious and though the Zionists attempted to keep their political motives under the table, the agricultural communities,
kibbutzim, Tel Aviv, and Jewish merchants did little to allay any of the growing fears of Palestinians. In the minds of Palestinians, the Zionists became agents of European expansion.

The Zionists bought land in the tradition of the European sense of land ownership. The land was sold at high prices but the peasants did not, for the most part, benefit from land sales despite having cultivated or grazed this land for centuries. It was sold by the absentee landholders and the peasants found themselves bereft of land and home. They became sharecroppers working for either the urban notables or for the Zionists. More significantly, a drift towards the cities in search of work began as the centre of economic activity shifted from the rural to urban areas. To the Zionists, the peasants had never owned the land. Centuries of cultivation were secondary to legal paper. The effects of the 1858 Land Code were blatantly obvious in this process of social dislocation. On all counts, despite claims that the Zionist settlement benefited the social and economic development of peasants, rural Palestinians increasingly resented the presence of the Zionists.

The urban notables profited from land sales but they had to take account of this resentment. Anti-Zionist sentiments emerged in the Arab press after 1908 and Arab deputies in the Ottoman Parliament pressured the government to limit Jewish immigration and land sales. One important Palestinian member of the Ottoman Decentralization Party, Shukri Bey al-'Asali, pointed out that Zionists threatened the traditional way of life in Palestine. He spoke of the

Porath, The Emergence of..., p. 25.
pasturage rights, land evictions, the militancy and determination of the Zionists, and the Palestinian fellahin's (peasant) growing resentment. Al-‘Asali, as a deputy in the Parliament, was taking care of his political interests. In private, he was not so adamant an anti-Zionist; he acknowledged that his motives were political not personal in nature. But he did succeed in making Zionism an issue outside of Palestine. Jewish settlement may have represented immediate profit but it furthered the skewed economic development of Palestine. Notables in Damascus and Jerusalem had to adapt to similar social and economic changes but only the Palestinian notables faced the Jewish challenge. The Zionist threat had to be publicized to garner support for resistance to this new form of European incursion.

The most prominent notable families in Palestine at the turn of the century were the Jerusalem families. The Khalidi family was among the oldest while the Husaynis came to prominence in the late eighteenth century when they regained control of the office of the mufti, the religious leader of Jerusalem. Another family, the Nashashibis, grew to rival the Husaynis when their rural landholdings increased in the early twentieth century. Through monopolization of religious and government posts and domination of the rural areas, these families were able to contain the threat of European consul-traders, Christian dragomen, and Zionist merchants and retain power and wealth.

5 Khalidi, p. 23.
6 Mattar, p. 6.
The Young Turk oppression and defeat in World War I reduced the threat even further. The Zionist threat, however, was strengthened by the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and its inclusion in the Mandate charter for Palestine. The Husaynis and Nashashibis had to secure their political leadership in order to protect their economic interests. As their power rested on the patron-client relationship between themselves and their fellahin, the notables could not accept the national home proposal of the Zionists and the British. But these notables, in their ambivalent traditional power broker fashion, "...exercised caution in expressing discontent with mandate policy so as not to anger their new occupiers." The notables had to be seen representing peasant resentment while attempting to maintain their leadership under British rule. Notable politics had not really changed. The British had simply replaced the Ottomans. For the notables, however, the difficulty in maintaining their position escalated with British rule.

The traditional position of Palestinian notable families differed from their Syrian counterparts in the nature of internal political divisions. Syrian notables were split along city lines. In Palestine, Jerusalem had no political rival. Domination of Jerusalem and extensive rural landholding meant domination of Palestine. The Nashashibis and Husaynis competed for prominence in one city. A distinct difference from Syria, but the upshot was the same: the rivalry of

8 Pamela Ann Smith, p. 25.
9 Mattar, p. 6.
the notable families undermined their own position as peasant militancy developed within Mandate conditions.

Between the notables and the peasants were the rural shaykhs. As in Syria, the shaykhs lost much of their power to the urban notables in the nineteenth century but they managed to preserve their social status.\(^\text{10}\) The shaykhs had traditionally led the great tribal clans, 'ashir, made up of the households, 'ailah, of extensive blood kin networks. The 'ashir, as discussed above, were united into the two great tribal confederations, the Qais and the Yamanyis. Disputes between the 'ailah, 'ashir, and the confederations were settled by the shaykhs.\(^\text{11}\) They were also expected to maintain security and collect taxes, very little of which reached the Ottoman treasury. As in Syria, the Palestinian shaykhs used their clans to defend against any attempt to reduce their autonomy or collect taxes with any degree of efficiency.\(^\text{12}\)

Commercialization impoverished many of the 'ailah and the urban notables, allied with the 'ailah who had managed to grow more powerful at the expense of those who had weakened, replaced the shaykh as the power in the countryside. The shaykh could either maintain his social position because of his traditional prestige or ally himself with a notable family.\(^\text{13}\) Poverty produced the need for financial support and the notable families had the means to provide this support.

\(^{10}\) Porath, *The Emergence of...*, p. 10.

\(^{11}\) Pamela Ann Smith, pp. 8-10.

\(^{12}\) Swedenburg, p. 171.

\(^{13}\) Pamela Ann Smith, pp. 22-24.
As the shaykhs became employees of the notable families and allies of the moneylender, the traditional relations that governed village life broke down. Peasants could not hold onto their land. Failure to pay taxes meant eviction and more and more peasants became hired labourers, sharecroppers, or drifted to the shantytowns that began to grow on the outskirts of Haifa and Jerusalem. Before 1930, Zionist land purchases did not directly displace many peasants but Jewish immigration and the concomitant increased demand for land did escalate land prices furthering peasant displacement.¹⁴

Because the traditional crop-sharing arrangements provided the basis for social, political and economic relations of mutual dependency and obligation, peasant displacement contributed to the breakdown of these relations.¹⁵ The market became the arbitrator of village and farming relations as the solidarity and strength of the clans diminished in respect to the growth of large landed estates.¹⁶ Before 1935, agriculture in Palestine had suffered while the urban economy boomed.¹⁷ Landless and impoverished peasants moved to the cities in search of work and thus "Tin Town" grew around Haifa.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 32-34.
The urban notable's wealth increased while the peasant's lot, was undermined by the vagaries of a market economy. The notables were a leisured class living off the proceeds of land speculation and urban investment at the same time maintaining their social and political position in the villages. While families like the Husaynis and Nashashibis expanded into industry, trade, finance and politics, the village was still their main source of economic and political power.

The expansion of wealth and land ownership of these two families occurred throughout Palestine. This expansion provided the Husaynis and Nashashibis with an extensive rural base to support their political activities.

During the war, most political activity in Palestine was split between the trends of Arab decentralization and Ottoman unity. The 1916 revolt was supported by the Arabists, the radical young men from the less prominent families, while the Ottomanists generally refrained from what was obviously treason. The defeat of the Ottomans and the British occupation negated the ideology the Ottomanists and provided the necessary ingredients for Arabist ideology to be recast as pan-Arab nationalism. While most Palestinian notables were suspicious of Faysal and Hashemite motives, the radical young Arabists who supported Faysal organized opposition to the British. In 1920, the al-Nebi Musa celebration was turned into a nationalist demonstration. Musa Kazim al-Husayni, Jerusalem's mayor, spoke to the al-Nebi Musa procession in Jerusalem praising "...Faysal in his speech, while young activists made 'inflammatory'

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19 Cohen, p. 12.

20 Mattar, pp. 5-6.
declamations from the balcony of the Arab Club. 21 The procession which included village peasants broke up into a small scale riot responding to the activists by roaming the streets of the Old City, attacking Jewish residents. A tension emerged in Palestinian politics between those politicians who sought accommodation with the new rulers and those activists who advocated militancy over political gamemanship. Until 1929, the moderates would hold sway over the activists.

Faisal's talks with Weizmann in London and his apparent willingness to accept the Zionist programme lost him the support of many Palestinian Arab nationalists. 22 These Arabists began to turn to the internal dynamics of Mandate Palestine as regional sentiments were intensified by the Mandate borders. Arab nationalism was undermined by these conditions and Palestinian nationalism began to take shape. Zionism contributed to this development because only the Palestinians faced Jewish nationalism:

...Zionism pushed the Palestinian Arab community toward unity as a national and cultural group...nationalism came to be equated with communal continuity...to resist, Palestinian Arabs naturally looked to their traditional sources of strength mobilizing along family and religious lines. 23

This development of a separate Palestinian political identity was initially

21 Swedenburg, p. 179.
22 The Faisal-Weizmann Agreement, Appendix F in Antonius, p. 437-9; Porath, The Emergence of..., p. 82.
focussed by two organizations formed with the support of the British authorities.

