



When Native Jews Ceased to be Arabs

The main theme of this issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly File* focuses on the status and tribulations of the native Jewish community in Palestine on the eve of Zionism. Much of the debate on this subject assumes a binary paradigm in which Jews and Arabs appear as two exclusive (or near-exclusive) entities that predated modern nationalism. It projects a definition of Jewish ethnicity from the Zionist period extrapolated backwards. The three essays presented here suggest three different approaches on this subject for the same historical period. Tamari's essay on the life and work of Ishaq al-Shami, the Hebron Jewish writer, suggests that many native and Sephardic Jews were culturally Arab even though their national Arab consciousness was amorphous. Kark and Glass, by contrast, focus on Sephardi-Muslim (and sometimes Sephardi-Christian) symbiotic relations as manifested in the life of Jerusalem's elite. The third essay, by Jacobson, takes an agnostic position on this duality, but suggests a very fluid period of national character formation in which language played a critical role in the creation of new ethnic nationalisms within

the greater Syrian domain of the Ottoman empire.

This contested debate takes place against the recent theorization of Jewish ethnicity in the West, particularly in North America, highlighted by the important work of Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*¹, in which the author traces the transition that occurred when the dominant conception of Jews changed from an immigrant ethnic minority to a cultural merger with mainstream American majority culture - thus becoming 'generic white people'. The argument here, in the context of the Arab East, turns this conception on its head. It suggests that native Levantine Jews were part of the larger Arab culture until the onset of anti-Ottoman nationalist movements (particularly under the impact of Zionism) separated out the native Jewish community of Palestine (and later of Iraq and Syria), altering their affinities with their Muslim and Christian compatriots.

The energization of intellectual discussion about the future of Palestine has made ideological linkages with these debates, first visible in the ranks of the Israeli Black Panther Movement in the 1970s and 80s, and later in works of Alkalay, Shohat, Ratz-Krotkin, and Yehuda Shenhav on the re-emergence of Mizrahi identity and the future of Israeli-Palestinian bi-nationalism. Although these are minority voices, their original analysis and its potency has major intellectual and political weight.

In Memoriam

This issue of *JQF* appears in the aftermath of the passing of three outstanding intellectuals - Sami Hadawi, Muhammad Hamzeh Ghanayem, and Yusif Sayegh - each leaving his mark on our understanding of the Palestinian predicament:.

Sami Hadawi, the first director of the Institute for Palestine Studies, was a native Jerusalem scholar. Born in 1904, Hadawi was in charge of the land taxation department of Palestine during the British Mandate period. He worked as a "land specialist" for the United Nations Palestine Conciliation Commission (UNCCP) in New York after the termination of the mandate and the fall of Palestine. At the UNCCP, he was entrusted with the task of identifying and assessing Palestinian land property in the territories of Palestine that Israel had occupied. In 1959, Hadawi joined the Arab Information Center of the Arab League, and in 1965 he became director of the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut. He is the author of many books including *Palestine: Loss of a Heritage* (1963), *Bitter Harvest* (1967), *Village Statistics Indicating a Classification and Ownership of Land in 1945*, *Palestinian Right and Losses in 1948*, and he co-authored *The Palestine Diary 1914-1948*. After his retirement, Hadawi resided in Canada until his death earlier this year.

The economist **Yusif Sayegh** was the founder and first director of the Palestine Liberation Organization Planning Center in Beirut. A native of Tiberias, Sayegh was born in 1916. He served as a member of the Palestine National Council and the PLO executive committee. He was a professor of economics at the American University of Beirut and the author of numerous books about Palestine and its economy.

Poet, writer and translator **Mohammad Hamza Ghanayem** was the youngest of the three deceased. He grew up inside the Green Line as an Arab citizen of the state of Israel, an experience embodied in his work. He made his mark as a researcher at Madar, The Palestinian Center for Israeli Studies in Ramallah and the editor of the weekly supplement of *al-Ayyam*, *Qaday Israeliyeh*. Ghanayem became known as

a prolific translator of Hebrew works, and commentator on Israeli affairs for the Arab reader.

We at *Jerusalem Quarterly File* mourn the loss of these three scholars who left their mark on Palestine and Palestinians, whether in exile or in the homeland.

As of the following issue, the *Jerusalem Quarterly File* will change its name to *The Jerusalem Quarterly*.

Endnotes

¹ Rutgers University Press, 1998.

AVAILABLE from The Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre and The Institute of Jerusalem Studies

