
Al-Nakba and Its Many Meanings in 1948

THE NAKBA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ARAB ELITE

In *Ma'na al-Nakba* (The Meaning of the Catastrophe), written and published in late summer of 1948, Constantine Zurayk defines the conceptual parameters of the Palestinian tragedy.¹ This book, modest in size, is not a comprehensive study of the Arab defeat and its long-term significance, but rather a report on the event itself whose full details and scope were unknown at the time. Nevertheless, Zurayk draws a clear and bold picture of the event's meanings. He introduces the term "al-Nakba" to describe the defeat, and explains the broad lines of its meanings. In successfully reading the reality of the Arab situation at the time, he warns that al-Nakba could turn into a greater disaster if its causes were not addressed quickly.² The book contains many important observations about the meaning of al-Nakba and its causes which required courage to point out in those difficult days. Fortunately, the American University of Beirut allowed intellectual freedom of expression, and the Lebanese capital was a safe place to publish critical and penetrating works without fear or trepidation.

Zurayk mentions five other terms in the beginning of his book to describe what had befallen Palestine before selecting "al-Nakba" for the title.³ It became in time the dominant definition for the Arab defeat in Palestine in 1948—leading to the tragedy of Palestine contributing a new concept to the international discourse on Palestinian struggle and destiny. In the decades that followed the terms "fedayeen," "intifada," *al-naksa* (setback), and others were added to the international language, enriching it with new concepts connected to the continuation of the Nakba and attempts by Palestinians to regain their "lost paradise." Before expanding on the meaning of al-Nakba, however, we would do well to get acquainted with the author.

Constantine Zurayk (1909–2000) is considered one of the most prominent Arab thinkers of the twentieth century. He was a professor of history at the American University of Beirut from the early 1930s, and became one of the most influential and appreciated lecturers by the students, many of whom were Palestinian. He became vice-president of the university in the 1940s.⁴ Zurayk's personal background helps explain his decision to take upon himself the role of a critical thinker who went beyond simply casting blame on others and labeling them as traitors; he was committed to keeping hope alive in the hearts of youth and students, while also diagnosing the factors of internal weakness. And so we find him, despite the cruelty of events and time, trying to chart a path out of the ruins to build a better future.

Under the title “The Oppressiveness of al-Nakba” on the book's first page, Zurayk writes the following: “Seven states take on the task of invalidating the partition and suppressing Zionism, and lo and behold, they emerge from the battle having lost a considerable portion of the land of Palestine.” The historian adds: “History has no record of a more just and righteous cause: a country is usurped from its inhabitants to be turned into a homeland for small groups of human beings who descend upon it from the four corners of the earth and establish a state there in defiance of its people and the millions of their brethren in the neighboring countries.” He then completes the picture with numbers: “Four hundred thousand or more Arabs are expelled from their homes, they are stripped of their property and possessions, and they wander listlessly in what remains of Palestine and other Arab countries.”⁵

After Zurayk draws the broad outline of the meaning of the Nakba and its consequences, he moves on to a discussion of the causes of the defeat and the way out of the calamity. He points to the responsibility of Arabs, first of all, and their ill-preparedness for the battle of destiny, their disunity, and their underestimation of the strength of the enemy who was well prepared for the war. Consequently, he points to the need to accept responsibility for the defeat and learn from the mistakes made, and warns against doing nothing other than passing the blame to others. The Arabs should not be satisfied with cursing the Jews, he argues, and disparaging “the British, the Americans, the Russians, and the Security Council . . . and everyone who stands against us in this struggle.”⁶

The August 1948 first print run of *Ma'na al-Nakba* sold out quickly and the book was reprinted again in October. At the time, the second cease-fire was in effect, but Zurayk did not update his book or add anything to the first edition. Although fighting did not resume in the summer months, circumstances in the Arab world went from bad to worse. Instead of closing ranks, disunity increased and the contending Arab parties heaped accusations on one another, particularly between some Arab regimes and the Palestinian leadership under Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husayni.⁷ The military defeat which followed on the heels of the political catastrophe after the partition resolution caused the conflicting interests of some

Arab parties to become prominent so that differences prevailed both inside and outside the Arab League.⁸

Following Zurayk, George Hanna (1893–1969) published a book on the Palestinian tragedy in November 1948.⁹ Hanna, a graduate of the American University of Beirut, was a socialist and became the head of the Soviet-Lebanese Friendship Society. In 1947 he visited Moscow and then wrote the book *I Have Returned from Moscow*. Hanna's political affiliation was with the Soviet side, as was his perspective on international politics, which gives his book special importance in understanding and analyzing the causes and roots of the Nakba.¹⁰

Hanna goes beyond blaming the enemies of the Palestinians—the Americans, British, and Russians¹¹—for their calamity, and stresses that none bears the real responsibility. He argues that the foremost and genuine responsibility lies with the defeated Arabs who were then searching for excuses for their failure by blaming others, instead of facing up to their responsibility and making the necessary reforms in order to transcend the catastrophe. But he not only blames Arab regimes and leaders, he also blames the people, writing: “We are attracted to the banalities of civilization, but not to the substance. . . . We lack a collective spirit. . . . We have no sense of responsibility, because we are the enemies of duty. . . . ”¹² He therefore does not expect an exit from the calamity or salvation from the crisis without social and political reforms, and the crystallization of an awareness of the importance of those reforms. In this context, he does not ignore the issue of the status of Arab women as evidence of the ignorance and underdevelopment prevalent in society that are hindrances to development and reform.¹³

It should be emphasized that George Hanna mentions the Russians alongside the British and the Americans as external factors in the Palestinian Nakba. He points to this role briefly, then expands on it: “And Russia, the third major power, is also responsible. Despite its hostility to Anglo-American policy, and its constant quarrel with it, Russia endorsed partition, and the establishment of a Zionist state next to the Arab state, in the hope that one of them would allow it a foothold into the Middle East.”¹⁴ These statements in November 1948 have very important historical significance. This straight thinking on the part of this socialist doctor was unique, because he does not couch his statements in justifications such as concern for peace, or choosing “the lesser of two evils,” or assertions of that sort which the communists adopted later. Instead, he said frankly that the imperialistic interests of Russia were the main factor in its positions and policies which contributed to the Palestinian Nakba.

The third author who analyzed the factors responsible for the Nakba in order to extract lessons from it was Musa al-‘Alami (1897–1984). Like his predecessors, al-‘Alami chose Beirut as the venue for publishing his book, released under the title *Ibirat Filastin* (The Lesson of Palestine) after the 1948 war had ended.¹⁵ Consequently, he could expand on its results and its several stages up to the cease-fire and the signing of the armistice agreements between Israel and the neighboring

Arab countries. Al-'Alami shares the opinions of his predecessors in his analysis of the factors responsible for the Nakba; however, this attorney, who knew the British well and spent most of his life in Jerusalem close to the British mandatory government, points to the fact that the primary responsibility for the Palestinian Nakba belonged to Britain.¹⁶ At the same time, he did not neglect the role of the Americans and the Russians in issuing the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine and in the Palestinian tragedy in 1948.¹⁷

Al-'Alami divides the war into two stages. The first began from the announcement of the partition plan until the declaration of the establishment of the state of Israel in mid-May, a period of about six months when the principal burden of the war fell on the Palestinians who tried to defend their country and homeland. The second stage was from mid-May 1948 until early the following year, when the responsibility for fighting Israel was transferred to the Arab states and their armies. Those states were defeated, and one armistice agreement after the other was signed with Israel. This division of the Palestine war, which al-'Alami first sketched, became prevalent and was accepted by observers, then by the historians who chronicled the Nakba and the war of 1948.¹⁸

Many books and studies on the Palestinian Nakba were published in the 1950s, and there is no need to mention them all. The common denominator of most is that they were written by members of the Arab political and cultural elite and published in Beirut. Muhammad Nimir al-Hawwari's book is an exception to this rule in that it was published in Nazareth after his return there.¹⁹ Al-Hawwari was born in 1908 and became a prominent lawyer and a leader of the Palestinian national movement up to 1948. He joined the ranks of the opposition to the mufti and founded the al-Najada (Helpers) movement in Jaffa, leading it until he left the movement during the early events of the war. He eventually returned to Nazareth with Israel's consent after living in exile for almost two years, during which time he represented the cause of the refugees at the Lausanne Conference in 1949. Given this background, it is possible to understand the stinging criticism he directs at the Palestinian leadership, from the mufti to the communists, who saw him as a political opponent following his return. In later chapters we shall review the political role that al-Hawwari tried to play.

Al-Hawwari's book is an elegant indictment of the mufti, the Arab countries, and their leaders in general. The author rains accusations and insults on the Jaysh al-Inqadh (Arab Rescue Army, also called the Arab Salvation Army) under the leadership of Fawzi al-Qawuqji.²⁰ After reviewing the events of the war, the book concludes by saying that the Palestinian people, particularly the refugees among them, paid a dear price in the Nakba. He poses the controversial question: why did the refugees leave their homes and their country? In his answer he mentions ten reasons at least, and directs his arrows at several Arab parties. However, the fact that he blames Arabs does not make him neglect Israel's role entirely; he mentions, for example, that following the first cease-fire, the Israeli army carried out killings, plundered property, and attacked the residents of villages and cities in

many parts of the country, such as Lydda, Ramla, Bisan, Majdal, al-Tira, Ijzim, 'Ayn Ghazal, Lubya, Saffuriyya, and al-Mujaydil.²¹

We conclude this brief review of the literature on the Nakba published directly after the calamity by mentioning one of the most important detailed works on the subject, *Al-Nakba: Nakbat Bayt al-Maqdis wal-firdaws al-masqud 1947–49* (The Disaster: The Disaster of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise).²² Jerusalemitic 'Arif al-'Arif published many works on Jerusalem, the Bedouins in southern Palestine, and other topics prior to the Nakba. During the Mandate, he was among the prominent Palestinian leaders known for nationalist activities.²³ His six-volume work expresses the Palestinian point of view on their calamity shortly after it occurred. Since the author depended heavily on his diaries, he chose to present events chronologically, beginning with the partition decision of November 1947.

There are several common denominators among the early publications on the Nakba. Despite some differences in reading and analysis, the authors agree on Britain's principal role in the Nakba of Palestine, and that other states, such as the United States and the Soviet Union, contributed to the Palestinian calamity. They also agree that there was an imbalance of forces favoring the Jewish side compared to the weakness and disparity of the motives among the Arabs. In the rest of this chapter we shall present a new reading of the point of view of the Palestinians who remained in their country and were not expelled in 1948. This brief review does not constitute an alternative to the ample literature on the history of the cause, but simply provides the groundwork for analyzing and understanding the opinions of those who remained.

