

Educator in the Service of the Homeland: Khalil al-Sakakini's Conflicted Identities

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As soon as British rule began, the Palestinian national movement too began to grow and take shape, its purpose to resist British imperial rule stubbornly until complete national independence was achieved. Thus, from 1919 a new political leadership appeared alongside the traditional one. Parties were established, congresses and assemblies were called, and newspapers reported enthusiastically on the national activity of the new movement.¹

Opposition to the British included armed resistance, demonstrations, assemblies, strikes, letters of protest, and anti-British articles in the Arabic national press. The undisputed climax came in the Great Revolt from 1936 to 1939, in which most of Arab society took part: city-dwellers and villagers, farmers and laborers, artisans and intellectuals. Palestinians opposed Mandatory rule because they saw in it a danger to their land and their fate, especially as it became clear that its main purpose was to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine.²

Interestingly, scholars and particularly Palestinian historians who wrote in detail on all aspects of the national resistance movement failed to give sufficient attention to a most significant arena in the opposition to British rule, education. Teachers and students in the Arab education system, both private and public, aware of the distress of their homeland and their people and of the existential dangers they confronted, could not remain neutral and indifferent as the British demanded.³ Prominent Palestinian educators led by Khalil al-Sakakini, Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi, Khalil Totah, 'Adil Jabr, Mustafa al-Dabbagh, Darwish al-Miqdadi, and others, used their power as teachers, principals, and school superintendents to help their students and the generations to



Khalil Sakakini 1904: A rare and unpublished photo of Khalil Sakakini (sitting, first row, right), with the Abduh family in Baq'a (Jerusalem). His fiancé and future wife, Sultana Abduh appears second from right, top row. *Source: IPS, Theodorie Collection.*

come to understand the controversy of the Mandate and its inherent dangers.

The purpose of the present article is to shed some critical light on this hitherto neglected resistance by examining a controversial project of the Palestinian educator Khalil al-Sakakini. Sakakini, according to his diaries, used education as a means to resist British imperial power, cultivating an anti-British and anti-Zionist political identity and awareness among teachers and students in the Arab education system throughout the Mandate period. Thus, Sakakini positioned himself as a major educator and made education the spearhead in the national struggle of his people. In order to critically examine this issue, we must also examine Sakakini's inner contradictions and his multiple conflicted identities – religious, national, social, and cultural.⁴

Sakakini's National-Political Activity

The work of Khalil al-Sakakini (b. Jerusalem, 1878–1953) at the end of the Ottoman period and through the British Mandate can be divided into three principal spheres: social, national-political, and educational. The present article will focus on his national-political activity to achieve what he believed in: liberating the individual and the homeland. That activity began in 1908, upon his return from the United States.⁵ In September of that year, he established a Muslim-Christian Association for mutual understanding and social-political cooperation with three of his closest friends: Nakhla Zurayq; Husayn al-



The poet Alter Levine in Arab costume, January 1929. Photo by Khalil Raad. *Source: National Library of Israel, Schwadron collection.*

Husayni, then mayor of Jerusalem; and the prominent journalist ‘Isa al-‘Isa. Immediately afterward, Sakakini joined the Committee for Union and Progress (*jam‘iyyat al-ittihad wa-l-taraqqi*) on the understanding that it would work against the centralization of government in Istanbul and toward Arab autonomy.⁶

In 1918, Sakakini escaped from prison in Damascus – where he had been imprisoned by the Ottoman authorities for harboring the Hebrew poet Alter Levine, a suspected American agent – and joined the leader of the Arab Revolt, Amir Faysal, the son of Husayn, Sharif of Mecca.⁷ From that time, and especially in the first decade of the Mandate, Sakakini was politically active on an almost daily basis. He met with activists and with Arab leaders, notably the Mufti of Jerusalem Amin al-Husayni, attended meetings and conventions, and took part in political organization among Palestinians to the point that his home became the meeting place for their senior leaders. He participated, albeit behind the scenes, in the first Palestinian Conference in 1919, supporting internal Arab unity between Christians and Muslims and the annexation of Palestine to Greater Syria under King Faysal.⁸

Nor did his political activity cease with the establishment of the British Mandatory government. From Egypt he worked within the Syrian Union Party supporting independence and the unity of Greater Syria.⁹ Between 1922 and 1924, Sakakini was secretary of the Arab Club (*al-nadi al-‘Arabi*), regarded as a significant national-political body. In 1922, he was elected by the Fifth Palestinian Congress to the Arab Executive Committee (*al-lajna al-‘Arabiyya al-‘ulya*) and in 1923–1924 he served as its acting secretary in place of Jamal al-Husayni.¹⁰ His national-political activity peaked in 1925, when Lord Balfour arrived to attend the cornerstone laying ceremony of the Hebrew University. Sakakini, a Christian, delivered an impassioned address against Lord Balfour, the British Mandate, and the Zionist movement from the *minbar* of the al-Aqsa mosque.¹¹ Sakakini’s fervent belief in Arab nationalism led him to go so far as to urge, in 1926, Christians in the country to convert to Islam for the sake of unity in the national movement!

