

In the Midst of the Chaos : Christian Arab Nationalists of Historical Palestine in Early 20th Century

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In the Midst of the Chaos: Christian Arab Nationalists of Historical Palestine in Early 20th Century

Akiko SUGASE

National Museum of Ethnology, Japan

1. Introduction

This paper deals with ‘Christian Arabs’ and their contribution to ‘Arab nationalism’ in ‘Historical Palestine.’ These terms are unpopular, so I would like to describe them before addressing the main topic.

Historical Palestine means the area which has historically been referred to as Palestine (Filastīn in Arabic). It would be all the areas currently controlled by Israel, except for the Golan Heights. In addition, Historical Palestine is also a part of the Arabic-speaking region in the East Mediterranean centred in Damascus, called Bilād al-Shām (Land of al-Shām or al-Shām region) in Arabic. Considering the history of the free exchange of people and culture in the region, this paper will focus on the relationship between Lebanon and historical Palestine.

The al-Shām region has historically been a religiously diverse area. Muslims (both Sunnī and Shī’a), Christian (Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholics, and so on), Druze, and Jews coexisted, though sometimes in tension. The Oriental Orthodox churches are a group of non-Chalcedonian churches consisting of the Armenian Apostolic, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, and Syriac Orthodox Churches. The Indian Orthodox (Malankara Orthodox Syrian) and Eritrean Orthodox Churches are not included in this context, as I deal with Christians under Ottoman rule in this paper. The Ottoman Empire conquered the area in 1516, and Christians (Eastern Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic), Jews, and Shī’ites were recognised as non-Muslim religious communities and allowed freedom of religion in exchange for paying a *jizya* and military exemption tax. *Jizya* is a per capita tax that has been imposed by Islamic dynasties on ‘Dhimmis,’ i.e. Christians and Jews. They were regarded as ‘People of the Book’ who shared the monotheistical scriptures with Muslims and were deemed to be eligible for legal protection. The idea of Dhimmi and their treatment originates from the way in which Prophet Muhammad dealt with non-Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula.

After the Ottoman Empire signed capitulations with France and other European countries, Roman Catholic missions entered Ottoman territory with merchants and established bases. French consulates and merchants began to hire local Christians as

interpreters, and France and the Roman Catholic Church increased their influence on the Christian community. In the latter half of the 17th century, a pro-Roman Catholic sect emerged within the Eastern Orthodox Church, led by Euthymios Saifi, metropolitan of Tyre and Sidon, which emphasised worship in Arabic rather than Greek, dividing the church into two. The pro-Roman Catholics split off from the Eastern Orthodox Church and established the Melkite Catholic Church, which belonged to the Roman Catholic Church but had its own church organisation, headed by an Arab patriarch.¹⁾

Arab nationalism is an ideology which calls for Arabs to establish an Arab state and solidarity among all Arabs. It emerged in the late 19th century among the East Mediterranean Arabs under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. At first, it began to sprout in the mid-19th century as part of the Arabic renaissance movement (*al-Nahda* in Arabic, the movement) that appeared in Cairo, Beirut, and Damascus simultaneously to encourage Arab citizens to use Modern Standard Arabic as their mother tongue, and it is noteworthy that non-Muslim minorities such as Christians and Jews played extremely important roles in its emergence. The Arabic language is classified into Classic Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic. Classic Arabic is used in the Quran and is not used in everyday life. After the spread of Islam in the Middle East, Classic Arabic was simplified and transformed by the influence of pre-Islamic languages in each region, such as ancient Syriac. This is colloquial Arabic, which has numerous dialects. Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, most Arab citizens were illiterate, except for a few groups, such as governmental officials, wealthy merchant families, and religious people. Modern Standard Arabic was created by the intellectuals of the Arabic renaissance for the average Arab to reclaim Arabic as their own language. For example, in Beirut, it began with the project to translate the Bible into Arabic by the American missionaries, with great help from local Christian intellectuals, Butrus al-Bustānī and Nāsīf al-Yāzījī. Butrus al-Bustānī came from a Maronite Catholic family in the Chouf area²⁾ and joined this project after being converted into the Presbyterian faith. Nāsīf al-Yāzījī was born in a Melkite Greek Catholic family of Mount Lebanon and learned Classical Arabic on his own from the archives of monasteries. Throughout the Arabic renaissance, they continued to dedicate themselves to the public education of Arabic and made impassioned pleas for the unity of Arabic-speaking people. The movement then turned into a campaign for the independence of Arabs from the Ottoman Empire. Churches and monasteries play a significant role in the teaching of the Arabic language. The Church imported letterpresses from Italy to print newly translated Arabic Bibles, which were used to print Arabic language textbooks. The fact that there are many church-affiliated elementary and high schools in Lebanon and Palestine is proof that the activities of the Church, which focused on Arabic language education and early education using Arabic in the Arabic language revival movement, continue to this day.

