

Communists, Pragmatists and Bureaucrats: Christian Palestinians in Kafr Yasif

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Transliteration and terminology

The transliteration from Arabic in this thesis is based on the scheme of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* excluding names of people who prefer a different transliteration. The only exception is Kafr Yasif that is not transliterated for reasons of convenience of the reader. Transliteration from Hebrew is based on the system of the *Encyclopedia Judaica* yet as most of the Hebrew words used here are names of people and places, in these cases I followed the known versions of these names. Accordingly, names of places that are known in English are mentioned in their accepted English name (i.e. Nazareth, Acre). Names of places may –when discussing a Palestinian village that was razed in 1948 and repopulated later by Jewish migrants either name (village or new settlement) will be used. Following that, Arab-Israelis, Arabs, Palestinians, Palestinian-Israelis etc. are all used interchangeably following the varied use of my interviewees.

Map-Kafr Yasif area



Map of western Galilee, 1942 Mandatory map used and changed by Israeli officials in 1959, with names of central towns and villages in mandatory Palestine and Israel. Courtesy of "Zokhrot", online website.

The towns, villages, *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* (worker's cooperative agricultural communities) in this map are selected according to their relevance to the history of Kafr Yasif during the mandatory period and under Israel. Names in italics indicate a *moshav* or *kibbutz* that were built on lands of Palestinians villages, names of Palestinian villages that were razed after the 1948 war are not indicated differently. A few Arab villages as well as Jewish ones are not indicated on the map for reasons of space.

Introduction

With nobility and bravery
The goodness with them
They raised the crescent with the cross
In unity
And with the *Banī al-ma' ruf* (the Druze)
Harmony flourished...
Like a fresh spring of water
This is Kafr Yasif..."¹

Like other poets from the Palestinian town Kafr Yasif in northern Israel, Dr. Munīr Tūma wrote poems about his community. In this poem, the people of Kafr Yasif are listed by their religions—Christians, Muslims and Druze—who are all united in a harmonious declaration of bravery. This poem is similar to many other poems that were written about Kafr Yasif by its people during the second half of the twentieth century, poems that were read aloud in demonstrations, weddings, poetry festivals, communist party meetings, and in celebrations commemorating the establishment of the local council. Like other poems recited in public such as those that exalted Nasser in the 1950s, condemned the military rule during the 1960s, highlighted the beauty of the Galilee, or venerated deceased heroes of their small community—this poem touches the one most important issue of communal life in this town: the tradition of harmonious relations it developed to overcome different

¹ Dr. Munīr Yūsif Tūma, *Qaṣīdat baldat al-nujūm*, quoted in Rafā' il Būlus, *Kafr Yasif: Bayn aṣālat al-māḍi waraw'at al-ḥaḍir*, second edition, self-published, (2012), pp. 400-401.

difficulties their community faced during the tumultuous times from the days of the British mandate till the early 1980s.

This tradition should not be belittled as a local anecdote; it was and still is used as means for moral, spiritual and political survival for Palestinians who remained in the Palestine that later became Israel. The tradition became a legacy and its proponents, the town's cultural, social, political and economic elite, who were mainly Christians, glorified this legacy using poems, history books, political activism and all other political and cultural means. This legacy encompasses a complex past and addresses the unknown future of sectarian relations. Within it one can find a historical construction of a communal memory that can be both intensely local while placing itself in a prominent place of a far broader swathe of national sensitivities as well as sectarian and social-political anxieties.

This thesis brings into focus the legacy of this town and its historical context and its proponents as an entry into an aspect of Palestinian history, the history of Palestinians in Israel, and the history of Christians in the Middle East that can easily be overlooked and underestimated. Nationalist narratives, whether Palestinian, Arab or Zionist which have been profoundly influential in academia as well as the public realm, reject stories like this because it is not simple, not linear and presents us with embarrassing paradoxes. Can one be both a Palestinian nationalist as well as a bureaucrat in the occupying force, i.e. the British Mandatory government or Israel? How does a communist worldview reconcile with class elitism? How does a historical narrative that sanctifies armed revolt encompass a local communal story of people who did not fight at all? How does anti-sectarian activism address anxieties concerning one's own community and challenges in the future? How does anti-sectarianism become a flag mostly waved by Christians?

Looking into the history of a Christian Palestinian community in the Galilee since the late Ottoman period until the early 1980s serves a few important goals. First, in examining this community's own story as told by its members, this thesis aims to retrieve Christian Arabs' historical agency and historicize Christian Palestinians' experience, bringing to the fore their history as a part of a history of Christians who are not a "protected, tolerated or prosecuted" minority in a Muslim Palestinian society nor "fifth columns or pawns of Western interests".² Second, this is a story of a Palestinian community since the late Ottoman period until the early 1980s that challenges both the academic divisions between Palestinian and Israeli histories and the underlying nationalistic assumptions that perpetuate the distinctions between the two. Third, this story brings a distinctly Palestinian history in which 1948 does not serve as the only or main point of reference for the people telling their stories. This is because inasmuch as the *Nakba* was a traumatic experience that shaped many of the memories and stories that I heard, the people telling these stories were allowed to remain and often their memories of the oppression and hardship they suffered under martial law until 1966 were actually worse than the war that preceded them. Lastly, in its capacity as a micro-history, this story brings to the fore the importance of telling a story at all. For the Christian community in Kafr Yasif looking back, remembering, and telling serves as a nuanced survival technique. The discourse that they produce concerning the history of the village is powerful: It depicts a community that prevailed due to its pragmatic and patriotic leaders, due to its anti-sectarian legacy and practice as well as its middle class lifestyle. It is powerful because it is local: its ability to simultaneously both adhere to national narratives while at the same time

² Paul S. Rowe, "The Middle Eastern Christian as an agent", *IJMES*, Vol. 42 (2010), p. 473.

subverting them allows enough leeway to tell a dignified, respectful and proud story of a small Palestinian community in Israel.

The *kafārsa*, as they call themselves, (*kafārsawī* sing.) claim that it was a combination of non-sectarian and middle class values with an attitude that blended both an insistence on a clear political voice with pragmatic leadership that allowed them to remain and prosper. The aim here is to examine the constituent elements of these claims, these claims' validity, and how these notions evolved during Kafr Yasif's recent history. Those making these claims are middle class Christians who provide the dominant historical narrative concerning Kafr Yasif's history. Including counter narratives of non-middle classes as well as of Druze and Muslims would have enriched our discussion yet was not possible due to the scope of this essay. To provide context for the claims discussed above, the fate of the village is compared to neighbouring communities, notably Kuwaykāt, which was razed by the Israelis after 1948 and repopulated with Jewish migrants in 1949. However, the historical validity of the claims is not what is at stake here. The issue is why these claims are made and how these claims became part of a communal strategy in which history, as it is recalled by the town's elders, is perceived as an important tool both for survival and assertion of dignity.

Micro-histories have been very rare until recently in the field of Middle Eastern studies yet are becoming increasingly common, because of their bottom-up potential of shedding new light on national and colonial historical narratives.³ Similarly to most micro-narratives this thesis relies on a mixture of sources that complement each other. Since this thesis deals with the construction of communal memory,

³ Laila Parsons, "Micro narrative and the Historiography of the Modern Middle East", *History Compass*, Vol. 9 (1), (2011), p. 85.

personal interviews serve as the main source. From 21 open-ended interviews that I conducted in Kafr Yasif during the summer of 2012 as well as many informal conversations with kind people who gave much of their time and energy to share their views and analysis, about 10 interviewees are quoted and referred to here. Most of my interlocutors are quoted by pseudonym due to personal or political sensitivities. As I am an Israeli Jewish woman whose parents live in a nearby village, a note on "positioning" is necessary. Almost all the interviews were conducted in Hebrew because my interviewees' Hebrew was usually superior to my Arabic. As in all interactions between Palestinians and Jews in Israel, our interaction was subject to overshadowing political facts and sensitivities that shaped our conversation, which would undoubtedly have been different if I were Arab. The fact that many of the discussions and questions touched upon sectarian issues surely led the level of suspicion to rise higher than it would have normally been. The kindness and openness of all my interviewees is much appreciated, and the analysis presented here is clearly, my own only.

A second and important primary source used here is Rafa'il Būlus's history book on Kafr Yasif. First published in 1985 and republished with revisions in the summer of 2012, this book is important first for the encyclopaedic knowledge it offers on life, history, society, proverbs, economy, culture and traditions of Kafr Yasif. Moreover, as it relies on the rich source of the many memoirs published by different *kafārsa* as well as different documents and academic literature concerning the history of the town; it brings forth many sources and facts that would otherwise not be available to me. Lastly, it was referred by most interviewees as a "must read" that "brings together all of what you would like to know on Kafr Yasif." Some

interviewees were reserved as to specific facts or argued that others can offer a better "knowledge" of Kafr Yasif yet its general analysis was not contested, which indicated that the historical discourse presented in this book was accepted by those who read it. In addition to Būlus's account were memoirs, as well as booklets commemorating people's life, an academic essay written by Samīra 'Abū-'Aqel, who is from the village, on Kafr Yasif, and the academic book written by Magid Shihade *Not Just a soccer game: Colonialism and conflict among Palestinians in Israel* that depicts the violent event in Kafr Yasif in 1981. All of these sources were extremely helpful for understanding the rich and complex world of the *kafārsa* as they see themselves.