While in the early 1930s he gave up active membership in its institutions, he retained good relationships with all branches of the national movement’s leadership.¹² Even as a functionary of the British Mandate, Sakakini continued to confront and to criticize. Thus, for example, he resigned from the directorship of the Arab Teachers’ Training College in Jerusalem in 1920 as soon as Sir Herbert Samuel, a noted Zionist, was named British High Commissioner for Palestine. While supervisor of Arabic language teaching in the Mandate’s Education Department, he declined an invitation to dine with the high commissioner, regarding it as a humiliation. There was more. The first broadcasting station in the country was established in 1936, and Sakakini was a candidate to head its Arabic department. He rejected the post only because of the introduction announcing “Broadcasts from Eretz Israel,” the Hebrew name for the country.¹³ Symbolic of his belief in Arab nationalism was the house he built himself in Jerusalem in 1937. Each room was named for an important Arab city: San ‘a’, Damascus, Cordoba, and Cairo.¹⁴

Patriotic Political Education

The Arab nation has fallen into the depths of weakness and abjection ... All that is needed to emerge from the situation is to awaken a national feeling.¹⁵

Throughout the Mandate, there were educators who saw a very important national-political role for their profession, feeling that education could be an instrument of opposition to the social and political reality produced by any foreign rule in Palestine. Moreover, they saw education as the means to propel Arab society into economic and social modernity and from there to national independence. Foremost among them were Sakakini and Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi.¹⁶ Sakakini was a teacher and hoped to remain so, but this was not to be. Political events and the dangers that beset his native land from the beginning of the twentieth century, with its appalling economic, social, and cultural conditions, propelled him into the political arena.¹⁷ His longing to change this reality directed his path from the final days of Ottoman rule and throughout the Mandate, leading him to become “the teacher of his people.”¹⁸

Through more than fifty years as a teacher, supervisor, and principal of colleges and schools he himself established – notably al-Dusturiyya (1909–1917) and, with Shukri al-Harami, al-Nahda (1938–1948) – Sakakini remained true to a deep faith in the power of free, progressive humanistic education to extricate the Arab nation in general and Palestinian society in particular from ignorance and failure and to lead it into enlightenment and independence. Again and again in his diaries, he reiterated the crucial role that education must play, as his own teacher Nakhla Zurayq had taught him, in saving the homeland. Aside from its geographic aspects, Sakakini’s concept of homeland included history, culture, and language.¹⁹

Sakakini was convinced that through education one could rebel effectively against everything in Arab society, standing firm against internal and external dangers. He saw every educator, not just himself, as having a social, political, and national mission to fulfill in shaping the personalities of the young.²⁰ He was convinced that he and the educational system were obliged to carry out a national political project with a great potential to bring about far-reaching social change. Sakakini felt bitter, sometimes to the point of desperation, that Arab society, with its complexity of social, economic, and political components and trends had not yet matured to the point where it could lead fateful historical movements that would establish an independent, free, and progressive nation. Sakakini’s hope was that the Arab nation would mature and act like the Jewish nation:

The Arab nation needs someone like Rothschild who will finance its rebirth from his own funds. At times I despair of the Arab nation’s success, and at times I am ashamed to belong to it. With that, I have to be part of it. I prefer to belong to it and not to think of its inferiority and its weakness ... I am not prepared to abandon my nationality at its low point. Besides, if I belonged to an enlightened, progressive nation like the French, the English, or the American, I would [still] devote my life to the Arab people ... It is



Khalil al-Sakakini (lower left, cross-legged) with the faculty and students of the National Dusturiyya School in Jerusalem, c. 1910, after its move from the Old City to the Musrara quarter. The students are in special uniforms to commemorate the Constitutional Revolution of 1908. Source: *Theodorie Collection and Institute for Palestine Studies, Ramallah.*

an unjust world where some nations reach the peak of progress and others reach the depths.²¹

Yes, Sakakini was aware of the dangers the Zionist movement would bring to his homeland in the future,²² and was among the first to sound a warning, writing in his diary in 1914:

I am not repelled by the Jewish nation's attempts to gain independence. On the contrary, I am happy over every people that wins independence and liberty. What I hate is the idea the Zionist movement is based on – that to exist and to flourish it has the right to humiliate and obliterate another people: the movement is trying to steal its independence. Is this an honorable means to attain it? Independence gained through another people's weakness and laziness is just too weak: as if leaning upon the sand. What will the Jews do if Arab national feeling awakens? Will they survive?²³

As a patriotic educator and an Arab Palestinian, Sakakini understood his duty and his life's mission to be the awakening of national feeling. So it was that during the British Mandate he would meet in his home with a group of intellectuals to discuss this mission along with more general subjects like history, literature, socialism, imperialism, and the like. The group planned to found an association called *ikhwan al-safa* that would

advance education and raise national political awareness in the Arab population.²⁴ The question that engrossed Sakakini was why the Arab nation did not progress and did not unite as the Jewish people did. He dreamt of a single united Arab nation, and felt that the Palestinians met more of the conditions necessary to achieve this than the Jews. Arabs had a living language, the strength of numbers, a large common geographical area, ties to a supportive Muslim world, a glorious history, a heritage of morals and customs, and a rich creative literature.²⁵ When he spoke of the Arab nation and homeland he meant the nation in its entirety, the one that joined the Arab Rebellion led by Faysal, but in particular the Palestinian society he lived in and worked for.