After a remarkable contribution to the rise of Arab nationalism, Christians handed that role to Muslims, who are the overwhelming majority of the East Mediterranean Arabs. Most Christian leaders are still being honoured, but the Christian leaders of Arab nationalism in the Galilee (Northern Palestine) have faded into oblivion under Israeli rule. They were Gregorios Hajjar (Hajjār), a Melkite Catholic Bishop of Akka, Haifa,

Nazareth, and all of Galilee at that time,³⁾ and Najib Nassar (Najīb Nassār). Though commemorative activities for Hajjar have been held by his Christian followers such as Johnny Mansour, Nassar has been overlooked and underrated in these activities.

The study of Arab nationalism in Greater Syria, including historical Palestine, has relatively picked up pace since the 1990s, and Nassar has been regarded as a pioneer of Arab nationalism. Khalidi (1997) introduced his activities briefly and evaluated him as a pioneer of the Arab nationalist movement in Palestine, though he never focused on the latter half of Nassar's life, especially after the 1920s. Mandel (1976) stated that Nassar was an instigator who drove Palestinian peasants to anti-Jewish riots, though this claim has been criticised by Khalidi for mere speculation. Kabha and Seikaly went deeper into Nassar's activities than Khalidi. Kabha (2007: 25) noted several points that Khalidi had ignored, such as Nassar's support for the British Mandate rule in the early days and his liberal views at the Palestinian Arab Congress. However, he did not mention the reason for this. Seikaly (1995) also focused on his liberal stance at the Palestinian Arab Congress in following the currents of Arab nationalism in Haifa, the central city of the Galilee. Fleischmann (2003), meanwhile, focused on his wife Sadhij, a pioneer of women's activism in Palestine and positioned Nassar as the person who laid the groundwork for her image.

Shoumarī summed up the articles by *al-Karmil* that provide a brief history of Nassar, but the writings are not beyond the scope of the database (Shoumarī 1996). Throughout my interview with Shoumarī, he pointed out that poor access to Nassar's works avoids his revaluation as a pioneer of Arab nationalism. As an Arab Christian, Shehadeh (2010) also wrote a memoir of Nassar, as he learned that Nassar was his great uncle on his mother's side by chance. However, most of this work is just a series of essays based on his trekking activities to trace the path of Nassar's forced exile between 1914 to 1918 (Shehadeh 2010). It is called fiction rather than a memoir.

In this paper, I introduce Nassar's life and work concisely and consider why Nassar has been underrated by focusing on *Zionism: Its History, Objective, and Importance*, his first book.

2. Early Days and Background of Najib Nassar

Najib Nassar was born in the Greek Orthodox family of Ain 'Anūb in Chouf, a historic region of Lebanon in 1865, though his father converted to Protestantism. After studying pharmaceuticals and politics at the Beirut American University, Nassar began to work at the Scottish Hospital in Tiberias as a pharmacist. Subsequently, he moved from Lebanon to Galilee, where he would spend the rest of his life. His brothers also immigrated to Haifa and ran hotels and pharmacies, which were often advertised in the newspaper *al-Karmil*.