The last form of primary source used for this thesis is archival material from archives in Israel and Oxford in the form of thousands of documents from these archives. Documents from the IDF archive, the *Hagana* archive, the Central Zionist archives, the Israel State Archives, St Antony's Middle East Centre archive and Hillel Cohen's collection of documents have been extremely important both for understanding the historical context as well as its implications on Kafr Yasif of the present day. These documents include petitions that were composed by people from the town during the 1950s to ministers and local military government employees, reports from the two British missionaries who worked in the town until the early 1970s, protocols of the local council, secret intelligence reports on the town throughout the second half of the twentieth century, and many more. These documents demonstrate how much the inhabitants of Kafr Yasif were politically active and engaged, as well as the extent to which this political activity was heavily monitored by Israeli intelligence agencies during the 1950s-1970s because of the perceived threat of the town's political activists. Unfortunately, the scope of this thesis could not allow inclusion all of these fascinating aspects of life in Kafr Yasif, as

recorded both in material written by the people from the town, as well as from outsiders such as British government employees, British missionaries, Zionist intelligence agencies, Israeli party members and others. One important aspect in this material is the remarkable continuity between the attitudes of British mandatory officials and Israeli officials regarding sectarian issues. The wide chronological span of this thesis (from the late Ottoman period till the early 1980s) as well as its episodic treatment will hopefully bring this set of continuities as others to the attention of the reader. Thematically, each chapter deals with a set of claims of the *kafārsa* concerning their history: that they are non-sectarian, middle class, and that they are both *waṭaniyyūn* (patriotic, nationalistic) and pragmatic.

The first chapter charts out the most fundamental claim on history made by Christian *kafārsa* today: that they are not sectarian. For contextualizing the current non-sectarian attitudes of Christians I follow critical scholarly treatment of the evolution of sectarianism in the modern Middle East and specifically in Palestine, as well as of the evolution of the concept of minorities in the new colonial nation states in the region. This chapter traces different historical claims that stress inter-religious harmony in the village from the late Ottoman period when the first mission schools for Christians of various denominations opened in the village and effectively created the sectarian divide by giving the Christians the educational tools and aspirations that made them the preferred employees of Britain, the new colonial power after WW1. The non-sectarian platform that emerged from this sectarian divide is traced throughout the years of the mandate until its most flourishing manifestation under the Communist Party in the 1950s and 60s until the 1980s.

The second chapter deals with a claim that is inherently interrelated to the previous one: that Kafr Yasif was and is middle class. For understanding these claims

and its related historiographical analysis made by *kafārsa* this chapter relies on Keith Watenpaugh's work on middle classes in the Modern Middle East. The second chapter, unlike the previous one, focuses on the British Mandate alone, framing the *de-facto* historical evolution of the *kafārsawī* middle class in that period. This chapter focuses on the depiction of the community as middle class, and the paradoxes this depiction entails: stories have to reconcile a community that is depicted as a "village of government employees" with national events that took place during this period such as the Great Arab Revolt of 1936-39. The nearby Muslim-only village of Kuwaykāt is brought into the narrative for comparison.

The third chapter deals with the claim that the *kafārsa* are both *waṭanī* (nationalist, patriotic) and pragmatic. This claim is made especially concerning past community leaders and their actions. The chapter is divided to two chronological sections—the first focuses on the 1948 war and the second focuses on the period of martial law and the period of communist political hegemony in the town. This chapter serves as both the chronological centre of this thesis as well as focusing on the most predominant preoccupation of the *kafārsa* who form the centre of this thesis: the decision to remain in 1948 is remembered as an active act of patriotic choice and the following decades are remembered as epitomizing the spirit of active citizenship the *kafārsa* are so proud of.

This thesis is, in effect, an exercise in piecing together what I take to be key elements in the *kafārsa*'s current 'collective memory'. In using this term, I intend it to have resonance with its use in current cross disciplinary research, in which it refers to social narratives about the actively remembered past, through which groups construct

their identities.⁴ Theoretical debates in that area are highly relevant to issues raised in this thesis, but will not be addressed directly. The work reported here was, rather, informed by ground level questions about how the *kafārsa* see themselves, and the challenges their own story presents to currently dominant nationalist paradigms, Palestinian, Arab and Zionist, in both academic and political spheres.

⁴ For a recent collection of pertinent essays in this area see Jeffery K. Olick et al eds. *The Collective Memory Reader*, Oxford University Press, (Oxford: 2011).

Chapter 1: The sun dries our clothes together- "I am an Arab Palestinian, my culture is Islamic and my religion Christian"⁵

"كلنا إخوة فقد جففت ثيابنا شمس واحدة"

Kafr Yasif is a picturesque town, lying in the foothills of the Western Galilee as the high ground gives way to the plains that lead to the Mediterranean. With a population of nearly 10,000 people in 2012, it has a small commercial center and a few cultural centers with many of its stores and restaurants clustered around the road crossing it. A map of the town for potential tourists produced by the local municipality in 2003 in Arabic, Hebrew and English, includes pictures of the town's important religious, cultural and educational centers, as well as a concise history of the development projects undertaken by the local council so that the "citizen would be proud of his town and its council".⁶ Discussing the town's population, the reader is informed that its inhabitants are "Christian, Muslim, and Druze who have been living together lovingly and as brothers [*ya 'ishūn bimawadda watakhī*] for hundreds of years".⁷

In this chapter I look at the different ways of remembering and forgetting sectarianism among Kafr Yasif's Christians. My original intention was not to focus either on sectarian strife in Kafr Yasif or on its harmonious history, but to hear how its Christian community understands and remembers, if at all, the political implications of religious differences, in its past and present. But, as I heard the argument that Kafr Yasif as a community is not divided along sectarian lines

⁵ "We are all brothers, and one sunshine dries our clothes" quoted in an interview with Abu Ḥisām Hanna Makhuli during which he pointed to a board hung on the wall baring a Cross and a Crescent that was given to him by the local Mosque committee baring this phrase. He finished the interview saying that he is an "Arab Palestinian..." etc. On <http://www.al-hageega.net/zakira/showArticlenews.asp?aid=553> last watched on the 7.1.13.

⁶ Map of Kafr Yasif, produced in 2003 by the local council headed by 'Awni Tūmā, personal copy.

⁷ *ibid.*

reiterated again and again, I came to realize that this is a subject of prime importance to the way Christians there recount their past and educate their children in the present. At first glance, there seem to be many holes and paradoxes in the Christian non-sectarian narrative, the first being that it is Christian and non-sectarian. This chapter and the chapters that follow aim to fill some of these gaps and illuminate some of these paradoxes, though as we shall see, some have clearer explanations than others.

In addressing the sensitive and explosive issue of sectarianism among Palestinian Christians who live in a multi-religious village, one must tread carefully because what is not said is as significant as what is said, and silences should be respected. Ignoring the "not said" elements misses much of the nuance of the discourse and its opening premise: that I, the interviewer, am a Jewish Israeli woman. My interests are to see how "micro-social remembrance"⁸ of small communities remembering and transmitting their histories deals with sectarianism, interprets it, and makes sense of it. When thinking of sectarianism itself I follow Ussama Makdisi and Bruce Masters analyses (to which I return later). In trying to understand why the past was depicted as harmonious, and which aspects of it were thus depicted, I found much of the sociological literature written on Christian Palestinians in Israel unhelpful. In contrast, some anthropological and interdisciplinary work, like that of Ahmad Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod, and Efrat Ben Ze'ev's research on memory of the *Nakba*, was extremely helpful.⁹ But most of the literature, when addressing "identity", seems to assume a solid existence of such a thing, with maps and charts that can explain why "trapped minorities" or "minorities inside minorities" behave or vote in this way or that. The stories I will discuss, though, demonstrate that the concept of "identity" as a

⁸ Efrat Ben-Ze'ev's, *Remembering Palestine in 1948: Beyond national narratives*, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge: 2011), p. 4.