Even before the British Mandate, Sakakini would ask students to write a critical essay on the state of the Arab nation, analyzing why it was declining in comparison with the Jewish nation. His Dusturiyya school students were to consider the strong and weak points of both nations and to draw conclusions for the future.²⁶ In other words, from the beginning of the twentieth century he perceived the unavoidable confrontation between the Zionist and the Arab national movements and sought to prepare his students for it.²⁷

While Sakakini believed the teacher's and the school's role was to serve the students, he regarded service to society and nation as their main obligation. This was accomplished through education that instilled in its students patriotism; complete loyalty to the Arab nation with its heritage, homeland, language, culture, and customs; and conduct expressing generosity and respect. In that way, he felt, the school would help defend the homeland, the nation, and its history.

The school will be able to withstand all those Arabs with Western leanings, despairing Arabs who are ashamed of being Arabs. The school can prevent the decline of the nation and the loss of the homeland. I teach this in every school I visit. The point is not to teach arrogance, racism, and vain pride but loyalty to the homeland, to the nation, and to one's roots.²⁸

In general, Sakakini did not differentiate between the role of a national political activist and a teacher in his classroom. Both can and must serve the homeland. Feeling keenly that Palestine was in great danger sharpened his perception of the teacher's national-political role. Every Palestinian had to prepare to defend the country. He described the peril: "The fate of the land is in darkness. There is no choice but to awake, cast a watchful eye, and act. I hope that I and all those active among this [our] people will have a role in defending the homeland from danger."²⁹

Sakakini saw five means by which to arouse national feeling among Palestinians. The first and most important of these were schools, followed by civil/social organizations, newspapers, the arts (including theater), and religious institutions. Schools, he felt, were the force capable of moving society, culture, and politics, and changing society from its very foundations. While he held some mission schools and their Arabic teachers in high esteem, he did not believe that missionary education could lead Arab society to a national revival because its main loyalty lay elsewhere.³⁰ Yet Sakakini believed Arab education

was unprepared to achieve these highest goals, inter alia because professional teachers with political awareness and a strategic view of Arab society were sadly lacking:

Most of the schools here are foreign missionary institutions. The state schools are still weak and primitive, and are not being appropriately used ... It is essential that in the foreign and in the state schools there should be patriotic teachers concerned with reviving national feeling.³¹

Literature, in Sakakini's opinion, was one of the keys to reviving national feeling. A patriotic teacher should do everything possible to use Arabic literature to arouse his students and to breathe the love of life into them. He advised teachers to use the works of authors who symbolized the ultimate in Arabic prose and poetry, like al-Mutanabbi, Abu Firas, Abu Tammam, al-Buhturi, and 'Antara. He warned teachers against allowing students to encounter cheap, immoral literature about drinking alcohol and chasing women, which poisoned the spirit, numbed the senses, and distanced the student from any national commitment.³²

Sakakini's distress regarding foreign domination was not only with regard to the British; Sakakini despised the Ottomans, too. In his diaries, he wrote:

I would like to see the revival of the Arab nation, even as the Ottomans have the empire that they themselves lead ... The Arabs are only soldiers in the ranks ... Are we doomed to be the lowest of the nations ... The Turks are working toward their plans and hopes while the Arabs have no hopes at all.³³

At al-Dusturiyya, his own school, and while the Ottomans still ruled the land, he allowed students full liberty to voice hostility to them. He refused to participate in Ottoman military ceremonies, unlike most state and private schools in Jerusalem. It placed him in a predicament, for the authorities questioned his loyalty.

Education under the British Mandate

By 1919, Sakakini understood that a British Mandate would rule Palestine with or without Arab consent. He knew, too, that with their huge empire, the British had long-established interests in the Arab region.³⁴ Additionally, he doubted Palestinians' ability to run a state themselves, for, among other reasons, he lacked confidence in Palestinian Arab leadership.³⁵ Before March 1919, Sakakini clarified his political position to Arab leaders: Palestine should be part of an independent Greater Syria, and there would be no room for Jewish immigration to the country. This position was important for his own national identity. He had a deep sense of belonging to the Arab people, its language, history, tradition and morality, and the Jews of Palestine were citizens of Greater Syria.³⁶ He came to understand that the British Mandate over Palestine was unavoidable and accepted it but continued to struggle for the interests of Arab society.³⁷ Hence he met

frequently with British officers concerned with education, trying to convince them that preventing Jewish immigration was supremely important.³⁸

Shortly after the British entered the country, Sakakini met with Major Tadman, the British educational director for Palestine. Stating his educational creed and the reforms necessary in Arab state schools, he stressed that the future of Arab society in Palestine depended on its state schools, meaning that cooperation between society and the schools could revive that society and propel it forward into modernization that would lead to progress and liberty.³⁹ He declared:

In any case, we need schools that will implant in the students' minds and spirits freedom, nobility, self-respect, courage, integrity, trustworthiness, and the other values essential to freeing each generation from the ignorance, indolence and subservience in which it has languished for generations.⁴⁰

Sakakini outlined for Tadman the principles he applied at his Dusturiyya school and the patriotic spirit of his activity. Sakakini urged Tadman to establish a department of vocational schooling staffed by Palestinians with advanced training in education, loyal Palestinian patriots who would have broad authority in Arab state education.⁴¹

In his lengthy conversation with Tadman and his deputy, Colonel Tyler, on establishing a committee to direct Arab state education, Sakakini saw the following conditions as essential for its success:

1. It was to be independent as regards curricula, hiring and firing teachers, professional grades and salaries, textbook selection, and supervision of teachers and schools.
2. All committee members were to be well-educated, skilled professionals and should have national Arab orientations.
3. The committee should not have foreign members.
4. Membership should be limited, to avoid internal arguments and schisms.
5. Committee members would be chosen by Arab society and by teachers and principals in Arab schools.⁴²

Sakakini explained to the British officials, some of whom studied Arabic with him, that without clear conditions and criteria there was no point in establishing an education committee. On 14 March 1919, he was officially appointed to the committee and confirmed his acceptance three days later, hoping to realize his dream of an independent, progressive, and national Arab educational system.⁴³ It was not long, however, before Sakakini grew dissatisfied with the membership and powers of the committee. He protested to Tyler, his friend and student:

I agreed to join the committee out of the respect and confidence that I have for you. But the day you leave your position in Jerusalem I shall resign ... because the committee is not to decide on curricula, textbooks, or appointment of teachers ... The government appointed the committee

members when the community and the schools were supposed to have elected them.⁴⁴

Sakakini indeed resigned when he found out that the British set up the national education committee to serve British policy, not Arab national interests, as he, maybe naively, previously thought or hoped.⁴⁵ From the third volume of his diaries, it appears that in Sakakini's discussions with British officials from 1919–1920, he insisted at all times that the education system the British set up had to serve and advance the Arab population. In 1920, he resigned as principal of the Arab Teachers' Training College, protesting the appointment of Sir Herbert Samuel, a Zionist Jew, as High Commissioner.⁴⁶ In Sakakini's contacts with the British he insisted that Arab society could develop only through its schools, especially the village schools. He believed that cooperation between village society and schools was the only way to change the deplorable state of the majority.⁴⁷

Sakakini emphasized his opposition to the British Mandate in a June 1920 letter to the British chief administrator of Palestine, Major-General Louis Bols, who left the country in 1920 in protest against Mandatory policies, which he refused to carry out. Sakakini thanked Bols for his courageous decision and hoped many British officers would do likewise. He stressed Palestinian opposition to all foreign rule, concluding with a question, an explanation, and a request:

What will be the state of this country when you leave? Nobody knows, but what we do know is this: we Arabs shall remain Arabs, free and independent Arabs and good Arabs. Finally, allow me to ask you a favor and that is, when you go home, please convey to Europe that we do not trust Europe, we do not respect Europe, and we do not love Europe.⁴⁸

As an educator and a patriot, Sakakini took part in the cooperation between school and community. In particular he encouraged schools to establish student councils that would work on behalf of village society, which happened in such villages as 'Ayn Yabrud, Turmus'ayya, and Sinjil in the Ramallah district. The councils dealt with issues like communal hygiene, raising public awareness and giving information to the students' parents. A "literacy committee" read and explained newspapers, as well as selections from textbooks to villagers. When necessary they wrote letters, too.⁴⁹ Again and again, Sakakini would explain to teachers how to give education a clearly national goal. He would assemble teachers and principals in his home for model lessons on how to insert national messages into a text. Visiting Nazareth schools in 1934, he addressed teachers on the subject of "Education – Both Professional and National." In his diary he wrote:

I chose a poem of Shawqi's, "Two Birds in Hijaz,"⁵⁰ to instruct the teachers. Among other things, I asked which line should be the poem's title. They chose "Nothing is dearer than the homeland." I asked the teachers to teach this poem and have the students repeat five times the line they chose as a title. Afterwards all the students would be asked to declaim the title in

unison. The teachers told me they were most deeply moved when the students shouted, “Long live the homeland!” The country needs new blood, and I promised myself to foster this new blood so as to cleanse the homeland of those outdated leaders ... from the world of the past who must step down and speedily make way for the new.⁵¹

With all his heart, Sakakini believed that worthy professional teachers could change reality in Arab society from its very foundations, delivering it from the failing traditional leadership that was in peril of losing the homeland. Hence, almost every day during his twelve years as inspector he would meet teachers and principals, doing whatever he could to kindle enthusiasm for national issues. Here is what he asked of teachers he met with in Tiberias in December 1934:

I told them we are a thousand teachers dispersed through the villages, the cities, and the desert. We are a huge force and we are charged with a heavy, fateful responsibility. If each of us is a patriot and infuses his pupils with a patriotic spirit, we can organize a free army, brave, noble, and educated, to defend the homeland. The teachers were enthusiastic about what I said. That is what I do in every school I visit. I am not afraid and not answerable to anyone.⁵²

He thought that the education department of the British Mandate managed Arab education in a corrupt, unprofessional, and colonialist manner. Even as a senior staff member in that establishment, he did not shrink from sharp criticism. In January 1932, he wrote his son Sari, in America:

Governments tend to be antiquated bodies with vested interests that care only that work should get done, not that it should make progress or show renewal. If as a teacher you try to take teaching forward with some innovative, pioneering, and creative idea, you will be seen as a troublemaker who has to go. Your father has tried his luck with governments. What do you say about the education department that finances, fires, transfers, or promotes only according to its own interests and a predetermined policy, and not according to professional principles and standards? What do you say about an education department that prefers the corrupt, the base, the ignoramus, and the liar over the honorable, educated, and courteous individual? Is it not strange that it employs a spy who is a corrupt alcoholic, an ignorant, hypocritical, and interested party, and promotes him?⁵³