THE BEGINNING OF THE NAKBA

Palestinians saw in British policy, exemplified in the Balfour Declaration, support for the beginning of a Zionist colonial aggression. The British promise to the leaders of the Zionist movement that "His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people . . ." was a strong blow to the national rights of the Palestinian majority. Issuing such a pledge while disregarding the right of the Arabs in Palestine to self-determination, and making this the basis of British mandatory policy, laid the cornerstone for the Nakba. The Palestinians—overwhelmed by the ramifications of the geopolitical changes affecting the Arab region at the beginning of the Mandate—had not yet crystallized an organized national movement. This left them unable to thwart that policy, endorsed later by the League of Nations,²⁴ which enabled Jewish settlers to establish the institutions of their future state while preventing Palestinians from undertaking their own state-building process.

The history of the Palestinian cause during the British Mandate does not need to be reviewed here, except to point out the second event along the road to the Palestinian calamity, the years of revolution, 1936–39.²⁵ In addition to the disastrous

results of that revolt for Palestinian society and its economy, we must highlight the partition proposal of 1937, which was the first proposal for a part of Palestine to be sliced off to create a Zionist state. The worst aspect of that proposal was that the rest of Palestine would be placed under Jordanian Hashemite rule rather than become an independent Palestinian state. The disdain for Palestinian demands, as seen in proposing Prince Abdullah as the ruler of that area, was a harbinger of plans by Britain and other colonialist powers. Consequently, the revolt was renewed after the Peel Commission partition proposal, causing Britain to retreat partially, and issue the MacDonald White Paper of May 1939. In the end, the lessons of the results of the 1936 revolt were not adequately absorbed by the Palestinian leadership.²⁶

The Palestinians and their leaders had an absolute conviction about the righteousness of their cause, as they were the indigenous population of the country and the absolute majority of its population up to 1947. However, the discourse concerning justice and rights blinded them to seeing international and Arab political interests. The results of World War II and the onset of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union altered the contours of the international scene. The defeat of the Arabs in the corridors of the United Nations, which took it upon itself to determine the future of Palestine following the end of the British Mandate, had already begun and the 1947 partition plan was worse than its predecessor of a decade earlier.²⁷ When that resolution won a two-thirds majority in the United Nations General Assembly, the calamity that was to befall the Palestinians had already begun. General Assembly Resolution 181 of 29 November 1947 constituted a decisive defeat of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination on the entirety of its national soil. It was expected that the Palestinians would not accept this unjust resolution, which gave 54 percent of their homeland to the Jews and gave them, who constituted two-thirds of the population, only 45 percent.²⁸

Political defeat after the issuance of the UN partition resolution did not alter the convictions of Arab and Palestinian leaders, who continued to make threats. This position failed to lead to a close examination of the consequences of the rejection of the UN resolution or to present an alternative that was acceptable to the world community of states. Some Palestinian leaders became active in Arab capitals mobilizing support for the Palestinian cause. The Jewish side, on the other hand, understood all too well the meaning of the resolution, which gave it a green light to establish a state in Palestine at the end of 1947 with the support of the Western and socialist camps. Britain began to prepare for its withdrawal from Palestine at the end of 1947 and to guarantee its interests in the region through its relations with Jordan and its king. With that, the drums of war began to beat while the Palestinians lacked a united leadership or the preparedness for the decisive war.

The Arab advantage over the Jews in Palestine was purely demographic. The Jewish community in Palestine (Yishuv) had superiority over the Palestinians in

all fields that decide the outcome of any struggle, including the military battle. However, the Palestinian leadership, which was aware of the unfavorable balance of power, could not accept the unjust partition resolution. Being content to say "no" without presenting acceptable alternatives put it in the position of the aggressor, and the Jewish side appeared to be the victim who was threatened with annihilation at the hands of neighboring Arab states. Despite their resounding utterances, these states were not prepared for a military battle in Palestine, nor were they united in their opinions as to what needed to be done. The Palestinians found themselves being propelled into battle without preparation and with neither a unified command nor sufficient awareness of what was happening in the corridors of the Arab League.

The Jewish side and its leaders were well aware of the fact that the Palestinians were not prepared for war. In a meeting between Ben-Gurion and experts on Arab affairs, Eliyahu Sasson estimated that the mufti had mobilized "between two and three hundred fighters, and this figure has doubled or tripled today."²⁹ There was a consensus among experts about Sasson's figures, and they confirmed the unpreparedness of the Palestinians for war, and that they faced an arms shortage. The Jewish side was also aware of internal Palestinian differences between the mufti and his rivals. The gathering estimated that, in addition to King Abdullah, it was possible to benefit from the rivals of the mufti in Nablus and Jenin and other places to weaken Palestinian ranks. It is glaringly obvious from Sasson's remarks that the Jewish side had connections with some leaders of Jaffa as well, and by way of example he mentioned Nimr al-Hawwari, the leader of al-Najjada, who kept the town quiet until he was obliged to leave in December 1947, adding that "disturbances started" after the latter's departure.³⁰

The Palestinian leadership directed the decisive war for the future of Palestine from outside the country, despite the criticism that this decision elicited,³¹ which fell on deaf ears. The events of that decisive war rolled on without a united leadership or a clear plan. Dr. Husayn al-Khalidi and Ahmad Hilmi 'Abd al-Baqi, who were in Jerusalem, tried to convince the rest of the Higher Arab Committee members to return to the country, but to no avail. The Palestinian leadership declared a general strike for three days (2–4 December 1947) in protest against the partition plan, which was unjust to the indigenous population of the country. This strike and the skirmishes that accompanied it reminded people of the events of the 1936 revolt.³²

The categorization of the early skirmishes between Arabs and Jews as a revolt rather than a war had disastrous consequences for the Palestinians. This image was shared by leading social cadres who understood the bloody events as another link in the chain of previous revolts. Al-Sakakini himself, who saw with his own eyes the events in al-Qatamun and neighboring quarters in western Jerusalem, was pessimistic, and even despaired of Palestinian military capabilities compared to the Jewish side. He writes: "By God, I do not know if we can endure in the face

of the aggression of the Jews, considering that they are trained and organized and united and equipped with the most modern arms, while we are none of those things. It is high time that we learned that unity wins over division, that organization overcomes chaos. . . .”³³ These words, penned by al-Sakakini in the early days of 1948, were a truthful expression of the large disparity in the capabilities of the two sides to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.³⁴

The eventful year of 1948 is one of the most frequent topics studied on both sides of the Palestinian-Israeli divide. This book is not attempting to rewrite the history of the 1948 war in Palestine, but to draw the broad outlines of the events in the north of the country. These events may be divided into three stages, which differ according to the policies pursued towards the Palestinians and their conduct in the months of war and afterwards. This chapter and the next will tell the story of those who managed to stay in the Galilee. The Zionist leadership had been planning to expel the Arabs of Palestine from the land of the Jewish state since the late 1930s at least. What then is the explanation for why a relatively large number of Palestinians remained in the Galilee compared to the center and the south of the country? To answer this question in depth, we shall closely examine the differences in geography, the periods of occupation, and Israeli policies, as well as the reactions of the Arab population and their conduct during the various stages of the war.

The three active stages of the war in Palestine, and the Galilee in particular, were:

- from early December 1947 to late March 1948
- from early April to late July 1948
- the completion of the occupation of the Galilee (Operation Hiram) from late October to December 1948

In the first stage of the war the gap in preparedness between Palestinians and Jews was not apparent due to the defensive policy adopted by the Haganah. The presence of British forces in parts of the country during that period played a role in the adoption of that tactic, as did the desire not to provoke a comprehensive reaction on the part of the Arabs. Despite that, when the Haganah chose to mount military operations, it became apparent that the Palestinian citizens were exposed and had no effective protection. One of the first operations was directed at the village of Khisas, north of Hula Lake, and was conducted by the Palmach on 18 December 1947. A dozen residents of the village were killed, including some children. The blowing up of houses and the killings caused panic to spread among the villagers and the inhabitants of neighboring villages as well, so that hundreds took flight and went about searching for a refuge for their families in Syria. This operation provoked some protests and even criticism among Jewish security institutions, but the clear effect of the operation on the panic-stricken Arab residents of the Hula region was considered to be an important achievement.³⁵

The Khisas village operation was neither alone nor unique among Haganah and Palmach operations against peaceful Arab residents in their homes, but it continued to concern Israeli public opinion for several years because of the friendly relations between some villagers and neighboring Jewish settlements.³⁶ Dozens of residents of the village, under the leadership of Shaykh 'Atiyeh Juwayyid and his sons, did not leave their village in the hope that the Jews would not forget the services they had rendered to Jewish settlers in the region. Some members of 'Atiyeh Juwayyid's family along with their neighbors, the Arab al-Hayb, had in early 1948 fought on the side of the Jews against their Arab brethren. But even that did not spare them from expulsion at the end of that same year. Contrary to what happened to the majority of residents on the Lebanese border strip, members of that family were moved to the interior of Israel, and all political and legal attempts to permit their return to their homes and their lands failed, as we shall see below.³⁷

To spur Palestinians to leave their cities and villages was an objective that the Jewish side implemented as part of the Zionist operation to uproot and occupy. The Zionists had two cherished objectives: fewer Arabs in the country and more land in the hands of the settlers. The argument between so-called extremists and moderates was not about fundamental differences, but rather a question of the timing and evaluation of the negative consequences of some terrorist activities carried out by Jewish organizations. Indeed, at the end of December 1947 there were several attacks on Arab villages in the middle of the country, particularly in the vicinity of major cities where there were concentrations of Jews. This happened in the Haifa district in the zone allocated to the Jewish state according to the partition plan, and the Arab residents of the city and neighboring villages suffered from the terror of those attacks.

In Haifa and its vicinity Arabs and Jews lived in relative peace and worked together in factories and government institutions. The city was also known for the rise of labor organizations which engaged in common class struggles. However, these good relations between the two sides were gradually undermined after the issuance of the partition plan and the start of skirmishes and acts of violence. Indeed, good neighborly relations and peaceful coexistence turned into bloody clashes at the end of 1947, most significantly in the events at the oil refinery, then the attack by the Palmach on the village of Balad al-Shaykh and the Hawwasa quarter in the first week of 1948. Palmach operations in these two areas once again demonstrated the superiority of the organized Jewish forces to the Palestinian side, by mobilizing their organized forces, taking the initiative and catching the Arabs by surprise, attacking Arab villages and quarters, and then withdrawing without suffering major casualties.