At the end of 1908, Najib moved to Haifa and founded *al-Karmil*, the first Arabic newspaper in Palestine. Starting with *al-Karmil*, Arabic newspapers proliferated in Palestine, such as *Filastīn* (Palestine) and *Mīrā al-Sharq* (Mirror or the East). *Filastīn*, which was founded immediately after *al-Karmil* and run by the Christian brothers Issa

al-Issa and Yousef al-Issa, remained the leading daily newspaper in Palestine for a long time until 1967. Issa al-Issa was a Christian Arab nationalist, alongside Nassar, who later became a vocal critic of Zionism and the British Mandate.⁴⁾ The considerable contributions of Christians to the newspaper industry is a testament to the church-led educational efforts that have flourished since the project to translate the Bible into Arabic.

In its early days, Nassar wrote most of the articles published in *al-Karmil* himself and asked for contributions by Arab nationalists in Lebanon and Egypt, such as Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī, the third son of Nāsīf al-Yāzījī. Most articles by Nassar were written without signature, or sometimes with the signature by ‘a reader.’ His attitude does not suggest that he was driven by a desire for honour to enhance his reputation; Nassar continued his unselfish attitude thereafter.

Since the early 1900s, disputes over land between Arab peasants and Jewish settlers began to break out in the Galilee, and sometimes there were deaths on both sides. In 1909, the Christian Arab farmers at al-Shajara village claimed their ownership of the land where the settlers of the Jewish settlement Sejira, adjacent to the village, began to settle and then attacked the settlement in April. Nassar, of course, covered the incident extensively in *al-Karmil*, but it has been suggested that he might have been one of the external factors that led to this incident (Mandel 1976: 70). As I noted before, Khalidi argued that there is no evidence supporting Mandel’s speculation (Khalidi 1997: 246), but in any case, he also claimed that Nassar’s involvement with the incident at al-Shajara village certainly had a significant impact on his views on Zionism.

2.1 The Series of *Zionism* and Flight to Desert

In March 1911, the first article with the title *Zionism* appeared in *al-Karmil*. 16 articles were published as part of this series. Until June, which were then quickly compiled into and published as a book within the same year. Assuming ‘Palestinians,’ whose mother tongue is Arabic and who inhabited the land called Palestine historically, to be his readers, this series introduced the history of Zionism, including its morph before Herzl,⁵⁾ and warned against its colonialist character citing the landgrab in the Galilee by the Zionist settlers. Needless to say, this is the first book to deal with Zionism in Arabic.

Zionism had a profound impact on Arabs in the East Mediterranean region. Major articles were reprinted in newspapers in the surrounding Arab region and within the Ottoman Empire, such as *al-Ahrām* in Egypt and *Filastīn* in Palestine. In addition, *al-Karmil* itself reprinted articles in a section called the ‘1910s Retrospective’ during the 1930s. The increase in the number of Zionist settlers and their takeover of land and other Zionist threats became visible within the sphere of people’s lives, both in urban and rural areas, and this may have led to a renewed focus on Nassar’s writing. According to Khalidi (1997: 124–126), 73 articles related to Zionism were published in 1911 alone. Excluding the transcription of these articles, a total of 134 articles related to Zionism were published by the time of *al-Karmil*’s suspension in 1940 (Khalidi 1997: 124–126).

In 1914, Nassar published an article criticising the Ottoman Empire’s entry into the First World War and became wanted for it, and he had to leave his wife and children to

live on the run for an extended period of time. *Al-Karmil*, which lacked its lead author and editor, also suffered a sobering hiatus from 1914 to 1918. In 1918, Nassar was arrested and imprisoned in Damascus, but was soon returned to Haifa by the end of the Great War. Subsequently, he became involved in the newly launched Palestinian Arab Conference in an advisory capacity rather than as a member.

2.2 Breakup with the Palestinian Arab Congress and Retirement from the Front Lines (1920s–1930s)

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, opinions were split among Palestinians over the British mandate rule and the Zionist settlements. In this context, the pro-British Nassar gradually lost his influence. The sending of an envoy to Britain sparked fierce controversy among the members of the Congress. Before the election of the delegation, Nassar appealed for the members of the delegation to be chosen fairly, regardless of religious differences. In the end, however, the two sides were divided over whether to include Gregorios Hajjar, Bishop of Galilee of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, as a candidate, with the forces led by notable Muslim families in Jerusalem and Christian merchants in Haifa (Seikaly 1995: 160–181). On this occasion, Nassar did not play any significant role.