As a patriotic and a moral educator, Sakakini thought several times about resigning from the department of education, which he criticized so sharply and publicly, feeling he could not continue in the corrupt system that was deliberately destroying the future of Arab society and the education of its young people. “If not for my family responsibilities, I’d

give that position one kick, and go back to a free life.”⁵⁴ About his hesitations and pangs of conscience, he wrote to Sari:

We always thought that what characterized Ottoman rule was inefficiency, hypocrisy, deceit, corruption, and nepotism, but it turns out that the present British rule is no better at all ... The British are trying to control me and to silence me, they can't stand me any more ... But I continue bold and daring, rebellious and disobedient. In this way I always help teachers who come to me with complaints about all sorts of discrimination. They know discrimination is something I cannot stand.⁵⁵

Despite his bitterness and his criticism of the British Mandate, especially its education department, Sakakini derived satisfaction from his work as a school inspector, regarding it as a mission that enabled him to serve his country and his people. It encouraged him as he visited almost every Arab state school, teaching and illustrating for the benefit of principals and teachers. He felt pride on entering a school where he saw signs of modern education that was democratic, national in spirit, self-respecting, and innovative, particularly when he recognized his own contribution.⁵⁶ His students and graduates should, he thought, acquire a broad, modern science-oriented education along with a code of noble moral values and, most important of all, a sense of responsibility for Arab society. They were to assume individual but also general responsibility. Through political activity they would deepen their national ideology.⁵⁷

Despite Sakakini's success as an educator and his persistent attempts to realize his dream of an independent national Arab educational system that would work to liberate and revive the homeland, his hopes were denied and his dreams shattered. Three elements were too strong for him: the Mandatory government, the Zionist movement, and the traditional Arab leadership, which, according to Sakakini, lacked both ability and unity.⁵⁸ His disappointment in Arab society was worst of all. He understood that it was for the most part ignorant and simply incapable of confronting the challenges that beset it. This convinced him that the last remaining hope was to educate the youth, the students in schools:

The Arab nation at present is divided into two parts: one has given up its nationality as regards dress and customs, and belongs to foreign, Western culture. You enter a home and hear only French or English ... The second part remains Arab but feels inferior, unable to be proud of being an Arab and hoping to get rid of its Arab nationality. No wonder. The condition of Arab society is nothing to be proud of. A nation that feels confused about itself is a dying nation ... In every school I entered I preached the same messages, I fulfilled my mission, and asked that each school should have one slogan, a line from a poem by Ibn al-Rumi: I have a homeland I shall never give up and never let others acquire.⁵⁹

In summary, Sakakini placed no boundary between education and politics. He believed his educational role did not end with teaching a subject. He believed that a worthy educator must be actively involved in his community's life, trying to improve it as he adopts a comprehensive worldview. Hence, as we have seen, he sharply criticized the British Mandate government, even though it employed him, and as early as 1933 he even raised the possibility of a general Arab rebellion against it:

All Arab protests have been in vain. If this goes on we shall have only two choices: to restrain ourselves and wait to prevent outbursts of rage – in which case madness will increase – or to declare a revolt that will make our beautiful Palestine a land of rebellion.⁶⁰

Inner Contradictions and Multiple Identities

With all his undisputed patriotic commitment and his unrelenting criticism of the British Mandate and of Western culture, Sakakini's life as he lived it reveals sharp, even contradictory transitions between multiple national, religious, and cultural identities.⁶¹ His personal diaries show that his religious identity was not clear and stable, as he changed from Greek Orthodoxy to complete secularism as a Freemason partly due to his tense relations with the Church. His immense esteem for and devotion to classical Arabic culture could veer to the culture of the West. The Arab patriot par excellence joined the bureaucratic establishment of the Mandate. The liberal humanistic teacher turned to nationalist military education. Once a teacher and a friend to Zionist Jews like Khawaja Ivri and Alter Levine, he became a bitter foe of the Zionist enterprise. The onetime follower of Nietzsche later rejected his philosophical principles. These confusions and contradictions in Sakakini's identity do not seem to have been adequately noticed.⁶²

Examining Sakakini's diaries also reveals a clear pattern: In financial straits and unemployed, as his debts accumulated, Sakakini gave up some of the principles and positions on which he wrote so extensively. Financial distress led him to become a supervisor of schools under the Ottomans even if he was critical toward their rule. For the same reason, under the British Mandate he occupied the post of supervisor of Greek Orthodox schools for twelve years despite his long struggle with their directors. He headed the Arab Teachers' College in Jerusalem and taught British officers Arabic, even though he regarded the British as imperialistic supporters of Zionism. While the historian's task is not to judge, the question arises as to the ethics of such a course. Is there not a deviation from weighty principles, first of all in collaborating with the side regarded as an alien and a cruel conqueror? Do settling one's debts and a better salary truly justify a significant change of principled positions? Or is this perhaps a natural, inevitable human tendency that indicates neither moral contradiction nor regression?