In 1918, the Muslim-Christian Association (hereafter 'MCA'), composed of Muslim-Christian societies in the major cities, was formed. The British military authorities were aware from the start of the Mandate of the opposition of Arabs to the Zionist enterprise. And the authorities, under the terms of the Balfour Declaration, were obliged to ensure that the "...civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine" were protected.24 Between 1919 and 1920, publications, speeches, demonstrations, riots and attacks on individual Jews and Jewish settlements were concrete and frequent expressions of Palestinian opposition to Zionism.25 These acts of opposition were organized by the young radical supporters of Faysal. Because of this pressure, the MCA, with Musa Kazim al-Husayni as president, took a leading role in the opposition to the Zionist policy of the administration. This opposition was the public posture adopted by this organization and the Arab Executive (hereafter 'AE'), formed in 1920 with Musa Kazim al-Husayni as its head. The MCA and the AE were led by those moderates who sought a political solution. By depending on the MCA societies and his position on the AE, Musa Kazim al Husayni was able to win widespread support and thus

24 Text of the Balfour Declaration in Antonius, p. 266-7; Ylana Miller, p. xi.

support for the moderate position. Militancy was a threat to be used if necessary, but it had to be contained. 26

The MCA's and AE's leadership was composed of the upper class notables whose power was based upon access to either the state or religious bureaucracy. They could not afford to jeopardize their positions by taking opposition to British rule to unacceptable lengths. For the British military, the MCA and the AE were acceptable conduits for opposition as long as both organizations refrained from involvement in any activities that might be deemed dangerous to the administration.

In May 1922, al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni was appointed by the British to the post of Mufti. He was to become a controversial and powerful figure in Palestinian nationalist politics. Like al-Shahbandar in Syria, al-Husayni was active in organizing opposition to the Mandate government. While al-Shahbandar married into the notable class, al-Husayni was born into an ashraf family claiming descent from Muhammad. Al-Shahbandar's politics were secular whereas Amin al-Husayni's were grounded in Islam. But both men played out similar roles as nationalist leaders and both were apparently caught off guard by rural leaders with whom they had varying degrees of association.

After his appointment as Mufti, al-Husayni pressed for the formation of a Muslim council with control over internal Muslim affairs, such as mosque appointments and 'awqaf disbursements, without any British interference. 27

27 Lesch, p. 92.
March 1922, he became president of the Supreme Muslim Council (hereafter "SMC") and thus he "...was personally placed in a position in which he could exercise pre-eminent control over Muslim affairs in Palestine, an activity that had been formerly exercised by the collective authority of the ashraf as a whole."

The British administration encouraged the formation of a country-wide Islamic organization in order to balance Arab interests with Jewish interests. The Mufti used the SMC as the basis for his nationalist organization. During the 1920s, most of his work was religious in nature but, at the same time, his political influence increased. As the central figure in the al-Nebi Musa celebrations, the Mufti commanded the necessary national and religious status to represent and disseminate an Islamic-based Palestinian nationalism. With Raghib al-Nashashibi holding the office of mayor, positions on the AE, and extensive lands, the Nashashibis formed the opposition to the Husaynis. The administration thus had organizations to funnel Arab aspirations and concerns and rivalry to undermine the effectiveness of these organizations.

The final imposition of the Mandate in September 1923 and conflict over the form of political action to be adopted weakened the AE's political punch. Political in-fighting among the notable families also contributed to the weakening of the AE. The rivalry of the urban notable families extended into

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28 Pamela Ann Smith, p. 61.
30 Mattar, p. 29.
31 Lesch, p. 95.
the countryside and rural factionalism followed suit: "...as rural disorganization increased, then, some groups began to act in their own interests...landowners could not be depended on." Impoverished, displaced, alienated, and frustrated, the peasants began to turn to: "...local religious figures and holy men who shared their problems and way of life." One fervently pious and active religious figure to whom peasants, especially the Haifa "Tin Town" peasants, began to turn was al-Qassam. Although much more is known of al-Qassam’s personal history than Sultan al-Atrash’s, information is nevertheless scarce. His story, when pieced together, is fascinating because, like al-Atrash, al-Qassam was a traditional leader who attempted by violent action to come to terms with modernization. Al-Qassam’s political life is also fascinating because he stood in the matrix of ideological connections between al-Afghani, Rida, al-Jaza’iri, al-Shahbandar, and Amin al-Husayni.

For the British, al-Qassam was a "...fanatical religious sheikh of the most dangerous type." He was born in either 1871 or 1882, depending on the source, and he came from the middle strata of the ulama whose positions were made the most precarious as secularization of government and society deepened. His father was Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Qassam, a local mosque teacher in the

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32 Ibid., pp. 23–4.
33 Pamela Ann Smith, p. 36.
village of Jablah near Ladhikkiyyah in Syria.35 He studied at al-Azhar in Cairo
probably under Muhammad 'Abduh.36 While studying to become an ‘alim, he
probably also became familiar with the ideology of nationalism and possibly
participated in anti-British demonstrations in Cairo.37 After teaching for a short
time in Ottoman Anatolia, he returned to Jublah where he took over his
father's position. In 1912, he proclaimed a jihad against the Italians invading
North Africa and managed to recruit some 250 volunteers to go to Libya.
When transport failed to show in Alexandretta, his band broke up.38 He
participated in the 1921 Alawite uprising and when the French crushed the
uprising after July 1920, he fled to Palestine where he remained in exile.39 He
was sentenced to death in absentia by a French military court.40 Al-Qassam
settled in Haifa from whence he continued on with his "dangerous activities".41
This time he directed his activities against the Zionists and the British.

It must be reemphasized that in the 1920s lines of national identity were
still not clearly delineated. The sense of being Arab smudged any real clear
notion of being Palestinian or Syrian simply because neither notion had any

35 Lachman, p. 59; Porath, The Palestinian-Arab Movement..., p. 133.
37 Lachman, p. 59.
38 Ibid., p. 59.
40 Porath, The Palestinian-Arab Movement..., p. 133.
concrete historical sense of reference. Identification with a community or a local region remained much stronger than any ties to an emerging but obscure national polity. What has to be re-emphasized is that the idea of some committed allegiance and consciousness of being Palestinian or Syrian was vague and only beginning to take shape. Al-Qassam, like Sultan al-Atrash, was a transitional figure on the stage of Mandate politics. His first commitment, by his deeds, was to Islam. The French and the British represented a threat to the primacy of Islam. He had little difficulty working his way into Palestinian society because the common bonds of Islam, Arab culture, and anti-foreign sentiments were sufficient to overcome any regional differences. But it is at this very juncture that things began to change. Sultan al-Atrash's traditional Druze response took on nationalist contours because of his relations with al-Shahbandar and the Damascene nationalists. Al-Qassam's traditional Islamic response to the infidel threat was reshaped by his relations with the Mufti and the Jerusalem nationalists. These urban notables, however complex their motives, were nationalists in the sense that they were acting in defense of an emerging notion of nationhood. This sense of national defense, bred in the conditions of Mandate and Jewish nationalism, was extended to al-Qassam. The tool coopted its exploiter. This is how Sultan al-Atrash and al-Qassam became something other than traditional symbols of defense against the infidel.

The myth of al-Qassam was woven around a person of some prominence whose achievements inspired the peasant guerrilla bands of 1936. The step from a Syrian rebel in an Alawite revolt to an important figure in Haifa begs for an explanation but, unfortunately, there seems to be no evidence to account
for al-Qassam's rapid rise to prominence in Palestine. One could surmise, as
the Arab historian A. W. Kayyali does, that perhaps his role as a rebel
combined with his education provided him with a reputation sufficient to attract
the notice of the a'yan and ulama of Haifa. Kayyali describes al-Qassam as
a "...prominent leader in the Syrian 1921 revolt...and a man of immense
learning and an eloquent religious orator." His piety and fervour were
translated into charisma and he became an effective agitator among the
disillusioned youth in the Haifa shantytown.