On 30 December 1947, the oil refinery in Haifa was the scene of bloody clashes with dozens of dead and injured workers. The events began with the Irgun organization (Irgun Zva'I Leumi [IZL or Etzel]) throwing one or more bombs at Arab

workers who were gathering at the gate of the refinery before work, and rumors spread quickly that there were dozens of dead and wounded.³⁸ Arab workers inside the refinery retaliated with a fierce and bloody attack on Jewish workers, using their tools and iron bars and whatever else was at hand, killing a large number of Jewish workers, greater than the number of Arabs who had been killed that morning. A number of Arab employees at the refinery lived in the village of Balad al-Shaykh and a shanty town called Hawwasa to the northeast of the city of Haifa. The Haganah quickly decided to mount a revenge operation, and a Palmach (strike force) unit was chosen to carry it out in the village of Balad al-Shaykh.

After midnight of the new year, the Palmach unit carried out an attack on the village from the east, using firearms and grenades, which resulted in dozens of dead and wounded among the residents who were asleep in their homes. This attack and others on Hawwasa and neighboring Arab quarters caused a wave of panic and confusion among the Arab residents of Haifa, some of whom were laborers who had come from villages in the Galilee to work in the city and had taken up residence in those quarters. In the wake of these bloody attacks in the first week of 1948, many workers decided to return to their homes and villages in the Galilee.³⁹ Some well-to-do families moved to Nazareth and Shafa 'Amr, and even to Beirut and other Arab cities outside Palestine.

These bloody attacks on unarmed Arab citizens completely contradict the image which Israel succeeded in marketing at the beginning of the war. The two operations in the village of Khisas in eastern Galilee and in the village of Balad al-Shaykh near Haifa were part of a blueprint to terrorize Palestinians in the areas allocated to the Jewish state in order to drive them to leave.⁴⁰ In fact, Palestinian migration from the areas in which those acts took place increased rapidly. It later became apparent by the end of the 1948 war that the vast majority of Palestinians living in the areas allocated for the Jewish state, according to the partition resolution, had become refugees, and only a small percentage remained.⁴¹ That was the situation in eastern Galilee and along the coast from Haifa in the north to Tel Aviv in the south, and in the Marj ibn 'Amir area and other places. This topic relating to the geography of who became refugees and who remained in 1948 is very important, and one to which we shall return later.

The National Committee for the Arab residents of Haifa, under the leadership of Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, attempted to stem the departure of Palestinian residents from their quarters, and to bolster their ability to defend themselves, to no avail. This committee went so far at times as to opt for the departure of women and children from the city, moving them to safe areas in the country or even outside, particularly in Lebanon. In this stage of the war (the first quarter of 1948), the Arab population of large mixed cities paid an exorbitant price, with hundreds killed and thousands wounded. Despite the fact that the Jewish side lost similar numbers of dead and wounded, the morale among Palestinians was worse due to the weak organization and the absence of effective leadership on their side. It was

therefore natural that the families of some of the elite and members of the upper middle class, who had the means and financial resources, should distance themselves from the areas of combat and leave the country. Since their understanding of war at the time was in terms of rebellions and revolutions, the idea of distancing oneself from dangerous areas and then returning sometime later was usual and acceptable to most people.

Zionist leaders used various ways to encourage Palestinians to migrate, by propagating rumors on the one hand and by passing on “advice” to mayors, mukhtars, and local leaders to leave the country temporarily, on the other. When Palestinian migrants began to realize what was happening, Israeli state institutions prevented the return of those people to their homes and lands using various ways and means. The Zionist forces and, after 15 May, the leaders of the Jewish state, did not make much distinction between residents of villages and cities, nor between areas allocated to the Jewish state and those outside the limits of that state that fell under their occupation. In this way entire Arab quarters in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Jaffa were emptied, as were many neighboring villages in the first quarter of 1948. Migration increased in the spring when the superiority of Jewish forces became glaringly obvious as well as their success in severing transportation links between Arab Haifa and the cities and villages of the Galilee. Tens of thousands of the residents of Haifa migrated before the fall of the city and its occupation on 22 April 1948.

Among those who migrated from Haifa before it fell: the brothers Nadim and Jamal Musa, who reached 'Akka by sea and went on from there to the village of al-Bi'na in mid-Galilee;⁴² the brothers Kamal and Jamil Ghattas, who went to the village of al-Rama; and the brothers Anton and Jibra'il Bishara, who returned to their village of Tarshiha in upper Galilee.⁴³ The stories of these and other members of the National Liberation League, and details of what happened to their villages, will be told in the next chapter. Importantly, the events and fate of Haifa had a strong impact on the residents of the Galilee, particularly those who worked and lived there, even if not for very long. The events of the village of Balad al-Shaykh and the Hawwasa quarter as well as other Arab quarters, which were subjected to repeated bombardment and attacks, caused thousands of families to lose the sources of their livelihood in that city.

As of January 1948, groups of Arab volunteers were organized in what became known as the Arab Rescue Army (ARA), and served as an addition to the Palestinian fighting force.⁴⁴ The entry of hundreds of fighters into Palestine was a morale booster for the Palestinians in the areas where clashes took place. The Arab side was successful in paralyzing traffic in the streets, and took a heavy toll on Jewish caravans in the Galilee and the Jerusalem districts. The Palestinians were able to cut transportation lines between Jerusalem and the coastal plain; Haganah forces tried to reopen them but several initial attacks mounted on Bab al-Wad failed. For a brief period, it looked like the Palestinians had achieved some success and had undermined Jewish confidence in their military superiority. This military

situation in the field caused the U.S. State Department to rethink the capability of the Yishuv to establish a state and defend it. Consequently, some states considered the possibility of ignoring the partition resolution and establishing a UN trusteeship in February 1948. This proposal was a political blow to the Jewish side, and an achievement for Palestinians who wanted the world to reverse the resolution to divide their homeland.⁴⁵

At this critical juncture, the Soviet Union chose to declare its firm position in favor of the partition resolution and the immediate establishment of a Jewish state. It did not just provide political support for the Zionist side, but made sure that Czechoslovakia would conclude and expedite an arms deal. Ben-Gurion, who quickly grasped the consequences of backtracking on partition, decided to change the rules of combat in the field before the United Nations could agree to a trusteeship regime. He called an emergency meeting of military commanders and ordered that Operation Nachshon be launched in the mountains of Jerusalem. That same evening, 31 March 1948, a Czech plane landed in Bayt Daras airport containing the first batch of arms: machine guns, rifles, and ammunition.⁴⁶ These modern arms reinforced the capabilities of the attacking Jewish forces. What had appeared as a weakness in the capabilities of the Haganah relative to the Palestinians was a miscalculation based on the tactics of defense employed by the Jewish leadership. When it became apparent that delaying the assault would be very costly, orders were issued for the implementation of Plan Dalet and for the offensive to begin.

PLAN DALET AND THE ONSET OF THE ARAB DEFEAT IN APRIL 1948

For some historians Plan Dalet was clear proof of an Israeli policy to occupy the country and expel the population, that is, ethnic cleansing.⁴⁷ This study, which revolves around the Palestinians remaining in Israel after the war, will not contest the meaning of that plan and its significance for the policy of ethnic cleansing. The action of killing Palestinians in their homes by the dozen and spreading terror to push them to emigrate from the country began at the end of 1947, while the policy of expulsion itself continued even after hostilities ceased in early 1949. There is a consensus among virtually all researchers that the Zionist community was trying to bring about a Jewish majority in the state as a top priority. The war which began as local skirmishes in late 1947 provided an opportunity to expel the population of the Palestinian areas who had no military protection against Jewish attacks; this led to Palestinian migration beginning several months before Plan Dalet had crystallized in March 1948.

The implementation of the plan in the field, begun in early April, represented a new phase in the Palestine war with disastrous consequences for the occupation of Arab cities and villages, such as Tiberias and Haifa and their vicinities. Up until early April the number of those killed on each side was less than one

thousand, and a few thousand wounded; it had been akin to a civil war with limited damages and destruction until Plan Dalet was implemented. The occupation of Tiberias and the expulsion of its entire population in mid-April, followed by the fall of Haifa and the forcing of tens of thousands of panicked Palestinians to flee the city was a major shock and brought a dawning awareness of the defeat. The uprooting of the Arab residents of Haifa (and Tiberias before that) in full view of the British was an important juncture in the war in northern Palestine. In the following pages we shall review some details of these important events and their consequences for the Palestinians in Haifa and the Galilee.

Not far from the events in Tiberias, a famous battle took place between the two parties to the conflict in the villages of Husha and al-Kasayir southwest of the town of Shafa 'Amr, in which dozens of fighters from both sides were killed. But the more significant result of this battle was the decision of the Arab battalion, which was made up of Druze fighters under the leadership of Shakib Wahhab, to stop fighting the Jews and withdraw from the battlefield in agreement with the Zionist side; this constituted an important juncture in the events of the war in the Galilee. The Jerusalemitic historian 'Arif al-'Arif makes a distinction in his history between Arab and Druze fighters,⁴⁸ which clearly reflects the tense relations between the Druze minority and the other sects in Palestinian society. Al-'Arif set aside several pages of his book *The Catastrophe of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise 1947–49* for a discussion of this significant battle. We shall return later to this topic and to the decision by Shakib Wahhab and the rest of the Druze elders to withdraw from the battles against the Jews.⁴⁹

From the beginning of the implementation of Plan Dalet, the superiority of Jewish military forces over the Palestinian fighters was crystal clear. Offensive military operations began in the mountains around Jerusalem. Two events that occurred within a short time had a huge impact on the Palestinians, and revealed the weakness of their organization: the first was the martyrdom of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni in al-Qastal on 8 April 1948.⁵⁰ The killing of this prominent commander at that stage of the war exposed the weakness of the military political leadership and how little organization there was, as well as the scarcity of arms in the hands of the Palestinians. The occupation of al-Qastal also crowned the operation to open the road to Bab al-Wad (Operation Nachshon) and the breaking of the siege on Jewish quarters in west Jerusalem.

Before the Arabs could recover from the killing of al-Husayni, the second painful blow came the next day. Not far from al-Qastal, the Irgun (Etzel) and terrorist Lohame Herut Yisrael (LHI/Lehi or Stern) gangs carried out a treacherous attack on the peaceful village of Dayr Yasin, killing and wounding hundreds of men, women, and children.⁵¹ When news carried the details of the massacre, including the mutilation and burning of corpses and the humiliation and torture of hundreds of prisoners, panic and a sense of insecurity spread through Palestinian ranks. These two events in the region of Jerusalem represented the beginning of

the Palestinian defeat, which ended with the destruction of the country and the dislocation of its population. They acquired symbolic significance in the history of Palestine: the first referring to sacrifice and martyrdom, and the second referring to the barbarism of the Zionist side and the victimization of the Palestinians. These events in the mountains of Jerusalem had a huge impact on Palestinian morale throughout the entire country; the martyrdom of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, a relative of the mufti and his nominee for the leadership of the war effort, had a very deep impact, as did the exaggeration of the news of the massacre in Dayr Yasin and its wide circulation.