In the wake of the shooting and sniping of participants in the anti-British and anti-Zionist demonstrations in the spring of 1921, Nassar ceased to express his pro-British stance. Even *al-Karmil* published a scathing article arguing that only the British and Jews would benefit from the development of Haifa. He also distrusted the notables-centric politics of Jerusalem and harshly criticised their stronghold, the Islamic High Council (Seikaly 1995: 187–189). However, as I will explain later, he treated Muslims and Christians fairly throughout his life and never gave too much lip service to Christians just because he himself was a Christian. During his flight from the Ottoman Empire, Nassar was betrayed by his Christian friends and was instead saved from danger by Muslim friends and Bedouins. For this reason, he seems to have been rather distrustful of Christians, sympathetic towards Muslims, especially those who were far removed from the mainstream of Arab nationalism, such as the rural peasants and Bedouins, and regarded them as comrades to be trusted. This is evident in the changes in his activities after this period.

From the mid-1920s, Nassar devoted his time to visiting local communist Arab nationalists and peasants. While criticising Zionism as usual, the articles published in *al-Karmil* also completely switched to content that explored the possibilities for industrial and agricultural development in Palestine, with some exceptions of a selection of articles from the decade. In 1923, Nassar helped his friend Abdullah Mukhlis found the Palestinian Arab National Party, with *al-Karmil* as its propaganda paper, but this party disappeared without any noticeable activity. Meanwhile, Nassar started the new series of articles named ‘Journey of Palestine and Eastern Jordan.’

He also wrote some Arab-nationalist novels, but there was no indication that they were widely read. Jamīl al-Baharī, a Christian journalist who was active in Haifa at the time, hailed him as the ‘Father of Palestine’ in his 1922 book, *The History of Haifa*,

indicating that he was still a popular figure in Haifa. Ironically, however, there is no denying that this was almost the last account of Nassar's disappearance as a leading political journalist.

Around the same time, Sadjij Nassar joined *al-Karmil* and began to help her husband as a co-editor and co-director. In 1926, she started her own section named 'The Women's Page' the first women's section in Palestinian newspapers, and published articles to promote gender equality and women's political participation (Fleischmann 2003: 71). Following the appearance of 'The Women's Page,' Nassar himself opened paired section named 'The Men's Page' to teach his colleagues how to be prepared to support gender equality, but this shift indicated that *al-Karmil's* editorial initiative had effectively shifted to Sadjij. In May 1930, Sadjij established the Haifa branch of the Arab Women's Union. She was viewed as a threat by the Mandate government for repeatedly staging 'assault demonstrations with children' on Arab shops favouring Mandate rule. Sadjij was arrested in March 1939 on charges of 'forcing' a strike on an Arab shopkeeper in Haifa, and after her release in 1940, she continued to write and edit in *al-Karmil*. By then, *al-Karmil* had been banned by the Mandate government but continued to print issues illegally. When Sadjij was arrested, her husband, Najib, was 74 years old and their son, Farouq, was 10 years old (Fleischmann 2003: 273). Although the year of her birth is unknown, Fleischmann speculates that Sadjij was probably in her mid-30s to mid-40s at the time.

2.3 Suspension of *al-Karmil* and the Last Days

Al-Karmil ceased publication in 1941 or 1942 (Shoumarī cites 1941 and Fleischmann 1942; the original copies dated 1942 do not exist in Palestine, so it is assumed to have been de facto dormant since 1941). It ended its role as a mouthpiece of Arab nationalism in Palestine, perhaps due to the arrest of Sadjij and her banishment, who, by then had almost become the chief writer. Nassar lived in Haifa until 1944, when he moved to Bīsān (Bet Shan in Hebrew), where he had long been considered a dear friend for his contributions to agricultural development. Shortly afterwards, however, he was admitted to the English hospital in Nazareth due to pulmonary failure and passed away at the end of 1947 (Fleischmann's speculation) or on 3 March 1948 (Shoumarī's speculation). His body was buried in the Eastern Orthodox Cemetery in Nazareth.