In January 1922, the Mufti appointed al-Qassam preacher of a new
mosque in Haifa. As a preacher, he used his eloquence and learning to
influence both the disenfranchised and the elite. He made some notables as
nervous as he did the British. His salafi education came out in his urging
young Muslims to adhere to traditional Islamic precepts, and his rebel spirit
was manifested in his calls for resistance to Zionist settlement and British
rule. The British became aware of his activities and saw in his preaching
"...inflammatory speeches...calculated to stimulate a spirit of religious
fanaticism". He gathered disciples around him and he fervently preached
against Zionism and British rule. His unpopularity with the Mandate
administration, his militancy, and his puritanical tendencies made the local

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42 A. W. Kayyali, Palestine: A Modern History, (London: Croom
43 Porath, The Palestinian-Arab National... , p. 133.
44 Ibid., p. 133.
hotables uncomfortable. The authorities kept a careful eye on his activities but refrained from sending him back to Syria.

According to the British police, many "good" Muslims disapproved of al-Qassam’s interpretation of the Quran, the implication being that good Muslims did not advocate physical resistance to colonial rule.17 As president of the SMC and Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husayni appeared to cooperate with the British and, despite his involvement in the 1921 Jaffa riots, he seemed to reject violent action for the political route.18 He used the waqf revenue to manipulate and keep a lid on any possible militant action. The Mufti, in the 1920s, acted like a 'good' Muslim to British eyes. Even Samuel considered him a moderate man. The AE constituted the opposition to the Mandate and the Mufti was "...too preoccupied with his new duties and religious projects and with the Opposition."49 Al-Qassam stands in direct contrast to the Mufti's position in the 1920s. What is curious is why the Mufti apparently did not attempt to curb the outspoken "preacher." Perhaps Amin al-Husayni was not prepared to put all his eggs in one basket.

Al-Qassam’s activities were out of tune with the tenor of notable politics in the 1920s. Between 1924 and 1928, the political activity of the AE and the

46. Lachman, p. 60; Kayyali, p. 180.
49. Mattar, p. 31 and p. 32. The Opposition, led by Raghib al-Nashashibi; attacked the AE and the SMC. The attacks had little to do with policy; it was family rivalry. As the historian Philip Mattar relates, Raghib al-Nashashibi told a friend that "...he would oppose any position that the Mufti took." (p. 31)
MCA was practically non-existent; by 1926, there was not enough money to pay even the secretary's salary.\textsuperscript{50} Jewish immigration had slowed to a trickle in 1926, giving the impression that perhaps Zionism was not the threat the nationalists made it out to be.\textsuperscript{31} The sense of diminishing danger accorded well with the Mufti's moderate position: "By 1928 the Mufti had consolidated his religious power while increasing his influence in politics, but never at the expense of his agreement with the British."\textsuperscript{52} The historian Philip Mattar argues that the Mufti's passiveness allowed the Zionist Yishuv (community) to solidify. By not adopting militant action and by not mobilizing the Palestinians against the Yishuv and the Mandate, he failed in a situation where he might have been successful in opposing the Balfour policy.\textsuperscript{53} This argument assumes that the people were primed for militant action. The years before the 1929 riots were quiet not because of the Mufti's inaction but because conditions did not warrant militancy.

In 1924, immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe flooded urban areas, investing in urban real estate, capital-intensive citrus groves and industry.\textsuperscript{54} The notable families profited from this demand for land and the urban growth; they were the main beneficiaries of the huge rise in the cost of cultivated land in

\textsuperscript{50} Porath, The Emergence of..., p. 243.
\textsuperscript{51} Mattar, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 32.
\textsuperscript{53} Mattar, p. 123-4.
\textsuperscript{54} Pamela Ann Smith, p. 44.
Palestine. Militant action was a threat to these profits accruing from the influx of Jewish capital. Maintaining and enriching family coffers went hand in hand with carefully opposing the British and Zionist presence and working towards national independence. The notables never stopped playing their role of power-broker. They regarded national independence in terms of replacing the British in the same way the Syrian nationalists envisioned their post-independence role. Militant peasants and impassioned preachers were a threat to this vision of things to be.

For the Palestinian peasants, the threat of Jewish domination seemed to recede after 1926 when Jewish emigration was greater than immigration. But resentment against the notable families and the British authorities slowly intensified. While citrus plantation owners charged exorbitant interest rates to peasant renters, the British, in their aim of achieving administrative stability without altering existing social relationships, used Ottoman laws as the basis for keeping public order and collecting taxes. These laws had never been implemented at the village level. Social relationships were in a state of extreme flux and the British attempted to maintain the old order with laws that never had very much to do with the traditional way of things. Village customs, under attack from agricultural commercialization, were being forced to fit standards imposed by infidel authorities, and the notables seemed to be unable or unwilling to do very much about the situation.

55 Ibid., p. 58.
56 Ylana Miller, p. 71.
In the early 1920s, Vladimir Jabotinsky, the leader of the Revisionist Zionist Party, argued that Palestinian Arab opposition "...arose from instinctive patriotism and not as a result of agitation by a few self-seeking individuals...the Arabs loved Palestine as much as the Jews and would resist Jewish encroachment". The peasants rejected any claim the Zionists may have to Palestine and, despite the arguments of the latter-day Zionist apologists, they had no where else to go. They were not Syrians or Iraqis; their families had tilled Palestinian soil for generations and this soil was the source of their social and political identity:

...to the Arabs who lived in it, Palestine...was still their country, their home, the land in which their people for centuries past had lived and left their graves.\textsuperscript{58}

The basis for peasant nationalism in Palestine rested on this historical ground and the political and economic conditions of the 1920s contributed to the process of politicizing the peasant.

Despite the subdued nationalist activity during the latter half of the 1920s, the social, political and economic changes in Palestine took an immense toll on peasant life. Interest rates, land prices, and efficient tax collection were among the factors that pulled the ground out from under the peasant. He began to turn away from the moderation preached by the Mufti, the AE and the MCA. Al-Qassam and his militant preaching found a receptive audience in thousands of peasant fringe-dwellers around Haifa. They had

\textsuperscript{57} Yeḥoyada Haim, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{58} Peel Commission Report, p. 6.
migrated to Haifa from the villages to find work in the rapidly growing urban economy. Most of the work they found was casual labour. By 1930, almost "...30 percent of all Palestinian villagers were landless, while as many as 75 to 80 percent held insufficient land to meet their subsistence needs." In CID reports, the British claimed that al-Qassam had a policy of "...selecting his audience from amongst the poor, ignorant and the more violently disposed of the pious" and through this policy, he secured a following in Haifa, Acre and in the villages around Jenin and Nazareth. He was probably not in need of a conscious policy; his teaching had always been directed toward the poor and pious. Shantytown peasants, unemployed or poorly paid, are, perhaps, not generally disposed at all times to accepting their fate. Al-Qassam did not have to reach out too far to find supporters inclined towards violent action.

Economic depression from 1925 to 1928, however, contributed to containing any possible violent outbreak. The depression was linked to the collapse of Polish currency in 1925 hurting the fortunes of newly arrived Polish Jews. For the peasants who had migrated to Haifa to find employment in the expanding urban economy, jobs would have been scarce and with the increasing concentration in citrus fruits, there would have been little point to returning to the countryside. Nevill Barbour has written that over 11,000 peasant workers

59 Swedenburg, p. 182.
62 Pamela Ann Smith, p. 44.
were living in the hovels of petrol-tins around Haifa. Scrambling for jobs in order to survive creates resentment but leaves little energy to revolt. It has been argued that a sense of relative deprivation is a spark of militancy and open revolt. In other words, it is when things are getting better that there is the energy to commit oneself to militant action. Extreme poverty does oil the machinery of militancy in the sense that the shantytown conditions of Haifa in the late 1920s surely made the peasant receptive to al-Qassam’s indictment of the Zionists and the British. It was only a matter of time and improving economic conditions for the growing resentment and frustration to boil over.

One last condition was added to the well of simmering resentment. Fearful of being overwhelmed or from being perceived as mere colonists, the Yishuv adopted a policy of avodah ivrit. This meant that only Jewish labour could be used in Jewish enterprises. This in effect segregated Jewish and Arab labour and created a system where Arab workers competed for fewer jobs with wages far lower than those of the Jewish workers. When the economy began the turnaround in 1928, Palestinian peasants had experienced enough of British efficiency, Jewish-settlement and labour policy, interest rates, unemployment and political infighting among their notables to blow the well.

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63 Cited in Pamela Ann Smith, p. 54.
64 Pamela Ann Smith, p. 55.
Palestine was fast becoming the most prosperous economy in the Middle East because of surplus capital, a modern infrastructure and cheap labour. The problem for the shantytown peasant was that he was a cheap labour. He did not benefit from the economic growth to the degree of the Jewish colonizers and the urban notables; thus, a sense of relative deprivation developed. All this resentment, despair, and alienation found a focus in al-Qassam's impassioned preaching.