Less than one week after these painful events in the Jerusalem mountains, the Jewish assault moved to the north of the country. In the same month, the Galilee witnessed military events which had a decisive impact on the course of the battles. The Arab Rescue Army's attempt to occupy kibbutz Mishmar Ha'emek failed and was followed by a counterattack by the Haganah which demonstrated the weakness of Arab fighting capabilities. In this attack several villages in Marj ibn 'Amir were occupied and their residents all expelled. At the same time, the Jewish side began operations in Tiberias to occupy the city and the villages in its district, having prior to that attacked the village of Nasir al-Din to the southwest (on the Nazareth-Tiberias road) and killed dozens of its defenders and civilians. The news of that massacre, carried by the survivors who reached Tiberias, had a heavy effect on the morale of the Arab residents of the city.

Most of the six thousand Palestinians from Tiberias reached Syria and Lebanon; only a few hundred residents were allowed to head west and seek refuge in Nazareth. One week after the fall of Tiberias, it was Haifa's turn. This blow was worse than the one before, because most of the seventy thousand residents of the city, along with the residents of nearby villages, were forced to leave. The fact that this occurred under the eyes of the British forces played an important role in the uprooting of the population of one of the most important Palestinian cities. By the end of April, Palestinian determination and morale had crumbled, and they were waiting impatiently for the armies of Arab states to arrive by mid-May to save them from their mounting tragedy. But Jaffa fell before the Arab armies arrived and most of its population was uprooted, as happened in Haifa. These events in important Palestinian cities and their environs demonstrated to all parties concerned the power superiority of the Jewish side, and the ease with which Arab cities and municipalities could be occupied and their residents expelled in the absence of a deterrent.

The fall of Haifa made Palestinians in the Galilee profoundly aware. The occupation of a city of that size and the expulsion of its population in one week within sight of the British troops stationed there made the residents aware of the enormity of the disaster which was befalling the Palestinian people. Ben-Gurion received a report of what was happening in Haifa after its occupation and recorded some of it

in his diary,⁵² which reflected the Zionist narrative of events. Historical research in recent decades has brought to light new facts which show the complex and diverse aspects of the events in Haifa. Nevertheless, we shall make use of what is recorded in Ben-Gurion's diary on 1 May: "There are now less than ten thousand [Palestinians] in Haifa, perhaps six thousand."⁵³ He added: "There is an Arab committee in the city: Farid al-Sa'd [manager of the Arab Bank]; George Tawil, a municipal officer; George Mu'ammar; Jiryis Khoury (municipal employee); the lawyer Kusa (who is a deputy public prosecutor); Farid Nasr (a Christian); and Victor Khayat—a very rich man."⁵⁴

Elias Kusa was a member of the Arab delegation that went to see British General Hugh Stockwell on 22 April 1948 to try to secure a cease-fire and save the Arab residents of Haifa. He himself saw the departure of tens of thousands of panic-stricken Palestinians from the city. He recorded in a letter that the mayor of Haifa had distributed a circular to the population calling on them not to leave the city, but he stressed that this circular had no effect because Haganah fighters were at that time raining bullets and grenades on the Arab quarters and using force to push families to the port where ships were waiting to take them away. In the case of Haifa, as in other cases in 1948, the great gap between the statements and the actions of the Zionist leadership were blatant, even as those leaders succeeded in marketing their telling of events. What happened in Haifa under the command of Abba Hushi and other leaders of Zionist parties and labor organizations is an example of cunning and conspiracy with Britain to expel the Palestinians from their country.

In Tiberias and Haifa districts, and later in Jaffa and elsewhere, Plan Dalet was operationalized to break the back of Palestinian society, to render it incapable of resisting the occupation, and to expel the population. The operation to kick out tens of thousands and later hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes was an important strategic objective of the Zionist movement, leading to establishing its state on the ruins of Palestine. The seemingly uncertain defensive policy in the first quarter of 1948 was only a preparation while waiting for the suitable time to unleash the offensive plan. In Tiberias and its villages, for example, they lost no time tearing down Palestinian houses so that the Arabs would have nothing to go back to. When some did try to return, they were forcibly prevented from doing so. This policy was applied weeks prior to the entry of armies from the Arab states, and became the official government policy after the establishment of the state of Israel in mid-May; it was designed to prevent the return of the refugees and calculated to facilitate the expropriation of their lands and property. (The Hebrew press recently, on 26 May 2015, published news of the auction of a letter from Ben-Gurion to Abba Hushi in which he urged the latter to prevent the return of Arabs to Haifa.)

Palestinians migrated by land and by sea from Haifa to 'Akka and from there to Lebanon and Syria, but a few thousand came to Nazareth, Shafa 'Amr and other

villages in the Galilee. Bulus Farah, one of the most prominent leaders of the National Liberation League during the British Mandate, relates in his memoirs the difficult circumstances in Haifa after its fall, and how he left the city to go to Nazareth. During his stay in Nazareth, he heard from Tawfiq Tubi “that the Jews were forcing stores open and pillaging their contents . . . and that in two or three days they would come to my bookstore and empty it of its contents.”⁵⁵ Farah describes how he went back to Haifa to save his bookstore, and how he managed to reopen it with the help of some Jewish friends. However, he was not able to return to his home on al-Anbiya’ Street, recounting that the invaders who had taken it over chased him away with shouts and curses. Bulus Farah, then, became a member of the Palestinian minority which stayed in Haifa but were pushed into the Wadi al-Nisnas quarter which soon became known as the ghetto.⁵⁶

Days after the fall of Haifa and the migration of most of its Arab residents, the Jewish side began its assault on a second important coastal city, Jaffa. Unlike Haifa, the vast majority of the residents of Jaffa were Arabs. However, Tel Aviv, which was established nearby, had eclipsed the Arab city for some time. Despite the presence of Palestinian villages in its vicinity whose residents helped the people of Jaffa, the city and its villages became a pocket surrounded by Jewish settlements. The Jaffa district was allocated to the Palestinian state, according to the partition resolution. When the Irgun began to attack it, the British feared being accused once again of colluding with the Haganah to empty Arab cities of their residents. They intervened militarily in a conspicuous way to prevent its fall to the Jews a week after the fall of Haifa. On 28 April, British forces made a military parade of their intervention against the belligerent forces, and indeed the Irgun was forced out of al-Manshiyya quarter in the north of Jaffa. This intervention did not save the “Bride of the Sea”—Jaffa—from its fate, but it did allow the British to save face, until they withdrew from the district shortly thereafter.

The majority of Palestinians were convinced that their city would not endure for long in the face of encroaching Zionist forces, so they continued to migrate by land and sea to flee the killing and destruction. At the beginning the British did not try to stem the tide of migration or to calm the fright of innocent citizens;⁵⁷ all they wanted was not to be accused anew of collaborating with the Jewish side. The fact is that the small Irgun gang (and not the Haganah) was the group that had attacked Jaffa, which made it easy for the British to put on a military show. After relative calm returned to the city, the British encouraged the remaining Arab leadership in the city to sign a surrender agreement with the Haganah on 13 May. And so Jaffa fell, and the Jewish state was established on the evening of the following day in Tel Aviv in a section of Palestine that spilled over the borders of the state according to the partition resolution. In the middle of that month, Israel stood on two steady legs astride the developed coastal cities, with its back open to the sea and the West that supported it. As for Palestinian society, it had reached almost

total collapse and fragmentation, and was awaiting the entry of the regular armies of Arab states to protect what was left of Palestine.

When the establishment of Israel was declared on the evening of 15 May 1948 as a state for the Jews, only a small number of the Palestinians who had previously lived in the areas taken over by the Jews were left. From eastern Galilee to the Syrian-Lebanese border, passing through Tiberias and Bisan and Marj ibn 'Amir, then Haifa and the coastal area to Jaffa, only a small number of villages inhabited by a few thousand Palestinians were left, in addition to a similar number in Haifa and in Jaffa. Most of the four hundred thousand Palestinians who lived in those areas had become refugees before the intervention of the Arab armies began. The rest who remained in their homes and villages until the end of the war were the 'Arab al-Hayb in Tuba al-Zanghariyya in eastern Galilee, as well as the residents of the small al-Zu'biyya villages east of 'Afula due to the collaboration of their leader with the Haganah. In Jabal al-Karmil, there remained most of the residents of the Druze villages of 'Isfiya and Daliyyat al-Karmil. Thus, the vast majority of Palestinians were expelled, leaving a small number who had demonstrated their loyalty to the Jewish side during the war, or even before.

The Arab armies reached the battlefronts in the middle and the south of the country in May 1948, but not in the Galilee. The attempted attacks by the Syrian army in the early months of the war in Palestine were repulsed. The small Lebanese army did not try to cross the international border to participate in the war. The Arab Rescue Army, which had demonstrated its ineffectuality in April, became the butt of jokes by the population because of its unpreparedness and its showy maneuvers which could not withstand any attack by the Haganah. In other words, the Galilee's situation was different from the situation in the center and south of the country because of the absence of regular armies which could be relied on. The residents, then, had an important role to play in their districts in defending their cities alongside Arab volunteers. This special situation of the residents of the Galilee was well known to the inhabitants, and had a considerable influence on their conduct and performance in the second half of 1948.

Indeed, as of May, the concern of many residents of the Galilee was how to stay in their homes and on their land. The fall of Tiberias, Haifa, 'Akka, and many villages in their districts as well as the expulsion of the populations of those villages increased people's fear about their future and their trust in the abilities of the Arab Rescue Army declined.⁵⁸ Under these circumstances, when defenseless citizens found themselves facing an escalating tragedy, it became a question of practical survival for the residents of the Galilee, rather than a war to save Palestine and prevent the establishment of a Jewish state. This awareness of the dimension of the tragedy and the responsibility that had to be borne by defenseless citizens created a new orientation which amounted to the need to hold onto home and land far from the slogans of the national elite, who had not prepared their people for a war of destiny.

THE NAKBA AS SEEN AND EXPERIENCED
BY THE RESIDENTS OF THE GALILEE

At the beginning of the summer of 1948, the experience of the disaster differed from one district to the other. Not all Palestinians, particularly the refugees among them, whose number was estimated at the time at 400,000 or more, experienced events in the same way. The meaning of the Nakba for the urban elite in Haifa, Jaffa, and Jerusalem differed from the meaning for the *fellahin* whose lives were completely destroyed by the loss of their homes, lands, and means of living. Whereas the well-to-do classes from the cities had social and cultural ties with the residents of the cities where they migrated, *fellahin* were forced to live in tents and shanties. The loss of their homeland had a different dimension for them, economically and socially, than it did for the elite. They were transformed overnight from owners of homes and lands which supported them into refugees comparable to indigents, who lived on Arab and international charity.