Two reasonable explanations, moreover, shed light on his conflicted if colorful personality. First, he lived in the United States during the years 1907–1908. There he was exposed for the first time to Western culture and social behavior. Western intellectual

perceptions produced within him deep conflict and even a sense of dualism, leading to sharp criticism of Arab society, even to the point of rejection. This was particularly true in the first years of the British Mandate and again in 1926, when he was made inspector of Arabic instruction in the Arab education system in Palestine. During these two periods he leaned definitely toward Western culture, regarding it as the fulfillment of a personal dream. In 1917, when imprisoned in Damascus and fearful of a death sentence, he made a will instructing his son Sari to study and live in the West, preferably in the United States. As a British civil servant in Jerusalem, again and again he tried to use his connections to obtain a position teaching Arabic in London.

The longing to leave Jerusalem for the life and culture of the West waxed powerful when he was unemployed, without an income and living in poverty. During World War I and again from 1922 to 1926, that was indeed his situation. He eked out a living from giving private lessons and with the help of friends, notably the Husayni family. When his situation got worse, his doubts grew sharper and broke through the surface. By contrast, when employed and earning well, he went back to the original Arab national and cultural identity to which he adhered for most of his life.

The second reason for Sakakini's identity conflicts was the ever-changing political reality in the country in the first half of the twentieth century. The Palestinian Arab community went from four hundred years of Ottoman foreign rule to British foreign rule. They saw the British as imperialists, their rule in Palestine parallel to their rule over India, Egypt, and parts of Africa. As a native intellectual scrutinizing his surroundings, he now faced a challenging inner conflict between admiration and respect for the foreign "conqueror's" Western culture and the need for a new native anti-imperialist outlook to protect the homeland. Such worldviews were widespread, flourishing in British and French colonies from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Sakakini keenly felt the dualism involved in admiring some aspects of the foreign conqueror's culture even while obligations to the homeland demanded a struggle against the foreign invader.⁶³ In this way, Sakakini's story is like that of other native Arab intellectuals who were deeply disappointed by Western culture with its cruel colonial conquests and returned to their national culture with a moral obligation to present it as a worthy alternative. One such person, a devoted friend of Sakakini, was George Antonius.⁶⁴ According to Edward Said, Antonius's book *The Arab Awakening* (1938) was designed to counter T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), whose *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* described the Arab Rebellion. In his book, Antonius declared that Arab leaders and intellectuals should offer their own narrative to reflect a native Arab view.⁶⁵

The foregoing analysis indicates that throughout his career Sakakini lauded and esteemed the history of the Arabs, regarding its full appreciation as the means to restore the honor of the past and as the basis for Arab culture of the future. It runs like a silken thread throughout his diaries, which are full of references to Arab heroes and historical symbols. From the mid-1930s, he embraced his Arab identity along with the broader national struggle that went beyond the borders of Palestine. It is not our intention to, nor can we, reconcile this with his earlier attraction to Western culture.

Ambivalence about Zionism

Sakakini was among the first educated Palestinians to identify the purposes of the Zionist movement and warn against them in the local press. He consistently regarded Zionism as an immoral endeavor seeking to establish a home for the Jews at the expense of the Palestinian people. For him it meant reviving one people by undermining another. He expressed that view among Arab intellectuals and in the first years of the Mandate tried to enlist support among British officials. For decades after the end of the First World War, he also voiced his opinions among eminent Zionist Jews, including Professor Judah Magnes, YOSHUA ben Hananiah, Alter Levine, and Israel Bernstein (referred to by Sakakini as Khawaja Ivri) in stormy dialogues. In 1944, Sakakini wrote an open letter to David Ben-Gurion in the newspaper *Falastin*, fiercely attacking the Zionist intent to take over the country and bring disaster upon the Palestinians. Regarding rights to the land he wrote:

Ben-Gurion says there is no Jew in the world who does not want to reach an understanding with the Arab nation ... If so, both sides are ready for an understanding. On what? We say to the Jews that what is yours is yours and what is ours is ours. But their answer is negative. We tell them we will let them have freedom of religion, movement, expression, education, and employment. The Jews say no. What, then, do you want? The Jews are clever and they are deceitful. They want the understanding with the Arabs to serve their own interests. They want not justice and not logic ... They want us to say to them: Palestine is your country, you have returned after a long absence ... so take it back ... If Palestine is not enough for you we'll give you Transjordan and maybe even Lebanon ... or even Iraq ... and Egypt ... Our cousins, the time is your time, the world is your world, indulge yourselves as you please, for you are the Chosen People.⁶⁶

It is strange, however, that despite this clearly militant stance, Sakakini found nothing contradictory or wrong in his long friendships with Zionist Jews, notably Ivri and Levine. He knew well that they were intermediaries for the Zionist movement, buying lands from Arabs, especially in the Jerusalem area. Both studied Arabic with him, and both conversed with him openly, not as academics and intellectuals but as affirmed Zionists, about Jewish rights to the land. Loyal to his friend as Arab tradition demands, Sakakini even endangered himself by sheltering Levine from the Turks who were looking for him. Put otherwise, Sakakini, a self-declared educator of high principles, saved the Zionist activist out of steadfast adherence to the Arab code of behavior although Levine's aim was to rule the homeland that Sakakini exhorted to save at all costs! Sakakini even taught Arabic and English in a Zionist school, borrowed money from a Zionist Jewish bank, and dialogued with prominent Zionists. But he did not mention this in discussions with Palestinian friends, or even in his diaries.⁶⁷

Sakakini, then, spoke two languages. The first, with which he addressed Arab society, was patriotic and sharply anti-Zionist. In the second, conciliatory and tolerant, he spoke

to the Jewish Zionist side. Such contradictory positions are difficult if not impossible to bridge or clarify logically, even in the case of a multicultural humanist, a man of great tolerance. It seems that on the issue of the two national movements, Sakakini himself was more pragmatic and more practical than the message he transmitted to Arab society.