⁹ Lila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad H. Sa'di eds. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, Columbia university press, (New York: 2007), Ben-Ze'ev, *Remembering Palestine*, *ibid*.

general cover term for explaining the structure of societies can be distorting.¹⁰ The story of how the Christian community in Kafr Yasif remembers its sectarian past and relates to the existence of sectarianism in the present reveals how complex and nonlinear remembrance is. Furthermore, as Svetlana Boym has argued, nostalgia has different ways of showing itself, informed by different motivations and background aspirations.¹¹ Being nostalgic as a Christian in Kafr Yasif can mean different, ideologically conflicting things. I try to look at those remembrances with delicacy and respect, aware of their explosive potential. In them I find clear evidence for the potential of local micro-narratives to subvert national narratives and shed light on the existence of a plurality of stories that overlap, contradict each other, or follow parallel lines.¹²

During the late nineteenth century Kafr Yasif's population which, like many other villages and towns in its region and in the Ottoman Empire, was multi-religious, numbered around 900 people.¹³ Belonging to the *Sancak* of Acre during most of the nineteenth century and then later to the *Vilayet* of Beirut, the unpaved road passing through the village was one of the roads taking travelers and merchants to Damascus and Beirut when the latter was becoming the central port city in the region.¹⁴ In peaceful times its merchants benefited from the proximity to the main road, yet in turbulent times which were frequent in the nineteenth century, the town was highly vulnerable to the changing regimes and their whims concerning taxes or

¹⁰ On post-colonial scholarly use of the concept "identity", see: Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, University of California Press, (Berkeley, London: 2005), pp. 59-90.

¹¹ Svetlana Boym, *The future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, (New York: 2001).

¹² Ben-Ze'ev, *Remembering Palestine*, p. 2.

¹³ Yitzhak Ben Tzvi quotes British census of 1921 in which 870 people lived in the village, out of which the Christians formed about three quarters, in the 1870s he found two conflicting sources that vary between 900 people and 500 in. Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi, *Kitvei Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi*: second book, Sh'ar Yishuv: part one, Mitzpe, (Tel Aviv: 1935), p. 118, Būlus quotes a sources suggesting 900 in the 1870s, Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁴ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab people*, Second edition, Faber and Faber (London: 2002), p. 294.

conscription—unlike the nearby Druze villages such as Yirkā, Julis, Jat and Yanuh that were physically more protected.¹⁵ Villages in Kafr Yasif's proximity were varied, some, like Kuwaykāt, al-Ghabsiyya and 'Amka were poorer and Muslim-only. Some, like al-Baṣṣa which was situated on the future border between mandatory Palestine and Lebanon, were Christian and Muslim, and much more central than Kafr Yasif.¹⁶

As described by Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, the Arabic-speaking enthusiastic Zionist traveler and researcher (and future president of the state of Israel) in his travels in Palestine in search of old Jewish communities during the early 1920s: "Kefar Yasif...is an hour and a quarter ride... from Akko...A great picture was revealed to us when we got to the end of the olive-grove; Kefar Yasif shining with its colors on the hillside. ... The image of the village from distance, under the rays of the hot sun is fantastic and is reminiscent of the image of Tzefat, Ṣalt, or Nazareth..."¹⁷

Ben-Tzvi's account was blinded by orientalist imaginings as well as by the hopes of finding remnants of the ancient Jewish community there. He was thus not able to see that the town was actually in the midst of a radical transformation.¹⁸ Yet his interest in the Jewish past of the village and his elaborate study is much appreciated among Kafr Yasif's local-history specialists who refer to his 1920s article as a proof of their town's fame, and of its legacy of harmonious relations between the different religions.

This image and story of a village which was once home to people of four religions, helps to reconcile later images in which inter-communal conflicts happened.

¹⁵ On protection of Druze villages, See Laila Parsons, *The Druze between Palestine and Israel 1947-49*, McMillan press (London, New York: 2000), p. 6.

¹⁶ Al-Baṣṣa thrived especially after it became a border town, See the *Hagana* village report, "Al-Bassa", HA, 105/223.

¹⁷ Ben-Tzvi, *Kitvei*, p. 110.

¹⁸ According to Rawḍa's memories and a 1940s *Hagana* report the mud houses in which people lived were being replaced during the early period of the mandate by stone houses: "Housing in the village: Ancient, from mud and stone. There are new houses from stone. The roofs are cemented", Interview with Rawḍa, July 2011; "Kfar Yasif-Acre district"- village report, 22.12.42, HA, 105/223.

These images might help explain present anxieties concerning demographic decline of Christians in the Middle East in general as well as in Kafr Yasif specifically. The town was predominantly Christian (Greek Orthodox) at the turn of the twentieth century, while in 2013 its Christian population was about half of the general population. As will be elaborated on later, the demographic anxiety characteristic of nation states in general, and some Middle Eastern countries in particular, is inevitably part of how Christians in Kafr Yasif talk about their past. For a better understanding of the complex contexts into which the Christian *kafārsa* inhabitants weave their memories, I first present a brief historical and historiographical review of sectarianism in the Middle East and in the Palestinian context.

I. Sectarianism in Palestine-Israel: Literature and history

"Kafr Yasif, that is known for its antiquity, and that it has many sects¹⁹, you have the Muslims, the Christians, and the Druze. And you feel that everyone, [in] the way they live, are all from one sect, because they are close to each other...very close to each other, and there was never a quarrel between them, and everyone feels that they're like brothers, everyone."²⁰

i. Historiography of sectarianism

One of the prevalent assumptions of Orientalistic writing about societies and cultures of the Middle East was (and still is) that these societies have been forever plagued with sectarianism, which split these societies according to religious

¹⁹ 'Edot in Hebrew—*tawa'if* in Arabic

²⁰ Interview with Butrus, Kafr Yasif, 21.7.13.

identifications. Refuting this argument, many (nationalist-influenced) scholars in the second half of the twentieth century sought to downplay sectarianism. As a result of what was perceived as imperial, colonial (and later orientalist) worldview that sought sectarian differences in these societies "it has often seemed patently disloyal to politically concerned scholars to focus one's research on the religious differences among Arabic speakers."²¹ As the political project of Arab nationalism set in the mid-twentieth century context became historically distant, and its assumptions more open to critique, critical writing on sectarianism in the Middle East started to produce analyses that neither exaggerated nor ignored the weight of sectarian issues.

Two scholars who have produced convincing arguments that both acknowledge sectarianism yet historicize it are Bruce Masters and Ussama Makdisi. Both Makdisi and Masters skillfully proved that sectarianism as we understand it today is a novel and modern phenomenon. Religious affiliation, they both argue, began having a political meaning in the Levant only in the nineteenth century. However, Makdisi denies the history of sectarian relations and conflicts that Masters stresses, and argues for a break in the era of Ottoman reforms and European intervention in the Middle East. He argues that these important factors and the way they were perceived by elites (in Mount Lebanon, which he studied) were what created sectarianism as a novel, modern, phenomenon.²² Working in the midst of this triangle were European missionaries, merchants, and foreign governments who, we understand from Makdisi, were the powerful players.²³ In the decade or so following these two important publications, the once-barren field of the study of sectarianism

²¹ Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab world; The Roots of Sectarianism*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 2001), p. 4.

²² Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews*, Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon*, University of California Press, (Berkeley: 2000).

²³ Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, p. 164.

and the study of the different religious groups in the region has flourished. Most scholars follow Makdisi's argument, and develop it—extending its reach to the colonial context of the French and British Mandates. Studies such as Benjamin White's tie the evolution of sectarianism to the evolution of the concepts of "minorities" and "majority" in the context of the colonial Syria during the French mandate. Others, such as Laura Robson's and Noah Haiduc-Dale's examine the evolution of sectarianism as a political signifier focusing on Christian Palestinians during the British mandate. Whereas Robson focused on tracing the evolution of sectarian identifications among Christians in general during the mandate, Haiduc-Dale examined the interplay between sectarianism and nationalism through the participation of Christian Palestinians in the Palestinian nationalist movement. Other examples include Max Weiss's work on sectarianism in Lebanon looking at the Shi'a community.²⁴

It is not surprising that the pioneering critical work on sectarianism in the Middle East as a whole was launched by two scholars specializing in the history of Modern Syria and Lebanon, and that such scholarship on Palestine followed later. The first two sentences in Makdisi's book are "The war in Lebanon is over. Sectarianism is not".²⁵ Writing the history of the creation of sectarianism would help, Makdisi and Masters surely thought, in understanding the current political and social situations in Lebanon and Syria. As historians' and others' attention is frequently focused on the concept of Struggle, Lebanon's history was written in the ink of sectarianism whereas

²⁴ Ben White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), Noah Haiduc-Dale, *Nationalism and Religious Identification: Palestinian Christians in Mandate Palestine, 1918-1948*, PhD dissertation unpublished (upcoming publication of book in April 2013), New York University, (2010), Laura Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine*, (University of Texas Press, 2011), Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi'ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon*, Harvard University Press, (Cambridge, London: 2010).

²⁵ Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, p. xi.