In July, the differences between what residents of different areas of Palestine experienced became apparent. In the center and south of the country, Lydda and Ramla and villages in their district were occupied and emptied of all their inhabitants during the very hot days of the month of Ramadan. Israel did not spare a single village in occupying this area and expelled tens of thousands of the inhabitants. The picture was different in western Galilee, and even more so in lower Galilee; apart from the tens of thousands of Palestinians who were expelled from 'Akka and neighboring coastal villages, a few thousand managed to remain in place. But what is more important is the survival of dozens of villages to the east of 'Akka in western Galilee, as well as Nazareth and its environs. Who were those survivors, and how were they able to escape being uprooted after the occupation?

Some Israeli historians have used the fact that many Palestinians in the Galilee managed to remain to support their claim of there being no comprehensive Israeli plan of expulsion.⁵⁹ On the other side, those historians who affirmed that Plan Dalet was the basis for the comprehensive policy of ethnic cleansing did not try to explain why tens of thousands remained in northern Palestine. Researchers from both sides, as we said, focused on Israeli policy to explain the fate of the refugees. This study, however, chooses to stress the story of those who stayed behind and to focus on their conduct, and the crystallization of their awareness that they had to remain in their homes regardless of Israeli attempts to uproot them.⁶⁰ The story of endurance, particularly in Haifa and the Galilee, is complex and varied and one should not try to flatten it. All of the points of light and shadow need to be studied.

An examination of the literature on the Nakba and the 1948 Palestine war shows that most researchers assumed that the two sides to the conflict adhered to nationalist positions which guided their actions. Whereas this may be largely true in the case of the Jewish settler society, which was fully mobilized to participate

in the war effort, it does not apply to all of the Palestinian people. Alongside the growing nationalist consciousness among the urban elite and the revolutionary villagers who participated in the events of the 1930s, pre-nationalist (ethnic, sectarian, tribal, and other) identities were still strongly rooted among Palestinians. While Zurayk was searching for the meaning and causes of the Nakba from a comprehensive nationalist perspective, thousands of Palestinians were busy trying to ensure that they could remain and to halt the migration and expulsion drive that was encroaching on their towns. Those who faced the calamity unarmed did what they could to ensure they could stay and save their families and their homes from destruction. Their understanding of the Nakba in the early summer of 1948 was pragmatic, rather than intellectual or philosophical. These multiple interpretations, even if they did share in describing the enormity of the catastrophe, led to disparate practical conclusions.⁶¹

The task of protecting the Galilee fell on the shoulders of the volunteers in the Arab Rescue Army and the local residents. The interpretation by the people of the Galilee of the Palestinian tragedy and the possibility of stopping it was different than the reading by the residents of Jerusalem and Gaza. The Arab volunteers and the people of the Galilee who were defending their towns lacked the most basic military preparedness to face the organized Israeli army, who had been equipped with the latest weapons which poured in from Czechoslovakia and other countries. As we mentioned earlier, units of the Israeli army experienced no difficulty in mounting offensive operations against Arab positions when it was ordered to occupy the north of the country. As for the citizens, they found themselves without any reliable defensive capabilities and facing an army. The different situation compared to the situation in the center and south of the country was no secret to the residents of the Galilee and formed part of their consciousness concerning the calamity they faced.⁶²

One term for the occupation of Arab cities and villages that became widespread was “the fall.” In describing events, people said, “when the country fell,” as though it were a ripe fruit on a branch that only needed the tree trunk to be shaken to fall to the ground. Most people did not speak of “war” because the majority took no part in real battles, nor were they prepared to do so in the first place. The author of *Bab al-Shams* (*Gate of the Sun*) expressed the sentiments of the people of the Galilee best through the characters of his novel. Yunis says from his hospital bed, “By God, it was no war, it was like a dream.” He then adds: “Son, don’t believe that the Jews won the war of ‘48. We did not fight in ‘48, we didn’t know how. They won because we did not fight. They too did not fight: they just won, and it was like a dream.”⁶³ Alongside the collapse and the destruction, there was a loss of confidence in leaders who asked the *fellahin* and simple folk to fight and be steadfast without preparing them to face this unexpected catastrophe.

Many residents of the Galilee began to comprehend the true balance of power between the two sides to the conflict after the fall of Haifa near the end of April,

followed by the entry of the armies of Arab states and then their agreement to a ceasefire after just a short period of fighting. The Druze in Jabal al-Karmil and along the coast, the communists in the National Liberation League, and other local leaders in the Galilee decided to end their participation in the “theater of war.” They declared they were withdrawing from the fight against the Jews to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, and the stand they took had a huge impact on the conduct of the Israeli army in Shafa ‘Amr, then in Nazareth and the surrounding villages in the ten-day battles of July. The withdrawal of the Arab Rescue Army from Nazareth, for example, left the city and its district defenseless in the confrontation with the Israeli army. We shall return later in this chapter to the subject of the fall of Nazareth and the circumstances of the surrender of the leaders of the city.

The Palestinian national leadership under the mufti lost what remained of its reputation and stature after the entry of the regular Arab armies to fight in Palestine. Hajj Amin al-Husayni and many of his aides and others close to him were far from the helm of the sinking Palestinian ship. From their positions far from the battlefield they asked the Palestinians to stand fast before the enemy, but when it became apparent that the Arab states and their armies were unable to save Palestine, the Palestinians realized the magnitude of the catastrophe. Consequently, naïve faith in the triumph of Palestinian rights began to shrink in the face of the expanding tragedy, and was replaced by a sense of frustration, disarray, and failed trust in the national leaderships. Against the background of this change in consciousness, some Palestinians decided to join the victors to ensure their survival. Thus, while many Palestinians sided with King Abdullah in the mountains of central Palestine, some in the mountains of the Galilee decided to accept Israeli rule, and even collaborated with Israel to ensure they could remain in the country.⁶⁴

As history tells us, in times of catastrophes the dominant pre-catastrophe nationalist values recede in the face of the need for survival. As the value of social solidarity weakens other factional and tribal values come to the fore among groups trying to save themselves. In the Galilee, which the regular Arab armies never reached, and which was far from the hotbeds of the nationalist movement in Jerusalem and other cities, alternative local sectarian, tribal, and political leaderships consolidated their positions in the theater of events and took control to safeguard the survival of their collectivities. At the beginning, before the war, these groups had not been active in the Palestinian national movement, and did not participate in nationalist action or discourse. Prominent among those groups in the Galilee were the Druze, the communists, and some Bedouin tribes and rural clans.

We referred earlier to some ‘Arab al-Hayb from Tuba al-Zanghariyya joining forces with the Haganah and fighting alongside the Jews against their Arab neighbors. Yitzhak Hankin mobilized and trained them to fight. In May 1948, for example, Bedouin recruits from this clan took part in the attacks on Syrian army camps, blew up bridges and engaged in other acts of sabotage in the Arab

areas. They participated in attacks on their neighbors, the residents of the village of Fir‘im, who had left their village after the Israeli army occupied it and were trying to return to it. Army reports mentioned that some ‘Arab al-Hayb attacked the village, burned down its houses, and seized some farm animals and property.⁶⁵ A section of that clan continued to serve alongside the Israeli army in upper Galilee in information gathering and intelligence operations. Its members became active in the war that Israel launched against the refugees who were trying to return from Lebanon to their country; they set ambushes, attacked them, and stole their belongings, then expelled them for a second time beyond the borders.⁶⁶

During July, Shafa ‘Amr and its neighboring villages were occupied in the ten-day battles (8 to 18 July); those villages remained standing and their residents were not expelled. The same thing then happened in Nazareth and its neighboring villages. The Druze of Shafa ‘Amr played an important role in the fall of their town; they were implementing a secret agreement which had been concluded earlier between officers of the Israeli army and some Druze leaders. On the basis of this agreement, which required the withdrawal of the Druze from the fight against the Jews, most of the fighters in the Arab battalion returned to their homes in Syria and Lebanon, while dozens joined the Israeli side in the war.⁶⁷ In return, the Israeli side guaranteed the Druze that their villages would not be subject to the maltreatment, killing, or destruction that Palestinian villages in the Galilee and other areas had suffered. In this way, Druze leaders guaranteed that their sect members could stay in the homes and on their lands, and they were also able to use their close ties with the Israeli side at times to help their Muslim and Christian neighbors.

Before the fall of Shafa ‘Amr, members of the Ma‘di family in Yarka played a role in helping the residents of neighboring villages to conclude surrender agreements. One, for example, was Kufr Yasif, which was inhabited by Christians, Muslims, and some Druze. Whereas the majority of the villages along the coast of ‘Akka had their residents evicted after their occupation in May, the nearby Druze villages and some neighboring villages remained as they were. When fighting renewed after the end of the cease-fire, Yani Yani, head of the Kufr Yasif municipal council, took advantage of the relations of his Druze neighbors with the Jews to save residents of his village from being uprooted and expelled, and signed an agreement to that effect mediated by Haim Orbach from Nahariyya on 10 July. When the Israeli army entered the village, they commandeered one of the houses as a barracks for some of their soldiers. They expelled the refugees who had found refuge in Kufr Yasif, and dozens of young men of conscription age were arrested and placed in prisoner of war detention centers, despite the fact that the village had surrendered without resistance. Nevertheless, the residents of Kufr Yasif and neighboring villages, such as al-Makr, al-Jdayda, and Abu Snan, felt relief because their fate was better than that of coastal villages which had been totally evacuated.

The occupation of Nazareth on 16 July, and the fact that the city and its residents remained due to an agreement between the mayor and city notables, and

the Israeli army, had special significance amidst the chain of events of the war and their destructive outcomes. Contrary to the disastrous and painful results just a week earlier in Lydda and Ramla, Ben-Gurion issued a clear order on the eve of the occupation of the city prohibiting the soldiers from attacking the residents of Nazareth and its holy places.⁶⁸ This military order by the prime minister and minister of defense was obeyed, so the residents of the city and most of its refugees remained in their homes and did not suffer theft, murder, and plunder. The activists in the Mapam party and its newspaper '*Al Hamishmar*' quickly noticed the different situation in Nazareth compared to other cities; they wrote much about the "occupation of hearts,"⁶⁹ contrary to what happened in Lydda, Ramla, Jaffa, Haifa, and other Arab cities.

The population of the Galilee were not under the influence of the mufti, and many of them supported his opponents. Most areas in the Galilee had been allocated to the Arab state according to the partition resolution, yet Israel began occupying more and more of the Galilee after the fall of 'Akka. The residents benefited from the fact that most areas of the Galilee were occupied in a late stage of the war, after they had learned about the Nakba events, which included the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians by the summer of 1948, and the prevention of their return. They therefore searched for opportunities and the means to guarantee their continued existence in their homes and on their lands. The Palestinians had seen what happened in Lydda and Ramla prior to the occupation of Nazareth in terms of killing, destruction, and the forced expulsion of tens of thousands. Against this background of tragic events, the survival of Nazareth and its villages was a surprise and represented a distinctive event. The question we pose here is: how did the city escape the fate that befell other Palestinian cities, and why?