In May 1928, al-Qassam assisted in the formation of the Young Men's Muslim Association (hereafter "YMMA") in Haifa. The YMMA provided him with the opportunity to establish ties with the national movement circles and to promote close cooperation with several of its members in the north—particularly Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, Subhi al-Khadra, Mudin al-Madi; all three of these men were to found the short-lived Palestine Istiqlal Party. Al-Qassam's political connections with the Mufti were thus not his only political connections. He worked hand in hand with Palestinian nationalists from various factions, and these relations support the claim that, contrary to British Intelligence reports, he was not simply a fanatical preacher.

In 1929, al-Qassam was appointed Ma'dhun, marriage registrar, of the Sharia court in Haifa. This appointment was approved by the office of the

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55 Ibid., p. 55.
66 Lachman, p. 60.
67 Ibid., p. 60.
Mufti. His position as *ma'dhun* allowed him to travel throughout the Galilee visiting villages in the Jenin and Nazareth areas, spreading his nationalist-religious gospel and building up a sizeable following. In Haifa, he established a night school for illiterate adults and combined his preaching with social work. On the eve of the Wailing Wall Riots, al-Qassam held three important positions: *imam*, *ma'dhun*, and executive member of the Haifa YMMA. These positions brought him into "...contact with wide segments of the Arab population in the north and afforded him the most favourable conditions for dissemination of his militant ideas." The Wailing Wall riots of 1929 would bring al-Qassam's militancy to the centre stage of political activity.

On 24 September 1928, the Jewish Day of Atonement, British police removed a screen that the Jews had put up near the Wailing Wall. The Muslim authorities objected to the presence of this screen as "innovation of practice". Both the Jews and the Muslims venerated the Wall. For the Muslims, it became a symbol for the Zionist threat; any activity out of the ordinary regarding the Wall was considered part of the Zionist plan to create a Jewish state and rebuild the Temple. The Wall became a political rallying cry for both the Jews and the Muslims. The Mandatory government had

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70 Lachman, p. 60.
71 Ibid., p. 61.
committed itself to maintaining the status quo ante of the Wall and acted accordingly on the Muslim complaint.73 But in August 1929, riots broke out following a Jewish march to the Wall.

Despite having very little to do with the outbreak of the riots, the Mufti emerged from these disturbances as the leading Palestinian political leader. The Shaw Commission, appointed to investigate the riots, found neither the AE or the Mufti as directly responsible for the disturbances but did accuse the Mufti of using the Wall issue as a "...means of incitement to disorder."74 He did politicize the screen incident, as Mattar argues, but he "...neither incited or planned the August 1929 violence."75 He had to be seen defending the Muslim Holy Places but the cost of actually committing himself to militant action was still too high. In any case, he emerged from the political violence as the leading Palestinian political leader because people believed that he had taken an active stand against the Zionist enterprise.76

The Mufti was still committed to political opposition to the Mandate but he "...refrained from openly defying the authority of the Mandatory government but his rise encouraged and lent impetus to the... militants ...[and the Mufti] secretly encouraged militant groups and helped lay the organizational infrastructure for the underground movement."77 He may not have incited or

73 Information Department Papers No. 20a, p. 39.
74 Shaw Commission Report, p. 74.
75 Mattar, p. 49.
76 Ibid., p. 33.
77 Lachman, p. 55.
planned what would occur that August but it is not inconceivable that in order to maintain and expand his political position, he would not want any other conclusion drawn. As he probably viewed the situation, any direct implication in the riots would have cost him his position necessary to his continued political opposition to the Mandate. Mattar argues that the Mufti resisted joining the militants. This does not account for his past support of al-Qassam and his organization of Palestinians in response to the threat to the Wall.

In October 1929, the first practical expression of armed rebellion emerged in the form of the "Green Hand Gang" (al-Kaff al-Khadra) led by Ahmed Tafish, who was wanted for a murder committed in Safad in the 1929 riots. Tafish was joined by Fuad Alani, alias "Lebnani", a Druze wanted by the French for various crimes committed during the 1925 revolt. The Gang was not very different from the traditional peasant bands that operated out of the hills of the Galilee but this particular band had an "...overt political purpose." The Gang members claimed to be Mujahideen, or religious fighters, and went from village to village collecting money for the nationalist cause. The historian Shai Lachman claims that their purpose was to "...stir up the population and create a tense atmosphere in the North thereby encouraging

78 Mattar, p. 51.
80 Lachman, p. 55.
81 Swedenburg, pp. 183-4.
establishment of similar gangs." Whatever its purpose, Tafish's band did contribute to creating an atmosphere in the countryside conducive to al-Qassam's call.

According to the British police, Tafish's band, destroyed in the spring of 1930, was backed by the YMMA. Without any direct evidence, the CID report on the incident connects the Mufti with Tafish through the fact that the Mufti was a patron of the YMMA. If this were the case, al-Qassam must also be implicated in that he had a direct role in the formation of the YMMA and sat on its executive. The insinuation seems to be an attempt to link the Mufti with the "...subversive underground activity of YMMA branch members." The police may have had some evidence to support these charges; YMMA branches found to be involved in subversive activity were closed down by order of Government. But any such evidence does not appear in the reports. If such evidence was available, this would back the claim that the Mufti did provide, at the very least, moral support for subversive activity.

One possible piece of evidence could be al-Qassam himself. He had received his posts by the approval of the Mufti. The police reports indicate.

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83 Lachman, p. 55.
85 Contrary to this, Mattar argues that the Mufti actually denied al-Qassam a teaching position in areas he controlled. (p. 30) He bases this argument on Subhi Yasin's book Al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya al-Kubra fi Filastin 1936-1939, (Cairo: Dar al-Hana, 1959). Yasin was an ardent supporter of the Mufti and problems with his work are discussed in Lachman's article.
that "...the most ardent branches of the Young Men's Moslem Association were those found around Haifa and Nazareth and Jenin."\(^{186}\) As a leading member of the Haifa YMMA and as the ma'dhun throughout the Jenin-Nazareth region and the most "fanatical and militant" of the preachers selected by the YMMA to give lectures, al-Qassam may have been the link between the Mufti and the Green Hand Gang. If in fact Tafish was financed by the YMMA, al-Qassam had to be behind this support.\(^4\) And through al-Qassam, the Mufti, at the very least, had to be aware of the YMMA-Green Hand connections and, most probably, provided moral support while being careful not to be implicated in any militant activities.

The Mufti has been linked to other groups involved in clandestine activity. There were three such centres of clandestine activity operating independently of each other during the early 1930s: Jerusalem-Ramallah, Tulkarm-Qalqiya and Haifa-Galilee.\(^{187}\) The Mufti was associated with two of the three centres. His YMMA connections with Haifa are clear. The commander of the Jerusalem group was the Mufti's nephew, Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni.\(^{188}\) The Mandatory administration acknowledged him as the leader of the Palestinian community while keeping a close watch on his activities. His public posture was one of militant moderation. But his leadership, as was traditional in notable-peasant relations, depended upon his ability to mediate between the forces of

\(^{187}\) Lachman, p. 57.
\(^{188}\) Ibid., p. 57.
government and the lives of the fellahin. It is not inconceivable that political necessity induced him to provide covert moral support and, possibly, financial support for militant nationalist fringe groups.

The 1929 riots and al-Qassam's Islamic nationalist proselytization were factors in the radicalization of both the shantytown peasant and the youth graduating from Mandate public schools where Palestinian nationalism was part of the curricula. Political radicalization produced militant groups. The Mufti probably had to covertly support these groups or risk losing his power-broker status. After the riots, he did attempt to steer "...Muslim institutions toward a more militant course". He may have preferred a nonviolent course, as the historian Mattar suggests, but he was not immune to the process of radicalization. Other AE executive members resisted his growing militant tendencies and continued to negotiate with the High Commissioner over the creation of a legislative council. The radicalization of the youth was something to fear and both the Mufti and the more moderate AE members were afraid to lose control of the nationalist movement. It would appear that the Mufti attempted to keep a few cards up his sleeve.

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89 Lesch, p. 102.

To assess whether he failed in his overt policies of position rests on the rejection of any covert ties he may have had with the more militant groups. Hindsight is a handy tool but it ignores the difficulty in judging the best course of action in any given set of circumstances. The Mufti may have exhibited bad political timing in adopting open militancy only after 1936 but this does not show that he completely ignored such a course before this time. (Mattar, p. 121.)