Palestine-Israel's history was viewed through the lens of animosity and conflict between Jews and Arabs. Scholars in the past decade or so have been successfully scrutinizing these "struggle-oriented" nationalist-oriented views concerning Palestinian history both in the Ottoman period and later.²⁶

ii. *Christian Palestinians in focus*

A recent wave of publications on Christian Palestinians aims to tackle the gap in literature concerning the evolution of sectarianism in Palestine, the relations between Muslims, Christians, and Druze, and mainly the bias of previous literature concerning Muslim-Christian relations.²⁷ This scholarship adds to the expanding critical literature on the role of British rule in Palestine as a colonial actor with its social, economic, political, and geographical implications.²⁸ The reasons for focusing on the Christian community in the mandate years as well as in Israel are: the gap in literature that ignores the diversity of Palestinian-Arab society and assumes a binary Jewish-Muslim essentialness to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; a wish to deepen the

²⁶ See critique of the "separationist narrative" in Gil Z. Hochberg, *In spite of partition: Jews, Arabs, and the limits of separatist imagination*, Princeton university press, (Princeton: 2007); Ella Shoahat's work on *Mizrahim* in Israeli society such as: Ella Shoahat, "The invention of the Mizrahim", *JPS*, Vol. 29 (1), (Autumn, 1999), pp. 5-20. In the sphere of Ottoman history in Palestine: Abigail Jacobsen, "Negotiating Ottomanism in Times of War: Jerusalem during World War I through the Eyes of a Local Muslim Resident", *IJMES* 40 (2008): 69-88 and Abigail Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire: Jerusalem between Ottoman and British Rule*, Syracuse University Press, (Syracuse N.Y.: 2011); Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians and Jews in early twentieth-century Palestine*, Stanford University Press, (Stanford: 2011).

²⁷ Noah Haiduc-Dale, Nationalism and Religious Identification, *ibid.* Merav Mack, 'Christian Palestinian communities in Israel: tensions between laity, clergy and state', in Marshall J. Berger, Yitzhak Reiter and Leonard Hammer eds. *Sacred space in Israel and Palestine: Religion and Politics*, Routledge, (London and NY: 2012), Una McGahern, *Palestinian Christians in Israel: State Attitudes Towards Non-Muslims in a Jewish State*, Routledge, (London and NY: 2011), and Laura Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity*, *ibid.*

²⁸ Early examples: Ann Mosely Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine, 1917-1939: The Frustration of a Nationalist Movement* (Cornell University Press, 1979), Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*, second edition, University of Arkansas press (2003), Naomi Shepherd, *Ploughing sand: British Rule in Palestine*, John Murray (London: 1999). For a similarly critical appraisal of the colonial rule of Britain in mandatory Iraq see Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied*, Columbia University Press, second edition, (New York: 2005).

understanding of British colonial mechanisms and their implications on the Jewish-Arab history, and, finally, the wish to formally address the role of the Christians in the national movement as well as the reasons for their later exclusion.²⁹

Unlike Lebanon's case, the Arab-Palestinian Christian community has historically been very small in comparison with the general Arab Palestinian community.³⁰ Yet, similarly to other Eastern Mediterranean societies in the 20th century, despite their size, the Christian Palestinians as a whole have been prominent in politics, commerce, cultural production and state bureaucracy.³¹ As argued by Robson, "By the beginning of WW1, Christians had become an important part of an emerging middle class in Palestine that stood between Palestine's peasantry and impoverished city dwellers on one hand and the 'urban notables' who had long dominated the Palestinian political landscape on the other".³² The aftermath of this war, though, changed the Christian Palestinian community's fate. British colonial rule in Palestine implemented the "status quo" policy which furthered (or according to Robson, created) the sectarianization of the Palestinian Arab community.³³ According to Robson, "the idea that a violent sectarianism has characterized Palestine since time immemorial is widespread, powerful—and fundamentally mistaken. In fact, sectarianism did not emerge as a primary aspect of Palestinian politics until the third decade of the twentieth century when Palestine officially became part of the British Empire".³⁴ For the British administrators, this policy was intended to preserve the Ottoman *millet* system. There has been much academic debate about the evolution of

²⁹ McGahern, *State Attitudes* (thesis), p. 2. Haiduc-Dale, *Nationalism*, And Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity*.

³⁰ Christians comprised over eleven percent of the general population during the late Ottoman period (1914) and the early Mandate period, whereas they comprised less than 8 percent of the Arab population in Israel in 2008, only around 1 percent of the general Israeli population; Haiduc-Dale, *Nationalism*, p.18, McGahern, *State Attitudes*, p. 48.

³¹ Haiduc-Dale, *ibid*, p. 2, McGahern, *ibid*, p. 73.

³² Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity*, p. 7.

³³ Haiduc-Dale, *Nationalism*, p. 38, Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity*, p. 9.

³⁴ Robson, *ibid*.p. 1.

the *millet* system³⁵ but it is clear that in the early twentieth century the system allowed for the relative autonomy of religious leaders of communities under Ottoman jurisdiction.³⁶

With the increase of European intervention in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century, there was a change in the different *millets* and their relationships with the state.³⁷ The evolution of the protégé system that allowed Ottoman subjects to have the legal and commercial liberties of their sponsors was one important aspect of these changing relationships. As Makdisi demonstrated, the *millet* system became synonymous with European protégés, and thus when the British adopted the "status quo" policy that perpetuated these *millets* they were entering a very dynamic process. Their innovation of introducing a Muslim *millet* was, however, not only dynamic but radically transformative and unbalancing for the existing social and political order.³⁸

The processes of increased communitarian identification and politics might have followed the pattern of Syria or Iraq if the Zionist movement had not been part of the political game in mandatory Palestine. As both Robson and Haiduc-Dale argue, the activity of the Zionist movement in Palestine and the support it received from influential British colonial administrators and the government in London transformed the sectarian policies of the colonial power.

In a parallel process, sectarianism both became a source for political identification for the Arab Palestinians as different institutions were set up for Muslims, Christians, and Jews; and was resisted by Arab political activists, who saw it as a colonial divide-and-rule tactic designed to weaken the position of the Arab

³⁵ Masters, *Christians and Jews*, pp. 60-63.

³⁶ Haiduc-Dale, *Nationalism*, p. 27.

³⁷ Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity*, p. 5, Masters, *Jews and Christians*, p. 152.

³⁸ Robson, *ibid.* p. 44.

Palestinian community vis-à-vis the Jewish one. As Christians were increasingly excluded from the national movement during the 1930s, they became the fiercest fighters against the sectarian system while adopting it for their own communities' benefit. Conversely, the immediacy of the threat that the Zionist movement posed for the Arab Palestinian national movement was what prevented explicit sectarian strife during the mandate.

iii. *Sectarianism and Minority-Majority Politics in Israel*

As in other countries in the Middle East and arguably nation-states in general, the creation of the state of Israel led to the emergence of the concepts and realization of "minorities" and a "majority" in it.³⁹ Similarly to other countries, this process has been accompanied by a paranoid demographic obsession, which in Israel found expression in a developed national statistics bureau as well as in daily lives of citizens.⁴⁰ From its establishment on, the state of Israel was obsessed with counting Jews and Arabs, viewing the proper relation between a Jewish "majority" and an Arab "minority" as essential to its existence as a Jewish state.⁴¹

The state categorization of an "Arab" was itself ambiguous and changing during this period as religious, linguistic, and ethnic differences were conflated or singled-out by state officials in an effort to control the Palestinian Arabs—like the attempt to conscript Druze into the army, as well as the mostly failed attempt to

³⁹ See White, *The Emergence of Minorities*.

⁴⁰ On Zionist demographic anxiety and policies, See Elia Zureik, *Demography and transfer: Israel's road to nowhere*, Third World Quarterly, (2003), Vol. 24 (4), pp. 619-630. On Natalist policies concerning Arab-Israeli women see Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*, University of California press (Berkeley: 2002).

⁴¹ Shira Nomi Robinson, *Occupied Citizens in a Liberal State: Palestinians under Military Rule and the Colonial Formation of Israeli Society 1948-1966*, Phd dissertation unpublished, Stanford, (2005), p. 4.

conscript Christians.⁴² During the years of the British colonial rule between the 1920s and the 1940s Zionist functionaries and activists were well aware of the increasing divides along communitarian lines of the indigenous Arab population in Palestine and indeed sought to manipulate the tensions and frictions to their benefit. As argued by Haiduc-Dale, "For Zionists, cracks in society along communal lines were viewed as hopeful entries into alliances with segments of the Arab population".⁴³ With the establishment of the state in 1948 the process of the institutional sectarianization of the Arabs began by the British government was continued and intensified.

The relation of the state of Israel to the Christians was, from the beginning, inconsistent. Whereas Christians were suspected of high-profile involvement in nationalist activity and were thus targeted by the state, their relatively low reproduction rates as well as international pressure concerning their well-being caused a somewhat awkward relationship of the state to its indigenous Christian population.⁴⁴ With time and with the demographic discourse taking hold among government officials, Christians were perceived as less of a threat in terms of demography. Low birth rates and increased migration, mainly to the Americas, were noticed by government functionaries in the early 1950s who understood the importance of these processes in the context of the perceived demographic war.⁴⁵

The Christian community itself is well aware of these statistics and their implications. As in the rest of the Middle East, the shrinking number of Christians due to relatively low birth rates and emigration, means that the Palestinian community in

⁴² Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Surrounded: Palestinian Soldiers in the Israeli Army*, Stanford University Press, (Stanford: 2009), pp. 8-9.

⁴³ Haiduc-Dale, *Nationalism*, p. 55.