THE SECRET OF NAZARETH'S SURVIVAL AND ESCAPE FROM DESTRUCTION

Nazareth, as opposed to Tiberias, Safad, and Haifa, was an Arab city that was distant from the borders of the designated Jewish state. The Jews did not build settlements in its vicinity. Its position in the middle of the Galilee, far from the coastal plain and the strategic border areas, led to the postponement of its occupation and the Jewish domination of its district. Ben-Gurion and other leaders of the Jewish state were well aware of the religious significance of Nazareth for the Christian world in general and the Vatican in particular, which led to the decision to treat the inhabitants and the holy places with care and delicacy. As mentioned earlier, Nazareth had absorbed hundreds of Palestinian refugees from Tiberias, then Safad and Bisan. Perhaps the fact that the Jewish forces allowed those hundreds (the majority of whom were Christians) to go to Nazareth instead of Syria or Lebanon was an indication that the city of the Annunciation would probably have a differ-

ent fate. The city was spared as a result of the convergence of factors of time and place as well as a top-level policy decision and the positions taken by various local leaders in the field.

Ben-Gurion's caution and sensitivity to the reactions of the Western world to the actions of the Jewish state are well known. A group of Jewish leaders shared his position, and indicated some time before the outbreak of war that it was important to behave with sensitivity towards three holy cities, namely Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth. Jerusalem and Bethlehem were supposed to be part of the designated international zone. At any rate, Israel did not occupy either Arab Jerusalem or Bethlehem because the Jordanian army entered both districts and prevented their fall. However, Nazareth's situation was different, as it became a unique test of the conduct of the Israeli army regarding its residents and its holy places. When Israel began its military operations to occupy lower Galilee, it was clear that the Arab Rescue Army in Nazareth would be unable to protect the city and its district. Both the decision of the leader of the ARA unit to withdraw and the decision of Israel to behave differently in the case of this city that was sacred to Christians played an important role in sparing Nazareth from the fate of other Palestinian cities.

A number of Palestinian communist leaders who accepted the partition resolution in February 1948 lived and worked in Nazareth, and renewed their old relationships with their Jewish communist comrades and with activists in the Mapam party.⁷⁰ Furthermore, a number of opponents of the mufti, who had established cooperative relations with the Jews from the 1930s, lived in the city and its district. Prominent among them was Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi, whom Israel set up as a leader of the Arabs in Israel after its establishment, as a reward for his services. The presence of many opponents of the mufti and his men in Nazareth, and their relationships with influential Jewish parties, were two other factors which contributed to protecting the city from destruction and its inhabitants from expulsion. Another contributing factor was the presence of priests, clergy, journalists, and employees of charitable institutions. Finally, the inhabitants of Nazareth escaped maltreatment and expulsion due to the actions of Israeli army officers, with Ben Dunkelman (who had Canadian citizenship) at their head, and due to the role played by city leaders who chose to act wisely and signed a surrender agreement.

Nazareth was occupied during the ten-day battles, according to the Zionist account of events. The Arab Rescue Army in the area was made up of a mixture of volunteers, and included a not insignificant number of Palestinians; one of its units was led by Mahmud al-Saffuri. Prior to the occupation of lower Galilee, the Israeli side had concluded an agreement with Shakib Wahhab and some local Druze leaders, according to which the Druze withdrew from the battle against the Jews, and in return Israel guaranteed that all their villages would be protected from harm.⁷¹ The first practical test of this secret agreement was in the village of Shafa 'Amr, whose inhabitants did not suffer from maltreatment and expulsion.

This relatively benign approach to occupation indicated a different policy compared to the conduct of the Israel army days before in Lydda, Ramla, and all the villages of their district.⁷²

The murder of dozens in the Dahmash mosque massacre in Lydda, and the subsequent expulsion of tens of thousands of the inhabitants of the city and of neighboring Ramla on a blistering hot Ramadan day (11–12 July), in addition to the pictures of refugees wending their way across valleys and mountains on their way to Ramallah and Jerusalem, inflamed sentiments.⁷³ Sharp criticisms were levelled at King Abdullah and his army, which had British officers, for their recalcitrance in providing assistance to the inhabitants of Lydda and Ramla despite their being stationed in nearby Latrun. The photos and articles published by the Arab and foreign press about the refugees and the forcibly expelled, and about the murder of dozens in the streets and in the Dahmash mosque, had a considerable impact on the political atmosphere.⁷⁴ Did that atmosphere, and the Jordanian and British reactions, play a role in the exercise of greater caution when Nazareth was occupied? Perhaps. In this respect, we know that some, particularly members of the Mapam party which was represented in the Israeli provisional government, went to see Ben-Gurion, and referred to the serious damage done to the Jewish state as a result of the promulgation of the news about Lydda and Ramla. This atmosphere may explain the adoption of the clear position that such events should not be replicated when Nazareth was occupied.

After the fall of Shafa 'Amr and nearby villages, the Israeli army quickly advanced eastwards. Saffuriyya, a large village known for its fighters, became the focus of attention because units of volunteers from its residents and from neighboring villages were stationed there. Those fighters did not surrender easily, but the superiority in numbers and equipment that the Israeli army enjoyed made it impossible for them to stand up to the heavy bombing, so the survivors withdrew and the villagers ran towards nearby Nazareth, seeking refuge. Saffuriyya fell quickly, and Madlul 'Abbas, the commander of the Arab Rescue Army unit stationed in Nazareth, realized he had to withdraw before the city was totally cut off from the north. But before withdrawing, that commander asked the residents to stay in their homes and not to migrate. Soldiers serving in the unit stopped briefly in al-Khannuq region to make sure that the residents were not following them. 'Abbas thus performed a valuable service to those who had been thinking of leaving.

After the withdrawal of the Arab Rescue Army from Nazareth, Mayor Yusif al-Fahum consulted with the heads of Christian sects and notables in the city on Friday morning, 16 July, on how to cope with the situation and save the city.⁷⁵ It was evident to everyone that the residents of Nazareth could not confront the Israeli army or prevent the fall of the city. In the afternoon, Ben Dunkelman had entered from the north (al-Khannuq) to the city of Nazareth after shelling the remnants of the retreating ARA. The Israeli forces did not advance to the center

of the city; instead, that officer had sent someone to look for the mayor and the heads of Christian sects so that they could sign a surrender agreement that would protect the city and its holy places, according to the orders of the top echelons of the army. Indeed, it was only a few hours later that officers of the Israeli army were signing an agreement for the surrender of Nazareth in the house of Shafiq al-Jisr.⁷⁶ The agreement had eleven articles, which collectively constitute a rare document of its kind for the events of the 1948 war, and it is worth pausing to examine its contents and significance.

At the top of the list of (Arab) signatories were the mayor, Yusif al-Fahum, and the head of the National Committee, Ibrahim al-Fahum. The agreement included two clauses guaranteeing that the activities of the municipal council and the civil affairs administration would continue in coordination with the military governor. Among the signatories were police officer Samu'il Khamis, and Nakhle Bishara, representing the Arab Orthodox sect. From the Israeli side the agreement was signed by army officers acting in the name of the Israeli government, with Ben Dunkelman at the head of the list. This agreement strived to give a civilized face to the Israeli side, who wrote the text in advance and signed it with leaders of the city. The ninth clause, for example, refers to the commitment of the government, represented by the army officers, to its recognition of "the civil rights in which all the residents of Nazareth are equal with the citizens of Israel without discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or language." It seemed likely that these words had been copied from the independence document of the state of Israel, and that the document for the surrender of the city had been prepared in advance under the directions of the prime minister and defense minister of Israel, Ben-Gurion.⁷⁷

After the events in Lydda and Ramla, and one week before the fall of Nazareth, Israel tried to whitewash its image in local and international public opinion. In a telegram that Ben-Gurion sent Moshe Carmel, commander of the northern front, the prime minister and defense minister ordered the setting up of a special administrative team to conduct the affairs of Nazareth without unnecessary contact with the population. The military directive to Carmel was that he had to issue very strict instructions prohibiting the desecration of monasteries and churches, and prohibiting looting and theft.⁷⁸ These strict orders from Ben-Gurion concerning Nazareth prior to its occupation are noteworthy for revealing the aggressive tactics that had become expected during the Palestine war in other cities and regions where Ben-Gurion had not issued specific orders prohibiting attacks, looting and expulsions of the population. Contrary to what happened to Palestinian residents of Haifa and Jaffa and other Palestinian cities, the case of Nazareth clearly showed a population that remained in their homeland and in their homes because they were not terrorized and forced to emigrate.

Ben-Gurion's clear and decisive written orders on the eve of the fall of Nazareth, and the Israeli army command compliance, prevented the mistreatment of the population and attacks on the holy places. This demonstrates the importance

of top-level policy formulated by the prime minister and defense minister during the war. In Nazareth, the Israeli army behaved differently, not with the longtime inhabitants of the city only, but also with the new refugees. Contrary to the usual policy, the Israeli government allowed thousands of refugees who had flocked to Nazareth to return to their cities and villages after a short while.⁷⁹ The clear exceptions to this rule were the refugees from Tiberias and Bisan which Israel decided to turn into Jewish cities denuded of their Arab population. But those refugees from Haifa, 'Akka, Shafa 'Amr, and some villages in the vicinity did gradually return to their homes. This unusual policy toward refugees, like that toward the residents of Nazaeth, demonstrates the importance of the policy decisions taken by the government under Ben-Gurion.⁸⁰

There were other factors, besides Ben-Gurion's orders to the Israeli army command, which helped residents to stay in Nazareth. Officers of the ARA who withdrew from Nazareth one day before it fell prevented dozens of families who wanted to migrate from the village from doing so, sometimes by force. Despite that, about one thousand people left Nazareth, and joined hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Most migrants from the city were Muslims, particularly the families of notables and merchants, like the al-Fahum family and others.⁸¹ But this minority who migrated is proof that the vast majority chose to stay. In addition to Nazareth, most villages of the district also escaped destruction and forced expulsion; the residents of twenty villages in the region of the city escaped, but four villages were destroyed and depopulated—Ma'lul, al-Mujaydil, Saffuriyya, and 'Illut. The first three of these villages remained deserted, but the residents of 'Illut alone were allowed to return to their village, which we shall discuss later.