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Endnotes

- 1 Kamil Mahmud Khalla, *Filastin wa-l-intidab al-Britani, 1922–1939* [Palestine and the British Mandate, 1922–1939] (Beirut: PLO Research Center, 1974).
- 2 Mustafa Kabha, *Thawrat 1936 fi Filastin: dawafi'uha wa in'ikasatuha* [The 1936 Revolt in Palestine: Its Incentives and Repercussions] (Nazareth: al-Qabas, 1988).
- 3 Kamal Moed, "Development of Arab Education in the Villages of Mandatory Palestine, 1920–1948: 'Arraba, Sakhnin, and Dayr Hanna as Case Studies" [in Hebrew] (MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, 2008).
- 4 Sakakini's eight-volume diary serves as the main source for this article. Khalil al-Sakakini, *Yawmiyat Khalil al-Sakakini: Yawmiyat. Rasa'il. Ta'ammulat* [The Diaries of Khalil al-Sakakini: Diaries. Letters. Reflections], ed. Akram Musallam (Ramallah: Institute for Jerusalem Studies and the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center, 2003–2010).
- 5 Ishaq Musa al-Husayni, *Khalil al-Sakakini: al-adib al-mujaddid* [Khalil al-Sakakini: The Reformer and Man of Letters] (Jerusalem: Markaz al-abhath al-Islamiyya, 1989), 27.
- 6 On Sakakini's political activity, see a long chapter in Yoram Kahati, "The Role of Some Leading Arab Educators in the Development of the Ideology of Arab Nationalism" (PhD diss., London School of Economics, 1994), 52–77, 92–103.
- 7 Sharif Husayn was descended from the Prophet Mohammed, hence the title *sharif*, indicating nobility and distinguished ancestry. On Sakakini's time in prison, see "Khalil Sakakini's Ottoman Prison Diaries: Damascus (1917–1918)," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 20 (Winter 2004): 7–23.
- 8 Gideon Shiloh, *Such Am I, O World: The Life and Diaries of a Palestinian Educator in Jerusalem* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1990), 13.
- 9 Shiloh, *Such Am I*, 13.
- 10 On his political activity in these years, see Khayriyya Qasimiyya, "Khalil al-Sakakini, 1878–1953," in *al-Mawsu'a al-Filastiniyya* [the Palestinian Encyclopedia], vol. 3 (Damascus: Hay'at al-mawsu'a al-Filastiniyya, 1984), 832–33.
- 11 Shiloh, *Such Am I*, 14.
- 12 Shiloh, *Such Am I*, 14.
- 13 Husayni, *Khalil al-Sakakini*, 32–34.
- 14 The house still stands in the Qatamon neighborhood and is used by the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO). On the house's construction, see Tom Segev, *The Time of the Red Anemones: Eretz Israel during the Mandate* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1999), 294–305.
- 15 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 2, 55.
- 16 Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi (1895–1951), from a highly educated Jerusalem family, was prominent in Palestinian education during the Mandate. He directed the Arab Teachers' Training College and wrote important books on education. On his importance as an educator, see: 'Ajjaj Nuwayhid, *Rijal min Filastin* [Men of Palestine] (Beirut: Mansurat Filastin al-muhtalla, 1981), 70–75; Ilyas Sahhab, "al-Fikr al-siyasi al-tarbawi" [Political Educational Thought], in *al-Mawsu'a al-Filastiniyya*, vol. 3, 718–723.
- 17 Husayni, *Khalil al-Sakakini*, 71
- 18 Kahati, "The Role of Some Leading Arab Educators," 107.
- 19 Ya'qub al-'Awdat, *Min a'lam al-fikra wa-l-adab fi Filastin* [Prominent Figures of Thought and Literature in Palestine] (Jerusalem: Dar al-Isra', 1992), 280.
- 20 Muhammad Habib Allah, "al-Fikr al-tarbawi 'ind Khalil al-Sakakini" [Khalil al-Sakakini's