91 Lesch, p. 102.
This process of radicalization was intensified by young activists graduating from the Arab schools established by the government and staffed by teachers who were supporters of the nationalist cause. They found themselves sufficiently educated to qualify for work in the government bureaucracy but unemployed because there were no administrative jobs available. One official in the Colonial Office referred to India, Egypt and West Africa as "...horrid examples of the dangers of...turning out large numbers of unemployable clerks." The same situation developed in Palestine. Radical militancy has fertile soil in large numbers of educated, idealistic and unemployed young men.

Many of these young men returned to their villages and served as teachers in village-financed schools. The government permitted considerable autonomy for the schools because they "...appeared to present no political threat and because [the villagers] were usually required to finance their own schools." Dr. Khalil Totah, headmaster of the Friends School at Ramallah, appeared before the Peel Commission in 1937. He argued that "...it was impossible to control the inherent nationalism of these boys...on the second of November, Balfour Day, we schoolmasters always expect a day's strike." Totah went on to compare the expenditure on education in Iraq and Palestine and argued that

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93 Ylana Miller, p. 92.
94 Swedenburg, p. 185.
95 Ylana Miller, p. 100; Swedenburg, pp. 186-7.
96 Ylana Miller, p. 100.

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"...a national government would look at the children differently, take more interest in them. Now they are just step-children." Though Totah was not employed by the Department of Education, the Peel Commission had "...ample evidence to show that Dr. Totah's official fellow teachers, though they may be less outspoken, felt at heart what he feels":

My confere in Iraq...in charge of a Government school, stands on a higher footing than I do. He tells his boys to hoist their national flag, to sing their national anthem, to salute the portrait of their King. I can't do that. I am a second-class Arab.

By spending little on education, allowing separate Jewish and Arab school systems and providing little opportunity for those few graduates, the government, apart from its unwanted presence, contributed directly to the radicalization of Palestinian nationalism.

The early 1930s were a time of growing unrest, militancy and anger. The Wailing Wall riots as a factor in this rising militancy were joined by increased Jewish immigration, continued skewed economic development, increased land purchases, and a growing sense that the notables' moderate political policies were bankrupt. In July 1931, Mr. Lewis French was appointed Director of Development but both the Arabs and the Jews refused to cooperate with him. An important part of his work was an investigation of landless Arabs whose

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98 Ibid., pp. 338-340. Between 1931-1937, the average yearly education expenditure in Palestine was 5.77 percent of the total budget while in semi-independent Iraq, 10 percent of the total budget was spent on education between 1933 and 1934.


100 Swedenburg, pp. 184-5.
condition was attributed to Jewish purchase of land.\footnote{Information Department Papers No. 20a, p. 53.} French's investigations suggested that few fellahin had become landless owing to Jewish land purchases: "It is a fact that Jewish land purchases have not so far created a 'landless' class of any dimensions."\footnote{Ibid., p. 54.} The numbers French's report rests on depend on the number of Arab claims for "landless status" at the Registrar of Landless Arabs. By obviously judicious criteria, 2,607 families were disallowed landless status. French also does not seem to consider how many families may have not registered and, instead, sought work in Haifa or Jaffa.\footnote{For the figures quoted, see Information Department Papers No. 20a, p. 54n.} Palestine also experienced probably the highest rate of population increase between 1922 and 1938 of any where in the world. From 752,048 in 1922, the population grew to 1,418,619: an increase of 90 percent of which immigration accounted for 40 percent. The Jewish population increased by 477 percent, the Muslim population increased by 52 percent and the Christian population increased by 57 percent. The increases in the Arab population were attributed to a cessation of conscription and improvement in public health.\footnote{All numbers and percentages are taken from the Information Department Papers No. 20a, pp. 56-7.}

While the rest of the industrialized world was gripped by economic depression, Palestine actually experienced an economic boom. Government revenue doubled between 1931 and 1935 rising from 2.3 million to 5.7 million pounds sterling while expenditure rose from 2.4 million to 4.2 million pounds
sterling, leaving a budget surplus of 6.3 million pounds sterling as of April 1936.\textsuperscript{105} In construction, 6 million pounds sterling was invested by 1934 and imports and exports nearly trebled between 1931 and 1935:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1935</th>
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<tr>
<td>Imports</td>
<td>5.9 million pounds sterling</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exports</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
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The deficit in favour of imports was covered by the imported capital of German Jews after 1933. This import capital left no government debt.\textsuperscript{107} This boom, however, was skewed. The veritable flood of western consumer goods destroyed the possibility of developing local industry.\textsuperscript{108} Because of Jewish immigration and the avodah ivrit policy of the Yishuv and the Histadrut (Jewish Labour Organization), access to the expanding job opportunities was limited for Arab workers.\textsuperscript{109} In relative economic terms, the Palestinians benefitted little from the boom. In political terms, this expansion of the economy and the increase in Jewish immigration threatened the attainment of Palestinian independence and inflamed public opinion.\textsuperscript{110}

The economic boom primarily affected urban areas. After four years of drought, the spring of 1934 found a large proportion of fellahin (70 percent of

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., pp. 64-5.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., p. 64.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., pp. 64-5.
\textsuperscript{108} Pamela Ann Smith, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{109} Swedenburg, p. 184.
\textsuperscript{110} Peel Commission Report, pp. 82-3.
the population) in a "...state of destitution, approaching starvation in some cases, and their livestock dying in large numbers." For most fellahin, when their debt surpassed their income, the only choice was to sell their land, an act which did little more that release them from debt and propel them toward the urban slums. Drought, fall in agricultural prices, capital shortages and heavy debts (with heavy interest rates: 30 percent or more) created a rural crisis.\textsuperscript{112}

In 1934, the historian Arnold Toynbee wrote:

For these factors the Jews cannot be held responsible...the boom which Jewish activities in Palestine were now producing had manifestly relieved the pressure upon the Arab agricultural population by opening to it new urban markets as well as more lucrative alternative field of employment.\textsuperscript{113}

Toynbee was right. There were more jobs and wages were better. Arabs from neighbouring countries did immigrate, legally and illegally, to Palestine because of the prospect of higher wages.\textsuperscript{114} But for the Palestinians, the boom served to increase the social and economic separation of Jew and Arab. The Ya'ad Leumi had to employ incoming Jewish immigrants in order to justify Winston Churchill’s 1921 "economic absorptive capacity" principle. The policy of avodah ivrit was thus strenuously applied. In the eyes of the Palestinian fellahin, the

\textsuperscript{111} PMC, Minutes and Reports, (Geneva, 25th Session, 1934), pp. 14 and 18.

\textsuperscript{112} Information Department Papers, No. 20a, p. 70.

\textsuperscript{113} Quoted in the Information Department Papers No. 20a, p. 70.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.; pp. 59-60.
Jews got the jobs first and they got whatever was leftover. Wages, too, may have increased—but only in relative terms. Jewish wages rose much higher than Arab wages creating the conditions for Gurr's principle of relative deprivation.\textsuperscript{115}

In 1937, the Peel Commission observed that "...with almost mathematical precision, the betterment of the economic situation in Palestine meant the deterioration of the political situation." Sir Arthur Wauchope, who became High Commissioner in 1931, reported a "...sullen distrust among the peasants, which could change to noncooperation and hostility unless every opportunity is taken of demonstrating that the Government appreciate their difficulties and is prepared to give them practical help."\textsuperscript{116} The Jewish National Home was developing at a tremendous rate. The government appeared to do little to check its growth and live up to the second clause of the Balfour Declaration. The moderate political policy of the established nationalist leaders seemed increasingly ineffective in the face of the Zionist enterprise. The fellahin began to turn away from their traditional notable leaders. They gave their support to those nationalists who argued that violence was the only means to preserve the Arab character of Palestine.\textsuperscript{117}

Awni Abd al-Hadi, a confident of Faysal in the 1920s and a secretary of the AE after 1928, established the Istiqlal (Independence) Party in 1932. The

\textsuperscript{115} Porath, \textit{The Palestine Arab National...}, p. 129; Pamela Ann Smith, pp. 54-6.

\textsuperscript{116} Peel Commission Report, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{117} Quoted in Lesch, p. 70.