One day after the fall of Nazareth, Ben-Gurion recorded in his diary that Moshe Carmel issued an order on 17 July to expel the entire population of Nazareth. This concise sentence indicates that there was a tense drama in which the northern region command tried to undo what had been agreed a day earlier. According to Ben-Gurion's memoirs, Ben Dunkelman, commander of the seventh battalion, "hesitated" to carry out the expulsion order, so Haim Laskov contacted the defense minister to inquire what should be done in this case. Ben-Gurion (lightly) records that he intervened and prohibited the expulsion of the population of Nazareth. Dunkelman confirms this incident in his memoirs, which he prepared for publication in the 1970s.⁸² He mentions that Laskov issued an order to expel the population of Nazareth, but that he refused to execute that order, and consequently there was an attempt to withdraw Dunkelman's troops from the city and replace them with another battalion led by Elie Yafeh. The mere attempt by Carmel and Laskov, who were in charge of military operations in the northern region to expel the population of Nazareth after they had signed an agreement with the leaders of the city to protect their safety and their rights indicates that they were not thinking anyone would punish them for that act.

More than one historian and researcher into the history of the 1948 war have indicated that Ben-Gurion never issued written orders for the expulsion of the Palestinians from their villages and cities. There have been many interpretations of Ben-Gurion's famous "waving his hand," which Yitzhak Rabin understood to be a sign that the residents of Lydda and Ramla should be expelled. This still troubles some Israeli historians. In the same days in which tens of thousands of Palestinians were expelled from Lydda and Ramla, the command of the Israeli army general staff asked for the consent of Ben-Gurion for the expulsion of about four thousand Palestinians from 'Akka, either across the border or to the city of Jaffa.⁸³ Minister Bechor Shitrit strongly objected to this based on his responsibility for the Arab residents. In this case too, Ben-Gurion reversed his initial approval of the expulsion of the remainder of the population of 'Akka after one official insisted on the need for a written order from the minister of defense. In this way the remaining residents of 'Akka were saved from expulsion, as were the residents of Nazareth, out of fear of the reaction to written orders of expulsion.

The attempt to expel the residents of Nazareth after its surrender under an agreement signed in the name of the Israeli government did not elicit sufficient attention on the part of historians on both sides of the conflict. Is it credible that Moshe Carmel or Laskov would issue expulsion orders without the knowledge and approval of Ben-Gurion? Was it the "hesitation" or opposition of Dunkelman to the expulsion orders that saved the people of Nazareth from being uprooted? Was Ben-Gurion's decision when Laskov approached him the result of a genuine opposition to the expulsion or was it due to a fear of the political and media scandal that might ensue if it was uncovered? These are important questions worthy of close examination and study on the part of defenders of Ben-Gurion and his policies during the war. The residents of Nazareth were unaware of the drama surrounding their fate on 17 July, for ultimately they remained in their homes and the army did not evict them. An important factor leading to this result was the second cease-fire which came into force the following day, 18 July.

The attempt to expel the people of Nazareth remained unknown to them, even if some had heard rumors. But nothing was written about it either in their memoirs or as part of the history of the war.⁸⁴ Apart from Dunkelman, who relates this account in his memoirs, the other officers on the northern front remained silent, nor has any document concerning the situation been released from the Israeli archives, either because there is no such document to begin with, or because no one has taken the decision to release it so far. Nazareth was better off than other places where agreements were signed and subsequently violated only a few days later, as was the case in Haifa and its surrender agreement with the leaders of the Haganah, as well as other agreements in the Galilee concluded but not adhered to.

The answer to the question posed earlier concerning the secret of the escape and survival of Nazareth along with the majority of villages in its district is that several causes contributed to that outcome: the fact that it is a holy city for the Christian

world, as well as the behavior of the inhabitants and their leaders who chose to remain in their homes. No doubt, Ben-Gurion's strict orders to the army command was what finally allowed the Palestinians to remain in their city. Activists in the Mapam party who had ties to the Liberation League in Nazareth noticed this behavior differed from what happened in Lydda, Ramla, Jaffa, and other places. Eliezer Bray, one of the leaders of the party and the editor of *'Al Hamishmar*, refers to this in a penetrating article he published in the paper in November 1948, in which he counters the narrative that had begun to make the rounds in Israel concerning "the flight of the Arabs," and places the blame for the rise of the refugee problem on Britain and the Arab states. He also points the finger of blame at Israel and its government, saying: "In Nazareth and Majdal 'Asqalan the Arabs stayed because we wanted them to stay there. If they did not remain in other places, the authors of the 'transfer' policy had a share in that."⁸⁵

The editor of *'Al Hamishmar* was certain of what he said. Following the occupation of Nazareth, the same paper published several articles commending the good treatment that the inhabitants received. One week after the surrender of Nazareth, as one article recounts: "In Nazareth there was an occupation of the hearts."⁸⁶ The paper's special correspondent reveals several matters worth quoting at length: "The example of Nazareth proves that looting and the maltreatment of people and property which were a feature of the Israeli occupation of Arab places were not inevitable." He adds to his explanation of the different way in which Israel behaved in Nazareth: "There was awareness that the eyes of the world were on our behavior in this city. Had the actions and manifestations seen elsewhere (Lydda and al-Ramla) been repeated in Nazareth, it would have led to severe reactions."⁸⁷ The correspondent concludes by expressing the hope that the example of Nazareth would not be unique.

Indeed, it seemed at first glance that Israel had decided to turn a page in its dealings with the occupied places. Following the occupation of Nazareth, the government did what it could to return to normal life in the city. The city was fortunate to receive visits from four cabinet ministers, one after the other, within a single week. First came the Mapam minister in the provisional government, the minister of agriculture, followed by the minister of labor and housing the next day. Then came the minister of minorities, Bechor Shitrit, then the minister of religious affairs, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Fishman. Minister Shitrit, who came from Tiberias and was fluent in Arabic, met with the mayor, a judge, and a delegation representing the National Liberation League. The atmosphere in those meetings was cordial, and the minister promised his hosts to look into their demands and deal with them. The military governor Elisha Soltz worked to return life in the city to its normal routines, and asked, for example, the municipality and the local police to resume work as usual under the auspices of Israeli rule.⁸⁸

Minister Shitrit, who visited Nazareth on 19 July and met with the mayor and a number of city leaders, was well aware of the importance of treating the

inhabitants well and preserving the Christian holy places. One day before his arrival, Elisha Soltz (who had earlier served in the office of the minister of minorities) was appointed military governor. The minister advised him to be sensitive and just in his dealings with the people of Nazareth. When Shitrit returned to Tel Aviv, he asked for the appointment of a judge for the city, and for the renewal of the activities of the municipality so that it could provide services to the population. Shitrit told the members of the provisional cabinet that the state of Israel "had to issue strict instructions to the army to treat the population of the city justly and in a suitable manner, due of its special importance in the eyes of the world."⁸⁹ In that moment, all the ministers agreed with what he said, without any objections.

Elisha Soltz met with cooperation not just from the municipality and the mayor but from local leaders as well, including the communists as well as a well-known figure, Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi, whose family was on good terms with the opponents of Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husayni. Sayf al-Din himself was a real estate broker who had worked with HaKeren HaKayemet (the Jewish National Fund), and for that reason had been the subject of an assassination attempt in 1947 which he survived.⁹⁰ During the 1948 war, the villages of the Zu'bi clan in Marj ibn 'Amir concluded a peace and good neighborliness agreement with Jewish settlements in the area. Intelligence services belonging to the ARA accused Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi of collaboration with the Jewish forces, and an attempt was made to arrest him and put him on trial.⁹¹ After the occupation of Nazareth, al-Zu'bi came to the city and became one of the prominent local leaders who openly collaborated with Israel in general and with the military government in particular. Thus, Elisha Soltz found cooperation from various parties which helped him to return normal life to the city quickly.

The history of Arabs in Israel begins with the "gentle manner" in which Nazareth was occupied, and the cooperation of its city leaders with the military governor and the Israeli government. It is true that prior to that, thousands of Palestinians escaped expulsion from Haifa, 'Akka, and many cities and villages in the Galilee; however, the continued existence of Nazareth and the escape of its population from uprooting constitute a unique precedent, where an entire city with its institutions and its political and cultural elite remained intact. Therefore, it is possible to consider the conduct of the Israeli government and its head in this case as a clear indication of the willingness of the Jewish state to accept an Arab minority, albeit in limited numbers. On the other side, the conduct of the people of Nazareth and its political leaders across the political spectrum was an indication by those who remained of a new awareness of the defeat and their acceptance of the new reality, so that they could continue to live in their homes and their country. The convergence of the conduct of the government and the army on the one hand, and the readiness of city leaders to cooperate with the new rulers on the other, laid the foundations for a new phase in the history of the Palestinians who remained under Israeli rule.

Did the occupation of Nazareth and the villages in its district set a precedent to be emulated in how Israel was to spread its control over the rest of the Galilee in Operation Hiram? The answer to this question will come in the next chapter. We close this chapter by addressing the question of the situation of the Palestinians during the second cease-fire which lasted three months or more, in which no military battles were fought on the official fronts, but struggles of a different kind occupied the Palestinians and the Arab states. In this period Constantine Zurayk finished his book, *The Meaning of al-Nakba*, and the residents of the Galilee became busy trying to comprehend what was happening around them, and what the future held in store for them, in the event that fighting resumed and Israel undertook to occupy all of central and upper Galilee.

CONDITIONS IN THE GALILEE DURING THE CEASE-FIRE (SUMMER-FALL, 1948)

By the end of July, the war between Israel and Syria, Lebanon, and even Jordan had ended from an operational point of view, while battles with the Egyptian army, which shifted to the position of defense, continued. Contrary to the first cease-fire, which was set in advance to last a month, the second cease-fire was not of a limited duration. The military defeat of the Arab armies was clear, and that is why they agreed to the cease-fire despite the fact that Israel had not agreed to their demands concerning refugees and other matters. At this stage (early summer 1948) the Nakba grew worse, and it was clear that the Arab armies were unable to stop the calamity that was befalling the Palestinians. Zurayk, the historian and penetrating thinker, absorbed the meaning of that historical moment and published his book about the Nakba and its meaning. The Palestinians also absorbed the magnitude of the national catastrophe, each from the position in which they found themselves, and tried each in their own way to save what they could from the rubble.