⁴⁴ On the (justified) suspicion of national activity among Christian Arabs in Israel from the side of the state, see McGahern, *State Attitudes*, (thesis), p. 122.

⁴⁵ Nur Masalha, *An Israeli plan to transfer Galilee's Christians to South America: Yosef Weitz and "Operation Yohanan" 1949-53*, University of Durham, CMEIS occasional paper no. 55 August 1996, pp.7-9.

Israel faced (and still does) similar demographic challenges.⁴⁶ Similarly to many Christian Lebanese families, many families in Kafr Yasif have relatives who migrated to the United States or countries in South America, today as in the early twentieth century.

Nonetheless, unlike other accounts from Christians in the Middle East in the post 2000s and this decade's "war of civilizations" *Zeitgeist*, those Christians who met me were very hesitant to declare themselves as separate, antagonistic or hostile to non-Christian Palestinians in general, and specifically those in their town, Kafr Yasif, which is an attitude similar to other Christian Palestinians in general.⁴⁷

Both in their accounts of their local past as well as in the way they talked about their present most people I met denied sectarianism as an existing organizing political mechanism in their society, whether locally or nationally. Some mentioned "events" of inter-communal violence, and some mentioned antagonistic relations. Yet, on the whole, these were but momentary ruptures in narratives depicting harmony, brotherhood, and solidarity. Many talked with nostalgia about the period of communist hegemony in the village, when "no such differences between Christians and Muslims existed".⁴⁸ Others mentioned the period of the British Mandate as a time of cultural and economic flourishing in which there were "no troubles" between the *kafārsa* and themselves and outsiders. Other mentioned the Ottoman period through stories of family members which highlighted the multi-religious character of Kafr Yasif in that period.

Remembering their past as non-sectarian was the strongest and most powerful means my interviewees used for traveling back in time in a constructive way. They

⁴⁶ Mack, 'Christians Palestinians', p. 285.

⁴⁷ See Naim Ateek, *Justice, And Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, Orbis Books, (Markynoll: 1989),. Amalia Sa'ar, "Carefully on the Margins: Christian Palestinians in Haifa between Nation and State", *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 25 (2), (May 1998), p. 216.

⁴⁸ Interview with Sulīman Murqus, Kafr Yasif, early August 2012.

could remember their past and their community as a whole and as a part of another whole. For example, remembering the period when the communist party could deal with internal disputes concerning sectarian issues is a way of both remembering a time when the community was self-sufficient and harmonious, and a time of belonging to a general whole of the political activity of Palestinians in Israel during the 1950s and 1960s.

Going back in time was done in two ways; one by conflating different periods of the past into one era in which things were "such and such," and the other by signaling individual events in the past as points of rupture. A story about inter-religious tolerance and harmony can travel between chronological periods, addressing its chronological section as "back then" and traveling all the way to the present. And just the same, some stories halted when depicting an "event" of inter-communal violence or discord and seemed to be frozen in time and almost superimposed over the chronological narrative. The following section follows this "episodic" chronology beginning with the Ottoman period and its nostalgia, and ends in the "event" of "Black April" 1981. This episodic approach both traces the way the *kafārsawī* local story is narrated, and exposes possible continuities in state policies and their relation to sectarianism among Palestinians in Israel.

II. Nostalgia, the Jews, the Communists, and "Black April" 1981

i. *In his heart a Jew—fi qalbihi yahūdī*⁴⁹

Rafā'il Būlus's book begins with a long exposition depicting the past glory of Kafr Yasif. He mentions the Canaanite and Phoenician past of the town, its Roman and Byzantine archeological remains and discusses the etymological origins (and controversy) over its name—Kafr Yasif. It is clear, he holds, "that Kafr Yasif played an important role in history."⁵⁰ He then depicts the geography, ancient history, and the evidence for the longstanding role of Kafr Yasif as a commercial center. He strengthens his argument with many references, including to the Jewish Talmud. Throughout the first few pages of his book he frequently refers to the Jewish past of the village, from Flavius Josephus who was known to have been given the village by a Roman Emperor, to the early twentieth century in which, despite having left Kafr Yasif, Jews from nearby Acre still buried their dead in the Jewish cemetery.⁵¹

This account is similar to those of other *kafārsā* I met, who talked with great length about the Jewish cemetery in their town, and about the Palestinian Jewish community that once inhabited Kafr Yasif. In Būlus's narrative, the Jews play an important part in the history of the village, from ancient days until the mid-nineteenth century, when the last Jew was known to live there. More significantly, they play an important part side-by-side with the Christians. Both "worked during the Ottoman age as merchants or traveling merchants" and "it is natural" that they fared worse than the

⁴⁹ From a list of *kafārsawī* proverbs concerning Jews; this proverb was said when someone held a secret, Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 12.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 1.

⁵¹ Ibid. pp.2-3.

Muslims since both were 'Ahl al-dhimma'.⁵² Būlus argues that the years of Egyptian rule under 'Ibrāhīm Bāshā were very good years for the Christians and Muslims who both worked as officials in Acre for his government and enjoyed prosperity from the cash crops grown around the village. Interestingly, the reason for the final departure of Jews from Kafr Yasif sometime in the mid-nineteenth century, as he sees it, was the reversion to the Ottoman *dhimmi* status, and the unbearable tax burden this entailed for Jews and Christians.⁵³ The Muslims, Būlus argues, are newcomers to Kafr Yasif, as they arrived only in the nineteenth century. His account of the Druze history is a bit more ambiguous, yet he seems to claim that they too are relative newcomers, and that a few Druze families arrived during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that the *khilwa* (Druze prayer house) was established only in 1880.⁵⁴

Discussing the fate of Kafr Yasif in the 1948 war and explaining why the IDF's "fantastic" officer decided not to conquer Kafr Yasif, Abū 'Aiman said that this is because "in Kafr Yasif we have had 300 years of co-existence".⁵⁵ His world view, which dictates co-existence (*du-kiyum*), extends well beyond his town and includes the inhabitants of the nearby Bet-Ha'emek (the former Kuwaykāt) where he taught spoken Arabic to his "friends, even in the time of Saddam [the Gulf War] when they were afraid!" Thus when he looked back on the Jewish past of Kafr Yasif he saw a connection between the Jewish past and the current Jewish state under which he lives. For him the looking back meant placing his aspirations for co-existence with the Jews within the fabric of his own local past. Būlus's intent was completely different, and much more similar to a generic Arab nationalist claim concerning the status and state of the Jews among Arabs before Zionism and Israel. Both, however, mentioned the

⁵² Ibid. p. 5.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 9.

⁵⁴ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 12.

⁵⁵ Interview with Abū 'Aiman, Kafr Yasif, 2.8.12. Referred to Dov Yirmiya, a former IDF lieutenant-colonel and a future critic of Israeli policies.

Muslims and the Druze as the late-comers—as a side note to the authentic and original inhabitants of the village, the Christians and Jews.

To my mind, the reasons for that have to do with the concept of nostalgia as presented by Svetlana Boym in her *Future of Nostalgia*.⁵⁶ Defining nostalgia as a "longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" as well as a "sentiment of loss and displacement, but...also a romance with one's own fantasy"⁵⁷ Boym looks at nostalgia as a "historical emotion". For our purposes here Boym's differentiation between two different kinds of nostalgia, one restorative and the other reflexive, is most useful. The first, she argued, is more related to the *nostros*, the homecoming; it follows one plot and stresses actual origins and historical truth. The second is about the *algia* (longing) which "does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones; it loves details, not symbols".⁵⁸ Boym then puts restorative nostalgia in the realm of "national memory" and national identity, and reflexive nostalgia in the realm of social memory "which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory".⁵⁹ Most importantly for our case, Boym argued that both these nostalgias can coexist.

In Būlus's narrative, his nostalgia is located within the confines of a national memory, whereas Abū 'Aiman's, in my view, looks more for a lost world that is not exactly defined or articulated. In memory, the quest for common ground can be viewed through the lens of nostalgia. However, this quest was a powerful motivator throughout the modern history of Kafr Yasif because it provided an arena that allowed political self-expression to take place within a framework that transcended the

⁵⁶ Svetlana Boym, *The future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, (New York: 2001).