\textsuperscript{118} Porath, \textit{The Palestine Arab National...}, p. 138.
pan-Arabists of the Party rejected the moderation of the AE and appealed to 
the rising militancy. \(^{119}\) The Party criticised the Mufti’s apparent collaboration 
with the British. \(^{120}\) The Istiqlal as a political party disbanded in 1934 because 
it could not attract sufficient support. As well, the AE was in a state of 
paralysis and dissolved in August 1934 with the death of Musa Kazim al-
Husayni. In the municipal elections of that year, the Opposition party of the 
Nashashibis was victorious in almost every town, and in Jerusalem, they won 3 
out of 4 wards. \(^{121}\) Following this success, the Nashashibis reorganized 
themselves into the National Defense Party (Hizb al-Difa al-Watani). Thus, by 
1934, the two dominant political forces in Palestine revolved around the 
Nashashibis and the Mufti.

The Mufti’s connections with his nephew’s band, the YMMA and al-
Qassam gave him credibility with the populace. \(^{122}\) By using Islamic symbols, 
both the Mufti and al-Qassam helped to mobilize the fellahin along national 
lines. \(^{123}\) Al-Qassam’s militancy never wavered and the fellahin’s radicalization 
could not but assist to push the Mufti into al-Qassam’s camp. The Mufti was 
making the transition from traditional notable to nationalist politician: he was 
being forced to choose between leading his people or acquiescing to British

\(^{119}\) Mattar, p. 66.
\(^{120}\) Swedenburg, p. 186; Mattar, p. 66-7.
\(^{121}\) Porath, The Palestinian Arab National..., p. 63.
\(^{122}\) See Swedenburg, pp. 188-9 and Lachman, pp. 55-6.
\(^{123}\) Lachman, p. 55.
rule.124 Because of the breakdown of traditional village life and the displacement of the fellah, the traditional bonds between the fellah and the notable underwent drastic alteration. The notable had to become the politician drumming up support rather than acting as a mediator. As Pamela Ann Smith points out:

...peasants were no longer exclusively bound to preserve and follow...anachronistic tribal divisions. For them, they were irrelevant and they preferred to organize themselves around their hostility to the Zionists and the British, if necessary without, or in opposition to, their traditional leaders.125

The Mufti attempted to retain his leadership by taking into account these changes and moving away from traditional appeals of loyalty. He could not be unaware that the traditional leadership had shot themselves in their venerable foot. By touring the countryside in 1934, he demonstrated the extent to which he was becoming a modern politician.126 What he was losing control over was the increasing tendency of the fellahin to adopt a gun.

A violent outbreak occurred in 1930 in Nablus, and between 1930 and 1932, several Jews were murdered.127 British police linked these murders to al-Qassam. Mustapha Ali Ahmed, convicted of one of the murders (Nahalal murders of 1932) and executed, implicated al-Qassam:

I am from Saffourieh and I am a member of the YMMA Saffourieh and the following from Haifa are in

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124 Mattar, p. 70.
125 Pamela Ann Smith, p. 63.
126 Swedenburg, p. 188.
127 Information Department Papers No. 20a, p. 72.
the habit of visiting our society in Saffourieh:...Sheikh Izzet Din el Kassam...the aim of [his] visits is to teach us and lecture us and deliver speeches.\textsuperscript{128}

There was, however, not enough evidence to convict al-Qassam. But three of the teachers in the habit of visiting Saffourieh were disciples of al-Qassam: Shaykhs Khalil Eissa (British transliteration of Khalil Muhammad 'Isa and alias Abu Ibrahim), Attiyeh Ahmad and Farhan es Saadi.\textsuperscript{129} These disciples were to lead guerrilla bands after al-Qassam’s death; they were part of the Ikhwan al-Qassam, the Brotherhood of Qassam.\textsuperscript{130}

Al-Qassam’s direct involvement with nationalist politics came with the establishment of the Haifa YMMA along with Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, the manager of the Arab Bank, and Subhi al-Khadra, director of the Awqaf for the northern district.\textsuperscript{131} In 1930, he received a fatwa (religious decree) from the Mufti of Damascus, Shaykh Badr al-Din al-Taji al-Hasani, authorising his advocacy of violence against the Zionists and the British.\textsuperscript{132} He was elected as acting-president of the YMMA in 1932 and succeeded Rashid al-Hajj as president of the Haifa YMMA in 1934.\textsuperscript{133} Thus by 1934, he had received

\textsuperscript{128} CID Report, Central Police Station, Haifa, "Statement of Mustapha Ali Ahmed of Saffourieh, 29.5.1933", Tagart Papers, (Box II, File 3, St. Anthony’s College), p. 3.


\textsuperscript{130} CID Report on al-Qassam, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{131} Porath, The Palestinian Arab National..., pp. 132-3.

\textsuperscript{132} CID Report on al-Qassam, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{133} Porath, The Palestinian Arab National..., p. 134.
religious approval for his doctrine and he was in a political position to implement it.

According to Subhi Yasin, al-Qassam had established an organized network of cells as early as 1925. His doctrine, preached through this network, was based on Islam and the salafiyyah notion of religious reform. He condemned folk practices and preached religious purification. He was virulently anti-Zionist and anti-British. He linked the Qu'ran and the concept of jihad to nationalist politics:

[Al-Qassam's] Arabism was of a saliently religious character and inseparable from Islam, which in its militant-political manifestations, was consonant with the nationalist sphere.

Within his 'fanatical' attachment to the fundamental tenets of Islam, al-Qassam was committed to his Arab linguistic-cultural identity. His plans included the following points:

- a) abolition of British rule;
- b) resignation of the current leadership of the nationalist movement in view of its inability to lead the people in its struggle;
- c) preparing the people for the coming revolt by training... stockpiling arms... providing adequate financial resources; and
- d) forming alliances with the enemies of Britain in order to obtain aid and support for the organization.

In the context of Palestinian nationalist politics, his underground organization

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135 Lachman, pp. 61-62.
136 Ibid., p. 63.
137 Ibid., p. 65.
was thus committed to freeing Palestine from the British and the Zionists by violence.

After the Nahalal murders, al-Qassam apparently refrained from any other violent attacks until 1935. But he did not stop organising. By 1935, he had enlisted more than 200 men into small guerrilla bands. During this period, agrarian crime increased. Trees on Jewish lands were uprooted and cattle were wounded. Fellahin squatted and grazed their animals on land to be sold while Arab scouts patrolled the coast to block illegal Jewish immigrants. On 13 October 1933, the AE, in its dying gasp, called a general strike to protest immigration and land purchase. For the first time, the government considered this outburst as "...a manifestation of Arab feeling against the government as well as the Jews." Al-Qassam bided his time waiting for the opportunity to put his plans into motion. It was not simply a matter of being materially prepared. He wanted to wait until the people were primed and ready to rebel.

The murder of Sergeant Rosenfeld on 7 November 1935 marked the resumption of al-Qassam's guerrilla activities. News of an arms shipment in Jaffa on 18 October destined for the Zionists galvanized him to action. His

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139 Swedenburg, p. 189.
140 Information Department Papers No. 20a, p. 73.
141 Ibid., p. 73.
followers were armed at their expense and quarry workers had supplied them with explosives.\textsuperscript{144} Thus armed, al-Qassam's band had left Haifa for the Jenin hills to work among the fellahin but on 6 November, Rosenfeld stumbled on their hiding place.\textsuperscript{145}

Al-Qassam was preparing to attack the Haifa police arsenal but he was not ready to declare a revolt: "...we want to equip ourselves with arms and go the villages to rouse them to \textit{Jihad}."\textsuperscript{146} His men were prepared to die for Palestine: "...one of his men sold his belongings and explained that he was going to die for the motherland."\textsuperscript{147} Religion and nationalism were fused in his movement. He used the traditional concept of \textit{jihad} to rally fellahin to the nationalist cause of liberating Palestine. Rudolph Peters argues that the Qassamite band was in most respects a \textit{jihad}-movement where most of the symbols of Islamic resistance were used.\textsuperscript{148} This \textit{jihad} impulse extended to most of the fellahin bands that would operate during the rebellion. "Al-Qassam had condensed nationalist rhetoric and \textit{salafiyyah} reform components into a modern revolutionary movement."\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{144} Lachman, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{146} Cited in Lachman, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{147} Porath, \textit{The Palestinian Arab National...}, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{149} Swedenburg, pp. 189-90.
On 20 November, al-Qassam was hiding in a cave near the village of Ya'bad, west of Jenin. In a battle with police, al-Qassam and four of his followers were killed.\textsuperscript{150} His funeral in Haifa became a massive nationalist demonstration. The Arab press lauded him as a national hero and the first martyr of the nationalist cause: "Dear friend and martyr", wrote one of the newspapers, "I have heard you preach from a platform resting on a sword. Today...you are, by God, a greater preacher than alive you ever were."\textsuperscript{151} His death and funeral had a tremendous effect on the country. He became a symbol of resistance that roused all Palestinians to action. The nationalist leaders were forced to grab onto his coattails and adopt a more militant stance. According to Palestinian folklore, he was the first nationalist fida'i, an Islamic warrior, in the long tradition of battling infidels from the Crusaders to the British.\textsuperscript{152} The people saw him as someone who sacrificed himself for the nationalist cause. His actions shamed the moderation of the notables. He was a hero and his grave became a national holy place.\textsuperscript{153} His followers, the Ikhwan al-Qassam, vowed to carry on his struggle.