After the Nakba, Sadjij moved to Damascus via the UK to establish a branch of the Arab Women's Union. Fleischmann says she is believed to have died in Damascus in the 1970s, but the details are not known. The whereabouts of Nassar's son Farouq are also unknown. The Nakba/Al-Nakba, or 'the catastrophe' in Arabic, refers the chaos that arose at the time of the founding of Israel in 1948 and the resulting expulsion of Palestinian Arabs living in Historical Palestine. Palestinian refugees were scattered both outside and inside Israel.

3. Details of *Zionism* and Nassar's Feature as an Arab Nationalist

The contents of *Zionism* are divided into three main parts. Most parts are devoted to the

introduction of Zionism, with Nassar's views coming to the fore in it is only the last few pages.

Part 1: The Pre-Herzl Zionist Stream, Relying on the Jewish Encyclopedia

Parts 1 and 2 are an introduction to Zionism, relying entirely on the Jewish Encyclopaedia. In Part 1, Nassar describes the desire to return to Palestine based on Jewish doctrine, the nationalistic activities of pre-Herzl European Jews, and anti-Semitism in Europe.

Part 2: Zionism and the Zionist Congress

In this part, Nassar describes the last few years of Herzl's life, from his publication of *The Jewish State* (*Der Judenstaat*) in 1896 to his role in organising the Zionist Conference in Basel the following year, and his disappointing death in 1904. He also briefly summarises the activities of the Zionist Congress up to its sixth session. Even though it is mostly just a translation from the Jewish Encyclopaedia, it would be a valuable textbook on Zionism for those whose mother tongue is Arabic.

Part 3: Nassar's View on Zionism and A Strong Warning against It

Following the description of Zionism in Parts 1 and 2, Nassar describes his own views in Part 3. He warns that the Zionists, who are strongly supported by the patronage of European nations, forcibly acquired the land of Palestinian farmers to build a colonialist Jewish state. At the same time, he pointed out the powerlessness of the Ottoman Empire against Zionism.

I am deeply concerned ... Zionism is a politically and ethnically dangerous idea. It is racist and cunning in its ability to deftly take advantage of the powerful nations of Europe and use them for political purposes. Possession. It's obvious what would happen if such a group were to take over Palestinian land. Fortunately, due to a lack of funds, he was not able to obtain a certificate from the Ottoman Empire. The Zionists are sure to put us in danger (Nassār 1911: 60–61).

At the end of the third part of the book, titled 'What should we do (mādā nahtāj)' he tells his readers that the only way to protect themselves from the threat of Zionism is to organise and confront it themselves.

The non-Jewish peoples in the Ottoman Empire should unite across religious lines. There are 2.5 million non-Jewish Muslims in the Ottoman Empire. We can adequately counter Zionism. Now is the time for true nationalism (watanīya in Arabic) and good leadership. The Jews, too, have been transformed from a displaced people into a cohesive group with a leader, Herzl.

The Ottoman Empire today is a rule of law, but if the people are not directly involved in the government and contributing to the betterment of society, the people will have to perish.

The Zionists and their supporters (a group of European colonialist states) used their financial power to control the land they are trying to take over the Ottoman Empire, and with their moves, the Ottomans have extended their clutches to the Ottoman Empire inside the Ottoman Empire as well. Awareness (Osmaniyah) will be raised. There will be in our country (bilārd) a person like Herzl, who is devoted to the public good, and who does not spare himself for the sake of the public. We need strong leaders. In fact, there are many such figures buried among us. They simply do not yet realize their mission and do not have the courage to take the first step. Leaders, come out, their ideas have awakened and the time is already ripe.

What we need to do, above all, is to revitalize agriculture, industry and commerce to build up our economic strength. It is. That way, if the Ottoman Empire loses power, it can still fall prey to a Zionist land grab (Nassār 1911: 62–63).

4. Nassar's View of Arab Nationalism as Derived from *Zionism*

4.1 Sympathy for Muslims and the Poor, and Distrust of Wealthy Christians

Needless to say, all the articles published in *al-Karmil*, including the series on *Zionism*, were written for those whose native language was Arabic. However, in *Zionism*, Nassar calls for unity among his 'Muslim' readers; there is no call to Christians such as himself. Sadjij, his second wife, was the granddaughter of Bahā'ullāh, the founder of the Haifa-based Bahā'ī faith,⁶⁾ but there is no evidence that he was in fellowship with any other religious minorities. This may simply be due to the fact that Muslims make up the majority of the Arab population in Palestine, but Nassar's activities before and after the writing of the series on *Zionism* suggest a surprisingly complex set of circumstances.