⁵⁷ Boym, *Nostalgia*, p. xiii.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* p. xviii.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

immediate problems of villagers under military rule and addressed these problems in a way that defied the divide and rule policies of the Israelis. Nabīha Murqus' account of her first May Day protest demonstrates how vividly powerful an anti-sectarian platform could be in these circumstances.

ii. *Jalīl ya jalīl 'inna ma lak mathīl*⁶⁰

In May 1958, Nabīha, a young wife of a teacher who had just been fired from his job because of his communist political activity, remembered being very excited before the May Day demonstration. They went on the bus, singing, chanting and raising red flags. They met up with other buses from the area, but they were all stopped at a checkpoint before Nazareth, where the demonstration was going to take place. Military government soldiers stopped all cars and buses from proceeding towards Nazareth (According to Nabīha "they didn't want us to ruin their [10th anniversary] party"). Nabīha could not take this. She persuaded a few friends to take a taxi with her and convinced the soldier at the check point that they are on their way to the hospital. They managed to get in to Nazareth and there, she described being completely shocked, seeing her first *'Intifāḍa*—jeeps turned upside down and the streets completely chaotic. Then she said: "There I saw that women are stronger than men. And I will never forget her—Arna Khamis—(the late actor) Juliano Mer's mother was young and pregnant in the ninth month. It was only the second time that I went to a May 1st demonstration and I asked someone who is she? And they told me, she's a Jew. With her slogans and her *kūfīyya* she was a hero. She told me: come,

⁶⁰ "Galilee, oh galilee, there's nowhere like you"—a part of a chant Nabīha remembered from these years, interview with Nabīha and Nimr Murqus, early August 2012.

come!...we were pushing the police officers...and they were hitting us, and she told me-hit them back! She taught me what to do and she is my example."⁶¹

As will be elaborated on in chapter 3, the Israeli communist party's role in the political activity of Palestinians in Israel in the 1950s and 1960s cannot be overestimated. Nabītha's account brings to the fore one important aspect of how the party's activity is remembered in relation to Jewish-Arab solidarity, its anti-sectarianism. There is here, in my view, a retrospective narration of lost hopes and promises of Jewish-Arab solidarity, as well as an opening into women's-history in Kafr Yasif. In that sense, this is the continuation of the story told by Būlus, a backwards glance into a world long gone. In a later part in the conversation Nabītha discussed what I thought was the obituary to these hopes—when talking about how her group of "women in black" in which she was one of the only Arabs dissipated during the years after the second *'Intifāda*, to the extent that for a few weeks she went with her banners alone to stand and demonstrate against the occupation.⁶²

Like other interviewees, she and Nimr highlighted the solidarity between the different religions, insisting on not naming people's religions but using their villages or towns as a point of reference. In their conversation there were plenty of references to the years of the Military Government and the restrictions posed on the people of Kafr Yasif and especially the communists. It can be argued that their memory of a coherent community in Kafr Yasif (and beyond) is shaped by a yearning for their years of youth, or that it is because they were themselves active in the communist party. But not necessarily. As Hillel Cohen, Ahmad Sa'di and Magid Shihade's

⁶¹ Nabītha and Nimr Murqus, *ibid.*

⁶² *ibid.*

researches have shown, one of the threats that the communist party posed was indeed its non-sectarianism.⁶³

Similarly to Sulīmān Murqus, 'Ilyas, Janet, Buṭrus and others were despairing of current frictions among Palestinians of different religions, and would probably agree with Sulīmān's desperation when he talked about self-identification and sectarianization in Kafr Yasif and in general as the source of friction and problems: "Our poet, god bless his soul, Maḥmūd Darwīsh, once wrote a poem '*sajjil 'ana 'arabi*'. Now I see that people are organizing summer camps for kids called: '*sajjil 'ana muslim*'".⁶⁴

Yet it seemed that more than what was described by Sulīmān as essentially demographic tensions between Christians and Muslims in Kafr Yasif, the community that was discussed most was the Druze. Sulīmān, an avowed communist like Nabīha and Nimr, as well as a poet, former teacher and presently a stone mason discussed at length his relationship with his Druze neighbors and his general opinions on Druze society. Like others, he seemed simultaneously critical and admiring of the Druze position vis-à-vis the state. As all Druze face an obligatory conscription into the army they are regularly blamed for being coopted into the state and for being collaborators by other Palestinian Arabs. Sulīmān, who was generally very critical—of politics in Kafr Yasif, in Israel, in the Arab world and generally in the world—said that he always wished he was born a Druze. He explained it saying that he is jealous of their social cohesion—"no one can buy a meter in a Druze village! They are like the

⁶³ Ahmad Sa'di, "The Politics of 'Collaboration': Israel's Control of a National Minority and Indigenous Resistance", HLS, 4(2), (2005), pp. 7-26, Hillel Cohen, *Good Arab: The Israeli Security Agencies and the Israeli Arabs, 1948-1967*, translated into English by Haim Watzman, University of California press, (Berkeley: 2010), Magid Shihade, *Not Just a Soccer Game: Colonialism and Conflict among Palestinians in Israel*, Syracuse University Press, (Syracuse: 2011).

⁶⁴ Darwish's poem is titled: "Write down, I am an Arab", whereas the summer camp was called "Write down, I am a Muslim". Sulīmān, *ibid*.

Kibbutz!" he said. Following that he said that the Druze live by themselves or with the Christians, as the Christians are the weakest link (among the Arabs in Israel).

Janet and Rawḍa talked about the help the people of Kafr Yasif received from the Druze of Yirkā during the 1948 war and went on to discuss building permits in Kafr Yasif today. They mentioned the fact that a few families from Kafr Yasif built their homes recently in Yirkā's territory, as the state (like in most Arab localities in Israel) is imposing many restrictions on building in Kafr Yasif. Then Janet mentioned the violent incident that occurred between Christians and Druze in the nearby Palestinian village al-Rāma. This was probably the only conversation in which violent sectarian conflict was discussed without any historical context or explanation. She discussed the accidental killing of a Druze youth by a young Christian. The parents of the young boy who was killed knew that it had nothing to do with anything sectarian, and wished to end things quietly. A week later, Janet said, masked Druze men arrived at the local school and began hitting people, mainly Christians. The whole event ended, she said, with a failed attempt to hold a peace march, because the policemen were afraid of escorting it towards the Druze neighborhood which was guarded by armed men.⁶⁵ This and other kinds of violent events, one of which we will discuss shortly, serve as the backdrop to the way the communist and Ottoman pasts are both remembered and told. Violence between Druze and Christians became increasingly more prevalent throughout the 2000s in such incidents as the controversy in Nazareth 1999-2000 and the Maghar "event" in 2005. Many Palestinians and non-Palestinians blamed the police and the state for tacitly encouraging this, and other, violent events.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Interviews with Janet and her mother Rawḍa, late July 2012.

⁶⁶ On Nazareth Raphael Israeli, *Green crescent over Nazareth: The displacement of Christians by Muslims in the Holy Land*, Frank Cass, (London: 2002). On Maghar see Magid Shihade, *Colonialism*

As agreed by Buṭrus, Jiryis and 'Ilyas, the communist party used to take the role of the arbitrator in these kinds of disputes in the past, fighting ferociously against sectarianism in Kafr Yasif and elsewhere, as until the 1970s it used to be the only Arab party that argued: "We are in Israel, we will fight from within, through the state, in the state institutions, in the Knesset".⁶⁷ 'Ilyas, who is younger than Sulimān, Nabītha or Nimr, but is also a party member, said that he was born a Christian, but did not choose his religion. He went on to say that in terms of religion there was never a conflict in Kafr Yasif between the Druze and the Christians. Responding, Jiryis told him that he shouldn't portray the reality as if it were ideal, to which 'Ilyas agreed, and mentioned an event in Kafr Yasif in which two pig heads were put in the local mosque during elections, but both he and the others seems to agree that this was a minor event that did not escalate and that in general, the relations between the different sects in Kafr Yasif are harmonious and peaceful.⁶⁸ Interestingly, this conversation was the only for-the-record conversation in which the "event" of 1981 that took place in Kafr Yasif itself was mentioned.⁶⁹

iii. *The Football match-1981*

The "Black April event" as it is called in local parlance began during a football match that took place on April 11 1981 between Kafr Yasif's team and a team from the nearby Druze locality of Julis. Būlus, 'Ilyas and Magid Shihade, (who devoted a

and Conflict, pp. 39-42, and *Country reports on Human rights practices for 2005*, online version: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005>, quoted in Hillel Cohen, *Good Arabs*, p. 260.

⁶⁷ 'Ilyas, in an interview with him, Jiryis, and Buṭrus, Kafr Yasif, 21.7.12.

⁶⁸ Ibid..

⁶⁹ In the interview with Nimr Murqus the event was talked about extensively, but he asked not to be quoted on that.

book to analyzing this event) all argued that there was no animosity between the towns prior to the football match.⁷⁰ A fight broke out during the football match between fans, and in the violence that followed two young men eventually died, a young man from Julis due to stabbing, and a young man from Kafr Yasif after a hand grenade was thrown in his direction. Three days after the violent match Druze people from Julis and other Druze localities attacked Kafr Yasif arriving in IDF jeeps and armed with IDF weapons. They burnt houses on the main road and attacked the local council in which some people were barricaded. The attack lasted a few hours and two young men died during it.