His funeral caused the nationalist parties to form a coalition and demand from the Mandatory administration the establishment of democratic government, the prohibition of land sales to Jews and the immediate cessation of Jewish


\textsuperscript{151} Peel Commission Report, pp. 88-9.


\textsuperscript{153} Swedenburg, p. 190.
immigration. The High Commissioner rejected the second and third demands but indicated that he was prepared to move on the first demand. Wauchope's proposed legislative council was rejected by Parliament, convincing the Palestinian leaders that the Zionists had preeminent power in London.

Jewish immigration peaked at 61,854 in 1935 and over 73,000 dunams (dunam equals 1/4 acre) of land were purchased. The threat of the Jewish National Home loomed larger.

On the road between Tulkarm and Nablus, two Jews were murdered on 15 April 1936. On the following day, two Arabs were murdered in retaliation. Arab mobs rioted in Jaffa on 19 April. Party leaders formed the Higher Arab Committee (hereafter 'HAC') on 26 April. A strike committee was set-up and a general strike declared. Local national committees, formed before the HAC and without the participation of party leaders, gave the HAC the authority to maintain the strike. The Mufti was president while Awni Bey Adel Hadi and Ahmad Hilmi Pasha, former Istiqlalists, were secretary and treasurer respectively. Raghib al-Nashashibi and Dr. Husayn el-Khalidi were prominent members.

By 20 May, the strike had spread throughout the country and the Ikhwan al-Qassam, with fellahin aid, sabotaged rail lines, attacked troops, police and

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154 Peel Commission Report, p. 89.
155 Ibid., p. 279.
156 Ibid., p. 76.
Jewish colonies.\textsuperscript{158} Al-Qassam's death produced a cult of armed bands modeled on the Brotherhood.\textsuperscript{159} The police identified the Brotherhood and "...the growing youth and scout movement as the most probable factors for the disturbances of peace in Palestine in the future".\textsuperscript{160} The police were proved right.

The General Strike and Revolt of 1936, which lasted from 26 April to 11 October, was, in a sense, al-Qassam's revolt. The Brotherhood were representatives of the devout nationalist freedom fighters al-Qassam had envisioned. They managed to sustain a tenuous unity between the guerrilla bands because of their reputation. Al-Qassam's spirit also managed to sustain a fragile unity between the HAC members particularly between the Nashashibis and the Husaynis.\textsuperscript{161} Among the rebel band members who had criminal records before the revolt, no one of the Brotherhood could be found.\textsuperscript{162}

Zionist leaders were quicker than the British police to grasp the political significance of al-Qassam and his Brotherhood. Moshe Beilinson declared that...

...these people are not bandits...mosque preachers, school directors, chairmen of the Young Men's Muslim Association do not engage in banditry. Not a gang of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[158] CID Report, "Terrorism 1936-1937", p. 16.
\item[159] Lachman, p. 74.
\item[160] See CID Report No. 17/35, 16.11.1935, Tegart Papers, (Box I, File 3, St. Anthony's College)
\item[161] Porath, \textit{The Palestinian Arab National}..., p. 183.
\item[162] Ibid., p. 183.
\end{footnotes}
thieves but a body of political terrorists has lately confronted authorities in Palestine. David Ben Gurion added that "...this is the first time the Arabs have seen that a man could be found ready to give up his life for an idea and this will be a very important educational factor for the Arab masses." The strike and the revolt proved Beilinson's and Ben Gurion's observations more true than perhaps they expected.

The rebellion was a military failure. But its significance in the economic and political transformation of the Palestinian Arab community is immeasurable. The revolt was carried out by fellahin imbued with the religious nationalist spirit of al-Qassam. The urban educated middle class and the notable families who had initiated the development of the Palestinian nationalist movement played little part in the rebellion. Over 65 percent of the rebel leaders were villagers while 22 percent were townsmen. Qassamites provided 25 commanders: 2 regional, 14 band and 8 sub-band; they were the most powerful group in the rebel hierarchy. Muhammad al-Salih, a veteran Qassamite and renowned for his nationalist-devotion, was killed by the RAF while attempting to mediate a dispute between two rival band leaders on 13 September 1938. Qassamites, like al-Salih, gave the rebellion whatever coherence it was able to

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163 Lachman, p. 22.
164 Ibid., p. 22.
166 Ibid., p. 262.
167 Ibid., p. 264.
achieve. Significantly, they were shantytown peasants and mosque preachers, not notables.

Like the Syrian rebellion, the Palestinian rebellion was a peasant war which was not initiated or mobilized from above. Like Sultan al-Atrash and his Druze rebels, al-Qassam, in his death, and his Ikhwan al-Qassam fired a peasant rebellion that caught the national leadership off-guard. Raghib al-Nashashibi, in meetings with Wauchope on 5 May 1936, stressed that...

"...the tension in the country was great and the attitude of the leaders were dictated by the pressure brought to bear upon them by the nation. The people...at the present time were ruling the leaders and not the leaders ruling the people". 168

Al-Shahbandar and Sultan al-Atrash politicized the Syrian peasant in 1925. In 1935, al-Qassam and the Mufti politicized the fellahin. 169 The process of radicalization and the ideology of nationalism penetrated the rural areas through newspapers, poetry, discussion, and militant teachers. 170 Al-Qassam's influence was widespread throughout the north and the Mufti's influence was throughout Palestine. These influences effected the growth of national awareness in the fellahin. After al-Qassam's death, the fellahin flocked to the nationalist cause. During the rebellion, the "...urban leadership rapidly declined and disintegrated and hegemony in large areas of the country passed into the armed bands movement, made up almost exclusively of fellahin of the rural hill

169 Ibid., pp. 149-50.
170 Swedenburg, pp. 186-7.
population." Contrary to many accounts of the rebellion, the rebel peasants were fairly well organized and they did develop a semblance of a national social program much to the horror of the notables.

The Brotherhood was again a major factor in unifying the rebellion to whatever extent that unity could be attained and contributing to developing a social program inherited from al-Qassam's social work in Haifa's Tin Town. Consider the obstacles to unity the rebel leaders had to overcome: traditional family, tribal, and communal rivalries, lack of a central leadership and the very inherent anarchial tendencies of a peasant rebellion that explodes from the ground up. Instead of criticizing the rebellion in terms of its ultimate failure to achieve coherent and consistent unity, one should admire the level of unity it did achieve. As for their austere social program, the rebels did refuse to pay taxes. They called for a moratorium on debts and levied heavy contributions against the notable landowning class. This may not be a coherent social programme but these actions did constitute an attack on traditional social relations in Palestine and pointed to a basis for social reorganization if ever conditions would have permitted such a development.

Al-Qassam was as complex, if not as historically illusory, as Sultan al-Atrash. He was a preacher and a rebel. He acted on his own while maintaining political connections with both the Istiqlal party members and the Mufti through the YMMA and his religious offices. Rashid al-Hajj and Subhi

171 Lachman, p. 78.

172 Pamela Ann Smith, p. 64; Swedenburg, pp. 196-7.
al-Khadra, whom al-Qassam had helped set up the Haifa YMMA, became leading members of the Istiqlal while working with the Mufti on the SMC. According to Jewish intelligence sources, al-Qassam’s political organization maintained close ties with the Mufti and during the rebellion, the Istiqlals cooperated with the Mufti’s party. A Jewish lawyer living in Haifa during this period observed that:

Husayni secretly supported al-Qassam short of his decision to openly and violently defy the authority of the mandatory government and when it became clear that al-Qassam was serious in his intentions, he expelled him from his party.

The Mufti was attempting to balance his relationship with the radicals on one hand and the government on the other. These political connections provide the ideological conduit for al-Qassam, a pious Islamic cleric, to become a fierce Palestinian nationalist insofar as he fought to free Palestine.