As noted above, in 1909, the year after the launch of *al-Karmil*, Nassar was involved in the campaign by the villagers of Shajara to buy back the land acquired by the Zionists. To the northeast of this village, the settlement of Sejera (later renamed Ilaniyya, now known as the Jewish kibbutz of the same name) was built in 1902. Now known as the kibbutz of the same name was built (Khalidi 1997), and there was a trouble with the villagers over land ownership. In *Zionism*, he repeatedly denounces the Zionist takeover of land as an act of colonialist aggression, but this might be based on his own experiences throughout the campaign, rather than on knowledge gained from *the Jewish Encyclopaedia*. At the time, most farmland in the Galilee was owned by wealthy Christian merchants living in cities such as Beirut. The most famous one is the Sursūq family, one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in Beirut; in fact, they sold their property in the Galilee to the Jewish National Fund, the corporation set up to purchase the lands in Historical Palestine under Ottoman rule to build Jewish settlements for the Zionists. Therefore, it is assumed that many of the peasants did not sympathise with the wealthy Christians who were complicit in the erosion of Palestine by the Zionists. Even while Nassar was on the run from 1914 to 1918, his experience of being betrayed by his fellow Christian friends and being saved from his plight on numerous occasions by his Muslim friends, especially the Bedouins (Shehadeh 2010), seems to have fuelled his disillusionment with and distrust of wealthy Christians. It also fits with the fact that it

was the Muslims and poorer peasants with whom Nassar actively interacted in the countryside after the 1920s.

However, in *al-Karmil*, in addition to Ramadan and other Islamic festivals, there are also a number of seasonal articles announcing festivals such as Easter and Nativity. It has been completely impartial from a religious perspective. Also, in *Zionism*, the emphasis is on Muslims, but it calls for ‘unity across religions.’ The intent to be impartial was clearly apparent.

4.2 Objective Perspective

What seems incompatible with Nassar’s position as the first Arabic-speaking critic of Zionism is a description that smacks of Herzl’s reputation as a leader. It is noteworthy that Nassar describes Herzl more than once as a dedicated leader who sacrifices his self-interest for the public good and describes the ideal leader who emerges from within themselves as ‘a person like Herzl’ (Nassār 1911). Nassar’s gaze as a dispassionate analyst is evident in his failure to reflect his feelings about Zionism in his assessment of Herzl’s talent as an organiser of propaganda.

It is also very interesting to note that Nassar himself had no desire to become a leader. This is evident from the way he distanced himself from the Palestinian Arab Conference in the early years of the British Mandate. At the time, he was in his mid-40s and heading into his 50s, an age when he was generally regarded as a community leader, and he made a commensurate contribution to society. Nevertheless, after 1921, he withdrew from the political arena once and for all and devoted himself to the revitalisation of agriculture and industry by frequenting the countryside. Beyond Nassar’s disinterest in politics, one can also sense Nassar’s disillusionment with the Palestinian Arab Conference as an arena of power struggle between Jerusalem’s prominent families and Haifa’s merchants. Raja Shehadeh, a writer and lawyer who is a descendant of Nassar, recalls that his ‘Ottoman uncle’ was a man who wanted to leave behind his cityhood and become a mere anonymous Bedouin. Perhaps the reason for his withdrawal from politics was the fugitive personality he had developed during his years on the run, and the despair of those who did not understand the unity of the people across religious lines, which he insisted on *Zionism*.