- Educational Thought], in *Khalil al-Sakakini bayn al-wafa' wa-l-dhikra* [Khalil al-Sakakini between Redemption and Remembrance], ed. Nawaf 'Abd Hasan (al-Tayba: Markaz ihya' al-turath al-'Arabi, 1991), 73.
- 21 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 2, 55. He was inconsistent in his use of concepts like "Arab nation" and "homeland," their meaning changing with the context. Usually he referred to the Arab people within the borders of Mandatory Palestine. He used the words in a broader sense in 1917–1919, when Sharif Husayn's Great Arab Rebellion broke out. Sakakini was in a Turkish prison in Damascus, and the debate in Palestinian society was whether to join Faysal's Greater Syria or to accept the British Mandate. Sakakini then wrote as a pan-Arab nationalist. However, when British rule over Palestine and French rule over Syria commenced, he perceived the Arab nation's weakness and concentrated on Arab society in Mandatory Palestine.
 - 22 Jihad Ahmad Salih, *Khalil al-Sakakini, 1878–1953: Ra'id al-tajdid fi al-hayat al-adabiyya fi Filastin* [Khalil al-Sakakini, 1878–1953: A Pioneer of Reform in the Literary Life of Palestine] (Ramallah: al-Ittihad al-'am li-l-kuttab wa-l-udaba' al-Filastiniyyin, 2010), 22–24.
 - 23 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 2, 56. He discusses the matter at length with his Jewish student "Ivri."
 - 24 Notable participants included Raja'i and Salam al-Husayni, Khalil al-Budayri, Ishaq al-Husayni, and Salim Khayata. The group's name, *ikhwan al-safa* (Brethren of Purity), refers to a secret society of Muslim philosophers in Basra, Iraq, in the tenth century CE.
 - 25 Segev, *Time of the Red Anemones*, 89.
 - 26 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 2, 57–59.
 - 27 Fayiz 'Ali al-Ghul, 'Isa al-Na'uri, and 'Abd al-Hamid Yasin, *Dhikra al-Sakakini* [Remembering Sakakini] (Jerusalem: al-Maktaba al-'asriyya, 1957), 63. Yasin, from Jerusalem, was a student and close friend of Sakakini. They would meet almost daily, so Yasin was thoroughly familiar with his teacher's opinions and activities.
 - 28 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 6, 92–93.
 - 29 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 6, 25. Particularly in volumes 5 and 6, Sakakini wrote on the Jewish threat, the danger of their immigration and of selling them land in the 1930s.
 - 30 Kahati, "The Role of Some Leading Arab Educators," 109.
 - 31 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 2, 63.
 - 32 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 2, 63.
 - 33 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 2, 143.
 - 34 He was sure it was important to prevent Jewish immigration to Palestine and to convince the British of the justice of the Arab position.
 - 35 On Sakakini's view of Arab political leadership, see Salih, *Khalil al-Sakakini*, 37–40.
 - 36 Salih, *Khalil al-Sakakini*, 38–41.
 - 37 On Sakakini's hostility regarding the British Mandate, see Salih, *Khalil al-Sakakini*, 33–37.
 - 38 Sakakini's diaries record attempts to cultivate anti-Zionism among British officers in the beginning of British rule, convinced as he was that most were pro-Zionist.
 - 39 Fawzi al-As'ad, *Khalil al-Sakakini, 1878–1947* [in Arabic] (Nablus: al-Jam'iyya al-'ilmiyya, 1994), 47.
 - 40 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 3, 44.
 - 41 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 3, 47.
 - 42 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 3, 99.
 - 43 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 3, 99; Kahati, "The Role of Some Leading Arab Educators," 112.
 - 44 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 3, 102.
 - 45 In April 1919, Tyler as district officer for Nazareth offered to appoint Sakakini his personal adviser. Sakakini refused, regarding the offer as an affront to his principles of national loyalty.
 - 46 After he resigned and distanced himself from any government position, Sakakini was free to engage in intensive political activity, countrywide, especially between 1922 and 1926. Then he was appointed national inspector for the teaching of Arabic, a position he held until retirement in 1938.
 - 47 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 3, 91.
 - 48 Israel State Archives, Section 65, Subsection 17, File Peh-350/27 (Abandoned Documents).
 - 49 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 4, 200.
 - 50 The poem by the great Egyptian poet Ahmad Shawqi (1868–1932) is about love of and loyalty to one's country. Sakakini used it often in his model lessons for teachers and principals.
 - 51 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 5, 384.
 - 52 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 5, 387.
 - 53 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 4, 160.
 - 54 Quoted in Qasimiyya, "Khalil al-Sakakini," 832. The inspector's position was his only income and barely sufficed for the family due to the cost of his son's education in the United States.
 - 55 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 5, 72.
 - 56 Sakakini, *Yawmiyat*, vol. 5, 60.
 - 57 Kahati, "The Role of Some Leading Arab Educators," 114.
 - 58 'Awdat, *Min a'lam*, 280.
 - 59 Quoted in Qasimiyya, "Khalil al-Sakakini," 827–835.
 - 60 Qasimiyya, "Khalil al-Sakakini," 827–835.
 - 61 Segev, *Time of the Red Anemones*, 30.

- 62 Nadim Bawalsa, "Sakakini Defrocked," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 42 (Summer 2010): 5–25.
- 63 Edward Said, "The Road Inward and the Emergent Opposition," in *Coloniality and the Postcolonial Condition* [in Hebrew], ed. Yehouda Shenhav (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute and HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 2004), 83–106.
- 64 Antonius was of Lebanese extraction, educated at Victoria College in Cairo and at Cambridge University. He was an adviser to Arab leaders like Sharif Husayn, his son Faysal, and al-Haj Amin al-Husayni. Like Sakakini he was employed by the Mandatory government in Palestine in the education department and as an administrator in the secretariat. He resigned in 1930, then left for New York and became a member of the Institute for International Research.
- 65 Said, "The Road Inward," 89.
- 66 The article is quoted from H. Makhul, "Khalil al-Sakakini, insan in sha' Allah" [Khalil al-Sakakini, A Human, God Willing], in *Khalil al-Sakakini*, ed. 'Abd Hasan, 55.
- 67 Gideon Weigert, "'Arab Filastin khilal al-nisf al-awwal min hadha al-qarn" [Palestine's Arabs in the First Half of This Century], *al-Yawm*, 24 August 1955, 4.