Al-Qassam, with or without the support of the Mufti and other nationalist leaders, radicalized the alienated fellahin and inspired them to take up arms in defense of Islam and Palestine. Jewish nationalism and British rule unified Christian and Muslim Arabs in Palestine. This kindled the development of Palestinian nationalism and served up a peasant rebellion.

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173 Mattar, p. 74; Lachman, pp. 75-6.
CONCLUSION

OVERVIEW AND ASSESSMENT OF THE REBELLIONS AND THEIR ARCHITECTS

Sultan al-Atrash and Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam were symbolic figures of the continuity of social, political, ideological and economic processes in the modern development of Syria and Palestine. All the changing conditions and responses are historically linked from Ibrahim's occupation in 1831 through the 1858 Land Code, the Damascus cafes, the ideological development of Ottomanism and Arabism, the 1916 Arab Revolt and promises made and broken to Sultan al-Atrash and al-Qassam.

Through al-Shahbandar, Sultan al-Atrash was linked to those Damascus cafes where al-Jaza'iri discussed salafiyah tenets of Islamic reform and Arab revival. Like al-Jaza'iri, al-Qassam was a middle-level alim directly affected by the bureaucratic and social changes of the Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. If he did not frequent the Damascus cafes, he did come under the influence of Rashid Rida, al-Jaza'iri's teacher, while he studied at al-Azhar University in Cairo. Thus both al-Qassam and Sultan al-Atrash bridged the ideological and political development of Palestinian and Syrian nationalism from the modern and conservative Ottomanism of Arab intellectuals in the late nineteenth century.

The politicization of Sultan al-Atrash and al-Qassam occurred in Syria. Al-Qassam was part of the 'Alawite rebellion and escaped to Palestine under the sentence of death. Sultan al-Atrash rebelled twice against the French to
protect the traditional social and political structure of the Druze community and, increasingly, to free Syria as a distinct political entity. His community’s political and economic relations with Damascus through the Druze Agency and the Maydan grain merchants as well as his personal relations with Bakri and al-Shahbandar changed what may have remained a traditional and localized Druze response to outside interference to a country-wide peasant rebellion that took on nationalist contours. The French had made themselves quite unpopular throughout Mandate Syria and Sultan al-Atrash’s actions in Suwayda ignited the simmering resentment into full-scale rebellion.

While causing popular resentment, the Mandatory governments created the form that this resentment would take as a nationalist movement. The Mandatory borders shaped what began as a evanescent vision of pan-Arab unity to a more manageable but no less difficult vision of Syrian and Palestinian Arab unity. In Palestine, the British did create a different mix of ingredients with the support given to the aspirations of Jewish nationalism. While Syrian nationalists had to contend with the French and intense communal and factional rivalry, the Palestinian nationalists had to confront similar obstacles to unity and deal with the threat of Zionist settlement. The two incipient national movements were both similar in respect to the historical condition of segmented and autonomous communities and the imposition of Mandatory government but the separate political, social, and economic experiences of the Mandatory years provided a unique shape to each movement.

Both the rural leaders signalled a change in the class structure. Both the Druze peasant and the Palestinian fellahin had a tradition of resistance to
outside interference. The patron-client relationship of notable-peasant or shaykh-peasant was the traditional model of class relations that was structured to be the buffer between the peasant and the central government. What both rebellions mark is a change in this traditional model. In both cases, peasants rebelled spontaneously with little or no leadership from the notable class. In fact, to a great extent, these peasant rebellions became as much a threat to the notables as to the Mandatory authorities. Armed bands in Syria demanded notable contributions while Palestinian rebels declared a moratorium on peasant debts. In both rebellions, the rebels attacked notables who wavered in their support of the nationalist cause. Peasants took the initiative. The traditional leadership was left floundering.

The peasants responded to al-Qassam’s and Sultan al-Atrash’s use of traditional symbols of defense fused with modern nationalist ideology. Because they were not the urban notables who had acquired wealth and power during the latter half of the nineteenth century, both leaders undercut the notables with whom they had formed and maintained political connections. They chose to act while the urban nationalists vacillated, disputed and negotiated. Sultan al-Atrash and al-Qassam had little to fear from a peasant rebellion. The urban nationalists did have considerable reason to pale at the thought.

The anthropologist Eric Wolf has written that:

Perhaps it is precisely when the peasant can no longer rely on his accustomed institutional context to reduce his risks but when alternative institutions are either too chaotic or too restrictive to guarantee a viable
commitment to new ways, that the psychological, social
and political tensions all mount towards peasant rebellion
and involvement in revolution.¹

The Syrian and Palestinian rebellions occurred at this time when the peasants
rejected the moderate and ineffectual policies of the traditional leadership. Al-
Qassam and Sultan al-Atrash bridged the gap between this rejection and the
new nationalist movement. The fusion of Druze particularism and Syrian
nationalism in Sultan al-Atrash and the fusion of Islamic reformism and
Palestinian nationalism in al-Qassam provided the means for the peasant to
adapt secular nationalism to their traditional belief systems. Both rebel leaders
possessed what we now term charisma in the sense that they took on mythical
parameters greater than their actual person. This charisma attracted the
peasants and thus Sultan al-Atrash's and al-Qassam's nationalist ideology,
however underdeveloped, was adopted by the rebel peasant.

The disintegration of the traditional social order began before the
Mandates with European economic penetration. The British and the French
accelerated the spread of capitalism which "...severed people from their
accustomed social mix in order to transform them into economic actors
independent of prior social commitments to kin and neighbours."² This
severance led to the kind of social dislocation experienced in Palestine in the
1930s. The extent to which such dislocation affected Syria and Palestine leads
us to the question of the kind of peasant involved in the rebellions. Wolf

¹ Wolf, p. xv.
² Ibid., p. 279.
suggests that revolutionary movements seem to grab hold first of landed peasants who had both the motive and the means to rebel. One has only to consider the degree of economic developments to infer that while both rebellions were peasant in origin, the Palestinian rebel was more often than not a landless shantytown fellahin. Sultan al-Atrash's rebellion occurred when the development of a free market economy had not advanced to the level the Palestinian economy had reached in 1935. The rebellions were ten years apart. But, more importantly, Palestinian economic development was intensified by the influx of Jewish capital creating more landless peasants. In Syria, peasants faced impoverishment but did not experience landlessness to the extent the Palestinian fellah did.

In Syria, peasants rose in rebellion to protect what little they possessed. In Palestine, the rebels were the urban fringe-dwellers, landless because of Jewish land purchases, heavy debts, and the intense commercialization of agriculture. The Syrian rebellion originated in the fringe rural Druze community and spread to areas where peasants still attempted to meek out an existence. Al-Qassam's rebellion was rural but in the sense that it originated in the Haifa shantytown, the fringe between urban and rural existence. From this fringe, the rebellion spread to the countryside. French economic policies threatened the livelihood of the Syrian peasant while Jewish settlement and enterprise took away the livelihood of the fellahin.

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The urban notables who adopted nationalism in response to the changing social and political structure of the Mandate and a free market economy did so, to a great degree, to maintain their traditional political position. The degree to which they failed is indicated by the fact that they had little or no control over the national revolt when it did break out. Al-Shahbandar was only able to contribute to the course of the Syrian rebellion through Sultan al-Atrash. The Mufti reestablished his influence by adopting the radical militancy of al-Qassam. In both cases, the rebellions went along with little or no control by the urban nationalists despite being transformed into national rebellions by Sultan al-Atrash's support of al-Shahbandar and al-Qassam's martyrdom forcing the nationalist politicians to adopt a more militant course.

In the end, both Sultan al-Atrash and al-Qassam and their respective rebellions were complex affairs. This study has emphasized the ideological continuity and political connections to show how the rebellions were nationalist in character. Both rebel leaders were not simply nationalist agitators. They both possessed traditional qualities of leadership in their own right. Both killed in the name of Allah and the nationalist cause. Sultan al-Atrash could very well have been an ambitious power seeker; most nationalist leaders would probably not be effective if they were selfless. Al-Qassam was a puritanical preacher but he also worked in the YIMMA preaching tenets of Palestinian nationalism alongside the tenets of salafiyyah Islam. One-dimensional portraits of them will not do them justice. Both possessed complex motivations; both Sultan al-Atrash and al-Qassam represented a transition between the traditional world of communal and religious loyalties to the modern world of national
loyalties. This transition has not been completed. Syria is still beset by separatist communal tendencies and Palestinian nationalism, like Jewish nationalism before 1917, has no promise of a state.
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