Magid Shihade, whose book begins with a description of this event and then moves on to analyze it, argues, as do others, that the police forces present during the match as well as during the attack were complicit and rather than preventing the violence and deaths waited until the Druze neighbors finished their attack. He blamed them for blocking the roads leading to Kafr Yasif and preventing neighbors (both Jewish and Arab) from assisting the inhabitants of Kafr Yasif. Shihade gives an extensive review of the coverage of the event in the Israeli Arab and Jewish media, as well as an analysis of the political framework which made it possible. Shihade, like 'Ilyas, blames the state of Israel for creating the setting for this event, in its explicit policies of division of the Arab Palestinian population in Israel. Shihade, who witnessed the football match as well as the events that followed, went through a "memorable experience".⁷¹ As suggested by the title of his book, *Not just a Soccer Game: Colonialism and Conflict among Palestinians in Israel*, Shihade sees this event as an outcome and as a symptom of the colonial framework in which Israel operated and under which the Palestinians living there exist. In his book, Shihade

⁷⁰ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 47, Magid Shihade, *Colonialism and Conflict*, p. xv, 'Ilyas, *ibid.*

⁷¹ Shihade, *Colonialism and Conflict* p. xi.

discusses the actions of the then head of council, Nimr Murqus, and his failed attempts for achieving a *Ṣulḥa* (the traditional Palestinian method of peace-making) as well as his consequent demands for a government-run inquiry on the scandalous behavior of the police forces during these days.⁷²

As mentioned earlier, a general silence characterized most of my interviewees' relation to this event. It seems that only those equipped with an adequate ideological "tool-box" could touch on this issue. 'Ilyas gave a similar explanation to Shihade, arguing that this event happened in Kafr Yasif because the state kept on trying to interfere and meddle between the different sects. "It was not really about the football match" he argued saying that he witnessed the event as he was in 11th grade and "they came and attacked only the houses of the Christians. Why? In Kafr Yasif there are Muslims and Druze too. They [i.e. the state] wanted to arouse this conflict but they didn't succeed....they are still trying to do that to this day but they don't succeed—you can hear it [sectarian antagonism] among people in the town, but they don't let it out".⁷³ Usāma explained the increased communitarian identification and antagonism as related to the capitalist age and to the fact that people do not spend time with each other anymore, but stay at home and watch television.

All in all, those people who did discuss this event did not see any essential internal causes for these disputes, similarly to Shihade who refuted on the whole the argument posed by state officials—that this event had been caused by an ancient religious rivalry.⁷⁴ But he did engage with the extent to which the Arabic newspapers (and mainly the communist newspaper *al-ittiḥād*) served as a mouthpiece for the

⁷² *ibid.* pp. 3-5.

⁷³ 'Ilyas, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 43.

Palestinian Arabs and did not question the reasons for this event but rather placed all the responsibility on the state.⁷⁵

III. Conclusion

The huge importance of the non-sectarian label to the middle class Christian *kafārsa* serves several distinct purposes.

The very strong civic pride they all demonstrate is best served by a remembered history in which their village – unlike many others in Israel-Palestine and the rest of the Middle East—always had the good sense to transcend differences of religion and find unity, cohesion and the strength to survive difficulties with a communal inner strength that derived much of its power from the insistence on non-sectarianism. Reviving either stories or documents from Ottoman times that say that even Jews were once part of this non-sectarian paradise. This serves both to prove how deep and strong this local tradition is, as well as fitting in neatly with the Arab nationalist story about relations between Arabs and Jews before Zionism disrupted historical coexistence.

In more recent memory, since the creation of the state of Israel, non-sectarianism was one of the flags raised highest by the Communist Party, an enabling political force during the 1950s and 1960s that provided a framework and an ideology with which the *kafārsa* could contend with the demands and impositions of the new Jewish state. As their stories reveal, this was no trivial matter, and the non-sectarian agenda allowed the Christians of Kafr Yasif both to fight their own local battles and take a place on the national stage as part of the Palestinian community.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 43.

In recent years the non-sectarian agenda, or the denial of sectarianism also serves as a means of dealing with anxiety, anxiety about the Christians' diminishing part in the population of the town, anxiety caused by a higher incidence of sectarian strife in and around the town and in other parts of the country, and anxiety caused by the bloody specter of sectarian strife in other parts of the Middle East.

The deep belief in a non-sectarian past is a story told by the Christians of Kafr Yasif about themselves. It is a story that combines ideology and pragmatism, ties the past together and weaves into a fabric that can be perceived and used in the present. It is only part of what makes these people see themselves as unique, but it is an extremely important element.

Chapter 2: We are Middle Class—Kafr Yasif the Capital

Wasfi Abu-‘Aqel—a friend and a host, greeted me and handed me a three-page long history of the town written in faultless Hebrew by his lawyer brother. The document described the antiquity of Kafr Yasif, as well as current demographics. The last section discussed Kafr Yasif's population, saying that: "Kafr Yasif is known for the big numbers of educated people amongst it, including the fact that the UNESCO of the UN [sic] found that the number of Academics in Kafr Yasif is the biggest in the world compared to the number of citizens..."⁷⁶

This chapter deals with the claim that emerged from this document, and from all the interlocutors in interviews: that Kafr Yasif is (and was) middle class. In terms of income the village is not middle class. In a composite socio-economic index compiled by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS)⁷⁷ Kafr Yasif is ranked at 4 on a scale of 10. This is one of the higher scores achieved by Palestinian Israeli communities, but with 54.9% of the salaried employees earning minimum wage or less the village cannot be considered middle class. The CBS data does not, however, differentiate between earnings of Christians, Muslims and Druze, and Christians are considered the wealthier part of the community.⁷⁸ It also ranks communities by income and not assets, and one of the main assets still held by many Christian families is land that can and is used both to finance higher education and the creation of businesses. Yet elementary for this discussion is the understanding that the middle class in Kafr Yasif is "more than a neutral economic category" that "constitutes an intellectual, social and cultural construct linked to a set of historical and material

⁷⁶ "Kafr Yasif", a document written by Wasfi Abu-‘Aqel's brother and given to me on the 22.7.12.

⁷⁷ Local Community Profile – Kafr Yasif, Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010

⁷⁸ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 158.

circumstances".⁷⁹ As such, the statement "we are middle class" refers only to a particular segment of the society of Kafr Yasif. With this caveat in mind the aim here is to examine the constituent elements that back this statement because of these elements' importance in the overall history of the village.

The Christian middle class of Kafr Yasif has been, ever since its creation during the British Mandate, the hegemonic political and social power in the town, which is why its members today describe Kafr Yasif as historically and overwhelmingly middle class, while ignoring other non-middle class members of the community. The notion that the village is middle class, and that this is a rural middle class distinct from the urban Palestinian middle class plays an important role in the way they remember their past and think about their present situation. Remembering their community as middle class nominally includes non-Christians and deal with typical middle class issues such as education and the relationship to the state.

Middle classes in the early twentieth-century Middle East, as Watenpaugh argued, were not always easily distinguishable from notables since many middle class people were land owners and involved with state bureaucracy.⁸⁰ Yet one aspect that increasingly differentiated the middle classes was education: "A middle-class lifestyle and culture was one such criterion, leisure activity, and especially the new invention of sport was another; but the chief indicator of actual membership increasingly became, and has remained, formal education."⁸¹

In that sense, talking about Kafr Yasif's middle class history is just another way of trying to negotiate a nationalistically-ambiguous history, in which alliance with the state frequently came at the "expense of" alliance with "the people". The

⁷⁹ Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism and the Arab Middle Class*, Princeton University Press, (Princeton and Oxford: 2006), p. 19.

⁸⁰ Ibid. pp. 37-41.

⁸¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914*, Cardinal, (London: 1989), p. 174.

juxtaposition of Kuwaykāt with Kafr Yasif in this chapter serves as a comparison as well as a window into the relations between the two communities that reveal different tensions that supersede a nationalistic historiography. Trying to explain why Kafr Yasif was not active during the Great Arab Revolt sheds light on these sensitive issues that relate both to class as well as to the processes of increased religious identification discussed earlier. Looking into the way this history is remembered and the choice of many of Kafr Yasif's current middle classes to highlight their community's middle class characteristics helps understand not only the Christian community in Kafr Yasif but more general attitudes towards the past among Palestinians, which some scholars of Palestinian society like Ted Swedenburg have not taken into account. Rather than a binary explanation of Palestinian society during the British Mandate (and today) as divided into "collaborators" and "nationalists" this micro-historical account of the important period of the mandate can help shed light on the multiplicity, complexity, and sometimes duplicity of identifications among Palestinians in that period. Following researchers such as Elizabeth Thompson and Keith David Watenpaugh the following chapter aims to situate the small community of Kafr Yasif in relation to larger processes that were taking place in the Middle East during the 1920s-1940s; and especially the way the community today remembers its interaction with "colonialism" and "nationalism" and the interplay between the two.