5. Conclusion

Though his influence on posterity is tenuous, Nassar has also been called the father of Arab nationalism or the father of Palestinian nationalism. So, is Nassar an Arab Nationalist or a Palestinian Nationalist? Or is he neither? The only answer to that question is no, in both cases. Nassar was trying to protect Historical Palestine from the Zionist takeover of the land, remaining in the category of the Ottoman Empire. The proposal to create an Arab state named Palestine was never mentioned in Nassar’s book, *Zionism*. Although the word ‘Watanīya’ (nationalism) appears in his book several times, not once does the word ‘Arab country’ appear. The word ‘Palestine’ appears a few times, but not in the last part where Nassar states his views on the Zionist settlements he

describes at the beginning of the book. The word 'Palestine' in his book is only used as the name of a place for descriptive purposes, and does not carry any implicit nationalistic connotations.

There is another Christian pioneer of Arab/Palestinian nationalism from outside of Historical Palestine: Gregorios Hajjar, a Melkite Greek Catholic Bishop of Akka, Haifa, Nazareth, and all of Galilee. Born in Southern Lebanon and elected as the Bishop at a young age, he, like Nassar, took a great interest in the revitalisation of the region. He worked diligently to build churches, improve parishes, and open educational institutions in the late 1910s. To the merchants of Haifa, and even more at 'Great Arab Revolt' from 1936 to 1939, he gave a famous speech to inspire the Palestinians to stand up against the threat of the British Mandate and Zionism, calling himself a Palestinian (Mansūr 2013).

Unlike Bishop Hajjar, Nassar did not call himself a Palestinian because he was born in Chouf, a region of Lebanon. He just insisted on opposing Zionism to protect the land of Palestine and to establish 'our country' but never gave the country a name. In other words, it is impossible to decipher whether Nassar thought that Palestine alone should establish a single Arab state, or whether he wanted to bring the Shām (Greater Syria) region together as an Arab state in cooperation with the surrounding areas. It can be said that Nassar was neither an Arab nationalist nor a Palestinian nationalist, but a man who, from his own perspective, wanted to protect the land he knew and had roamed with his own feet from colonialism.

However, Nassar's stance, which looks at the current situation with an enlightened eye and does not mix personal feelings with analysis, may have been unacceptable to the Palestinian Arab society, which is bound by blood and land relations. This is evident in the fact that his successor did not live too long. Jamīl al-Baharī, who described him as the 'Father of Palestine' was assassinated in 1930, and his wife Sadhij also left Palestine after the Nakba. Najib Nassar and his activities have been forgotten in large part because he was a recluse who excelled at being ahead of his time but had no desire for honour or ambitions to become a leader.

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Notes

- 1) The title of Melkite Catholic church's head is Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, and Alexandria and Jerusalem. Patriarch is a rank unique to the Eastern Catholic Churches, represented by the Melkite Catholic. They are churches that have separated from the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Church and belong to the Roman Catholic Church, except for the Maronite Catholic Church.
- 2) Chouf is mountainous area located south of Beirut. As will be discussed later, Najib Nassar is also from this area.

- 3) His successors are now Archbishops, as the diocese was upgraded to Archeparchy in 1964. Whether he is Bishop or Archbishop, he is called Mutrān in Arabic.
- 4) Issa al-Issa is known as a good partner of Khalil Sakakini in Arab nationalist activities, although they were both born into Greek Orthodox families, they had problems with the church. When Sakakini was rejected by the church to have his wedding in Ramallah, Issa took his friend and the bride out to Jaffa and at the same time kidnapped the priest and blackmailed him into performing the wedding.
- 5) Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) was an Austro-Hungarian Jewish journalist, playwright, political activist, and writer who was the father of modern political Zionism. Herzl formed the Zionist Organization and promoted Jewish immigration to Palestine in an effort to form a Jewish state. Though he died before its establishment, he is known as the father of the State of Israel.
- 6) The Bahā'ī faith is based on the teachings of Bāb, who was born in Shiraz. He prophesized that God would soon send new prophet like Jesus and Muhammad and was executed in 1850. Bahā'ullāh took over his teachings and spread it in Haifa, claiming that he was the new prophet arrival Bāb had predicted. The teachings of this faith give importance to world unity, expressing that all religions originated from the same source. The Bahā'ī faith has no clergy, and the believers are required to read the scriptures written by Bahā'ullāh by themselves to deepen their interpretation. The group of believers and their activities are referred to as the Bahā'ī community. Bahā'ī's Holy Places in Haifa and Western Galilee have been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008.

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