At the international political level, Count Folke Bernadotte, since his appointment as a mediator and United Nations envoy, had tried to arrive at a cease-fire and unlimited armistice agreements between Israel and the Arab states. Following the cease-fire in July, he sought an agreement that was acceptable to Israel, Britain, and the Arab countries. In his negotiations with the parties concerned, he tried to take into account the situation in the field, so he proposed that Israel either annex the entire Galilee, or the western and southern portions of it which it had occupied. After Israel, Jordan was the second beneficiary from Bernadotte's proposals, while the Palestinians were the main losers. The Arab states, which were competing with each other even after their defeat, were unable to arrive at a common agreement or position concerning Bernadotte's proposals. These facts were no secret to the Palestinians, who followed the news and realized that there was no Arab force capable of preventing Israel from occupying the rest of the Galilee.⁹²

The inhabitants of the Galilee felt in the summer of 1948 that their region would fall under Israeli rule, either by agreement or by force and occupation. This awareness of the facts contributed to their adoption of pragmatic positions in their dealings with the Israeli army and government. Bernadotte's assassination by the terrorist Lehi organization (Stern gang) cut short his attempts to reach an agreement. His successor, Ralph Bunche, accused the Israeli leadership of responsibility for the hostile atmosphere which led to the assassination. Indeed, the Israeli government opposed the proposals of the UN envoy and criticized them severely, and leftist labor parties, including the Mapam party and even the Israeli Communist Party, refused any compromise or agreement with King Abdullah and "his British masters."

The issue of Palestinian refugees kept UN institutions busy, and Israel feared that it could be subjected to pressure to allow some to return to their homes and country. The Israeli government had taken an official decision in mid-June prohibiting their return; however, as the number of those forced to become refugees increased so did pressures on Israel to permit the return of some refugees at least. But the Jewish state, which had begun to absorb Jewish immigrants from Europe, refused to bow to the pressures and became steadfast in its refusal. Nevertheless, Israel grew more concerned following the assassination of Bernadotte that pressures might increase in a way that could harm its global political relations. But these concerns dissipated quickly due to international developments in the neighboring Arab region, and due to the renewal of fighting on the Egyptian front.

It is clear from developments during the cease-fire months that they coincided with military developments in the field which were not in the interest of the Palestinians. In the Arab context, divisions and internal conflicts drowned out discourse stressing common interests and the need for unity. The principal dispute concerned the fate of the Palestinian territories that Israel had not occupied, and which were under the control of Arab armies, particularly those of Egypt and Jordan. Would those states allow the Palestinians to establish their own state according to the UN partition resolution? If such a state was not established, what would be the fate of the territories and their inhabitants? These and related questions resulted in the exacerbation of disputes among Arab states, and between some of them and the Palestinian leadership under the mufti.

According to the UN resolution to partition Palestine into two states, one Arab and other Jewish, this had to be done by 1 October 1948. Consequently, September witnessed moves by several Arab states, headed by Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, in favor of establishing a Palestinian government under the leadership of the mufti, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, which was to administer the territories under the control of Arab armies. Egypt (contrary to Jordan) supported this move and encouraged convening a Palestinian National Conference in Gaza toward the end of September, during which the establishment of an "All-Palestine Government" headed by Ahmad Hilmi 'Abd al-Baqi⁹³ was declared. The mufti and his supporters

had an overwhelming majority among the members of this government, which elicited strong opposition from Jordan. King Abdullah adopted political measures and took steps on the ground to annex the West Bank to his kingdom with the help of the opposition to, and those Palestinians competing with, the mufti.

Despite the Jordanian opposition, the mufti tried, as of September, to prove that he was the sole leader of the Palestinian people, and that the All-Palestine Government in Gaza enjoyed the support of all Palestinians. But this government had many enemies from its birth: Britain, Israel, Jordan, the mufti's own opponents, and others. It was also formed very late, and was not fated to live long. The king of Jordan was the most hostile to the All-Palestine Government; he convened a conference in which he gathered all his supporters in the capital, Amman, where the conferees presented him with a petition to protect the West Bank and annex it to his kingdom. Britain, which had supported the king's steps, encouraged him to conclude an agreement with Israel so that he could annex the West Bank according to an understanding between the two sides. Egypt was not in a position to compete with King Abdullah and to continue to support the All-Palestine Government unconditionally. This became apparent after the renewal of the fighting, Israel's attack on the Egyptian army, and its bombardment of Gaza City itself at the end of October.

Israel controlled most parts of Galilee except for the pocket of villages in upper and central Galilee during the months after the cease-fire. Life returned to normal in Nazareth: schools opened their doors with the beginning of the new school year, and the mayor, along with local leaders, including the communists, conducted the business of the people in cooperation with the military governor.⁹⁴ This cooperation with the Israeli authorities has been branded as treasonous and attacked with adjectives that are not indicative of understanding that historic phase. Decades later the critics changed their minds and admitted the error of their previous hasty position. Some declared that they consider the Palestinians who remained in Nazareth and other parts of the Galilee to be sensible people who behaved with wisdom and steadfastness in their homes and homeland.⁹⁵ Indeed, the seventy thousand Palestinians who were counted in the survey of Israel at that time were the nucleus or the beating heart of the Arabs in Israel.

The pocket in upper and central Galilee which had not yet been occupied by Israel was still populated by thousands of *fellahin* who lived in sixty Arab villages. This region—called the Galilee pocket—appeared slated to be occupied by Israel, and the residents were trying to glimpse their future: would they become like those who were uprooted and expelled or like the villages of western Galilee and the city of Nazareth and its villages? There were also thousands of refugees living in the area who had not completed the process of migration beyond the borders of historic Palestine, in addition to the original inhabitants of the villages in the Galilee pocket. There was a prevalent conviction among the inhabitants of that region that the ARA units would be unable to defend them should Israel decide to occupy it.

The ARA's performance during the previous months and its unpreparedness were apparent to them, which contributed to the spread of negative attitudes towards those volunteers.⁹⁶ A number of people whom I interviewed in the Galilee said they used to rely on radio broadcasts and newspapers to understand what was happening around them, adding that some officers of the ARA admitted that they would not be able to protect the area if Israel decided to occupy it.

Prevalent in the collective memory of those who remained in the Galilee after the Nakba is the fact that volunteers in the ARA were accused of mistreating the residents of the area; however, an in-depth examination of relations between the residents and most units in the ARA points to a complex situation which differs from the attitude that was developed retroactively. It is true that the residents of some Druze and Christian villages refused to cooperate with the Arab volunteers, which contributed to tensions and friction between the two sides, but in other cases there was cooperation and solidarity for the protection of villages close to the lines of contact with the Jewish side. The residents of these villages were asked to contribute to the defense of their villages, by bearing arms, building fortifications, and providing food supplies to the volunteers. In some villages, local committees were established to run the affairs of the residents in cooperation with officers of ARA units. Israel was in control of the eastern, southern, and western sides of the Galilee pocket. However, the open borders with Lebanon guaranteed the continued flow of arms as well as the necessary food provisions for the population during the cease-fire months.

Residents of al-Battuf recall the error made by the mukhtar of Sakhnin, Ibrahim 'Abdullah Khalayle, who decided to surrender his village to the Israeli army on the eve of the cease-fire. The middle man in that deal was Jad Mustafa Dhiyab from Tamra, who was related to the mukhtar, and who convinced him to follow in his footsteps. Indeed, a delegation from Sakhnin and neighboring villages reached the occupied village of Mi'ar⁹⁷ on 18 July and signed a surrender agreement.⁹⁸ Then some Israeli soldiers entered Sakhnin, but withdrew later to Mi'ar because of the continuing skirmishes with the unit headed by Abu Is'af in the neighboring village of Sha'b. When a cease-fire was declared on the same day, the ARA command became aware of the case of the mukhtar of Sakhnin and his surrendering his village before the Israeli army had reached it. The mukhtar and some of the people close to him were arrested and subjected to insults. They were moved to the police station in Majd al-Krum, which was a stronghold of the ARA and a jail at the same time.⁹⁹ This situation, which many of the residents of central Galilee experienced, left them in a quandary between their desire to protect their villages from the vengeance of the Israeli army and their fear of punishment at the hands of the ARA.

The inhabitants of the Galilee were Muslim, Christian, or Druze and some villages were inhabited by two or three sects at different times. The fact that the Lebanese border remained open took the pressure off the siege imposed on the residents of the Galilee pocket on the remaining sides. The residents of this rural

area used to work and shop in 'Akka, Haifa, Safad, Nazareth, and other cities, all of which fell under Israeli control. After that, the small traders, smugglers, and others went to south Lebanon and even to the capital Beirut to bring goods back to central Galilee; some preferred instead to go only as far as Kufr Yasif, Shafa 'Amr, 'Akka, and elsewhere. These movements by the residents were not unknown to the Israeli authorities, who took advantage of these trade routes for their own ends.¹⁰⁰ The open borders with Lebanon, and the transmission of information about the refugees, made the residents of central Galilee more cognizant of the options available to them. Testimonies of people from that period confirm that many who had migrated from their cities and villages at the beginning of the war and had reached Lebanon decided to return, and did so during the cease-fire period.

By way of example, Najib Susan was a seventeen-year-old boy when he was expelled from 'Akka along with others after the occupation of the city in May. After a period of homelessness and dislocation in Lebanon, he reached Beirut, and found help from the residents of the city. However, after about a month, he decided to return to his family in 'Akka. Susan relates the story of his return in his autobiography and speaks of the route he took from Rumaysh to upper Galilee. Crossing the border with a group of refugees and the help of a guide, he reached the village of al-Bi'na where, according to his account, he joined the Abu Is'af unit which was stationed in the Shaghur area.¹⁰¹ When central Galilee fell, he joined the Arab Rescue Army and retreated with them to Lebanon. After a brief period he returned once again to the Galilee on his own, and then reached 'Akka where he rejoined members of his family.

We have another story of departure and return related by Elias Srouji, who left Nazareth in June to take his father, who was suffering from cancer, for treatment in a Beirut hospital. In the middle of October, he decided to take his family back to Nazareth. Srouji agreed with a Nazarene taxi driver (Fu'ad Nasrallah Zahr) to take the family in his car as far as the village of al-Rama. Indeed, they travelled from Beirut by car on 25 October and reached the house of a friend of the family, Yusif 'Awad (Abu Salim). After resting two days in al-Rama, the members of the family decided to hire two cars to take them to the village of Dayr Hanna, but the difficult road and the health of the poor father forced them to change the plan. Having gone as far as Dayr Hanna, 25 kilometers north of the occupied zone around Nazareth, they were forced to return to al-Rama, and reached the house of their friend Abu Salim in the evening. The new plan was for them to spend the night in al-Rama, and then to return back to Beirut the following day.

Barely an hour after arriving at al-Rama they heard the sounds of extraordinary explosions outside. Salim burst into the living room to announce that a plane was hovering over the village and bombing it. The damage of this air raid on al-Rama was not severe, as it became apparent later, but it was a signal that the operation to occupy the rest of the Galilee had begun with the aerial bombardment of several villages to terrorize the population. In this way the cease-fire, which had lasted a

hundred days, ended and Operation Hiram began towards the end of October. The inhabitants of al-Rama, like others in the region, had experienced tension and anxiety since the renewal of fighting on the Egyptian front, and were expecting an Israeli attack to begin. When the attack did begin, all of central and upper Galilee were occupied quickly and easily, as we shall see in the next chapter.