The history of the evolution of the predominantly Christian middle class in Kafr Yasif is a clear indicator of the critical role the British Mandate played in reshuffling the social and economic deck of Palestine, creating distinctions that last till this day. The stories told about this period show how a community chooses to enshrine particular segments of memory as part of its communal history. Thus for example in relating how many members of the community had important positions in

the mandatory government, the stress in interviews was always on their success and importance, and not on the fact that this employment made for conflicting loyalties. In that sense, this communal story answers Laila Pasron's call for a scholarly engagement with the "prosaic concerns of daily life" in the context of the wider current scholarly debates on colonialism, nationalism and modernity in the early twentieth-century *Mashriq*.⁸²

As discussed previously, the British Mandate in Palestine radically transformed the political realities in Palestine by institutionalizing religious tensions between Arabs and themselves as well as between Arabs and Jews. But besides sectarian issues, this intervention also had economic and social implications. Christian Palestinians, like other fellow Christians in the post-Ottoman Levant, were already enjoying a few decades of increased European penetration into Palestinian society which provided first and foremost superior education. In between the Young Turk Revolution and WWI Christians were a part of an evolving vibrant, political middle class that sought to advance multi-religious and non-sectarian politics. In the first years of the mandate these culminated in the creation of the Muslim-Christian Associations that had an important political role during these years.⁸³

The colonial institutions allowed, as in Aleppo, Damascus and Beirut, the creation of a "colonial civic order."⁸⁴ By "colonial civic order" I follow Elizabeth Thompson who sought to explain the framework of interaction between citizens and between them and the state in colonial Lebanon and Syria. Thompson argued that this concept "emphasizes the fluidity of interaction and negotiation, and deemphasizes the boundary between state and society. Indeed, in colonial contexts, clear boundaries

⁸²Laila Parsons, "Micro-narrative and the Historiography of the Modern Middle East", *History Compass*, Vol. 9 (1), (2011), p. 85.

⁸³Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity*, p. 17.

⁸⁴Elizabeth Thomson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, Columbia University Press, (New York: 2000), p. 1.

rarely existed, as colonizers routinely depended upon indigenous intermediaries to exercise rule. Bargains struck between the state and its mediating agents set the terms of membership in the civic order, and consequently defined terms of citizenship variously for different groups within the population".⁸⁵ Here I use these sets of relationships to describe the position of the large number of government employees in Mandatory Palestine. Christians were disproportionately represented among the middle classes that emerged because of government demand and changing economic circumstances in Palestine since they were better equipped for dealing and engaging with the European colonial state.⁸⁶

Rural Christians, who resided in Palestine mainly in its North as well as in what was to become the West Bank, were less connected than Christians living in the big cities to the central mandatory government. Yet the network of missionaries spread throughout the villages secured these villages' centrality in their prospective regions because they offered superior schooling for Christians and non-Christians alike. Thus villages like Kafr Yasif became known during the Mandate as "the capital of the Galilee" for the education and health facilities they could offer for their surroundings.⁸⁷ This in turn created commercial opportunities, and the weekly market held in Kafr Yasif on Thursdays became a central attraction for the surrounding villages.

I. Middle Classes in the Middle East and the *kafārsawt* middle class

The analytical concept of middle class is somewhat vague and difficult to pin down, especially since its meaning shifts so dramatically between places, periods, and

⁸⁵ibid, p. 1.

⁸⁶Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity*, p. 6.

⁸⁷"*Kafr Yasif al- 'Aāṣimah*", in Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 15.

political climates. Kocka defined it as a "small but coherent and highly influential social formation defined by common opponents and a shared culture" that was unique in Europe and specifically for Western and Central Europe between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries where a "tradition of Enlightenment and a specific separation between countryside and town" existed and allowed this phenomenon.⁸⁸ Kocka's attempt to geographically delineate "middle classes" to Europe was aiming for analytical accuracy and serves as a good starting point for a discussion, yet its critique in our case is clear.

Post-colonial critique has dealt extensively with the movement of ideas, practices conceptions, and knowledge from Europe to its colonies and post-colonies and back. Leading scholars have convincingly argued that the idea that the middle classes, or modernity for that sake, were duplicated and merely reproduced in the non-Western world is not only Western-centric and racist but just wrong.⁸⁹ Keith Watenpaugh paved the way to a more nuanced scholarship on the middle classes in the Eastern Mediterranean that deals with the relationship between the evolution of the middle classes in the early twentieth century and nationalism, colonialism and modernity.⁹⁰ His point of departure is trying to understand and define the "lived historical experience" of modernity in the non-West, and specifically in the "Eastern Mediterranean".⁹¹ On the relationship between modernity and the middle class he argued that; "in the crucible of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, World War I, and the imposition of colonial rule, a discrete middle class emerged in the cities of the

⁸⁸ Jürgen Kocka, *The middle classes in Europe*, JMH, Vol. 67 (4), (Dec. 1995), pp. 805-806.

⁸⁹ See HomiBhabha's 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', in *Location of Culture*, Routledge, (London: 1994), pp. 94-120. DipeshChakrabarty, 'Introduction: The Idea of Provincializing Europe', in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 2nd edition, Princeton University Press, (Princeton-Oxford: 2008), pp. 3-26; GyanendraPandey, "Can there be a Subaltern Middle Class? Notes on African American and Dalit history", *Public Culture*, Vol. 21 (2), (2009), pp. 321-342.

⁹⁰ Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*,.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 8.

Eastern Mediterranean that was defined not just by the wealth, professions, possessions, or levels of education of its members, but also by the way they asserted their modernity".⁹² The preoccupation with the external signifiers of modernity as well as an internal "middle class anxiety" about being modern from within were characteristics of the middle class that developed in the peripheral Arab Ottoman provinces as in the rest of the colonial world, Watenpaugh argued.

Yet one important factor is missing from his analysis, which in Palestine is very important. For Watenpaugh the middle class was exclusively an urban phenomenon. He did not take into consideration the demographic geographical distribution in such areas as Mount Lebanon or Northern Palestine where Christians were not concentrated in the big cities but spread all over the region with many living in rural villages or small towns and the implications of this geographic distribution on the evolution of middle classes in non-urban settings.⁹³

Since not much has been written on middle class Palestinians in general, the historical and cultural research that exists focuses mainly on the big cities, whereas the countryside is assumed to be Muslim and agricultural.⁹⁴ Other research that deals with the big cities in the region, politics throughout the British Mandate, or the Christian population in particular addresses issues concerning the middle classes yet not as the main focus of interest.⁹⁵ It is clear however, that the middle class in

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³In Palestine: Noah Haiduc-Dale, Phd thesis, p. 17. Lebanon: Ussama Makdisi, "After 1860: Debating Religion, Reform. And Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire", *IJMES*, Vol. 34 (4), (Nov. 2002), p. 604.

⁹⁴See examples in Salim Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture*, University of California Press, (Berkeley: 2009); Itamar Radai, "The collapse of the Palestinian-Arab middle class in 1948: The case of Qatamon", *MES*, Vol. 43 (6), (Nov 2007).

⁹⁵Mahmūd Yazbak, *Haifa in the Late Ottoman Period, 1864-1914: A Muslim Town in Transition*, Brill, (Leiden: 1998), Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917-1948*, translated from Hebrew by Haim Watzman, University of California Press, (Berkeley: 2008), Merav Mack, 'Christian Palestinian Communities in Israel: Tensions between Laity, Clergy and State, in Marshall J. Breger et al eds. *Sacred space in Israel and Palestine*, Routledge, (London and NY: 2012), pp. 284-310, Ellen L. Fleischmann, "The Emergence of the Palestinian Women's Movement, 1929-39, *JPS*, Vol. 29 (3), (Spring 2000), pp. 16-32.

Palestine was formed in a similar setting and at the same time as that in Aleppo—between the Young Turk revolution and WW1, and grew much faster under the British Mandate.⁹⁶ As discussed in the previous chapter, by the 1940s Palestinian Arabs were increasingly identified and identifying according to sectarian lines, which, according to some researchers, only amplified the general frictions in this society and furthered the failure in the consequent 1948 war.⁹⁷

The institutional sectarianism that developed throughout the mandate with the increased self and external identification of communities according to religious lines was intertwined with issues of class.⁹⁸ If, under Ottoman rule Muslim land-owners were the overwhelming elites, the processes described in the previous chapter contributed greatly to changing ideas of social order and social classes. In the countryside these processes took a different form than they did in the cities, sometimes accelerating and perpetuating religious identifications in areas where Muslims and Christians co-habited. Such was the case between Kafr Yasif and some of its neighbouring villages during the period of the mandate when the predominantly Christian Kafr Yasif fared much better than neighbouring Muslim-only villages, like Kuwaykāt.

II. Kafr Yasif and Kuwaykāt

Kuwaykāt was not famous during the British Mandate for its doctors, academics or teachers, and at the end of the Mandate it ceased to exist when it was occupied a day after the conquest of Kafr Yasif, on July 10 1948, after which all its citizens fled. Most of its former inhabitants and their offspring live to this day in

⁹⁶ Radai, "Qatamon", p. 962.

⁹⁷ Rashid Khalidi, 'The Palestinians and 1948: The Underlying causes of failure', in Rogan and Shlaim, *"Palestine"*, pp. 21-24.

⁹⁸ Haiduc-Dale, *Nationalism*, p. 289.

refugee camps in Lebanon, but a few families live in the nearby Abū-Sinān, where some of their homes overlook their families' lands which are now used and cultivated by *Kibbutz* Bet-Ha'emek. Its only fame came after it was mentioned in Elias Khuri's novel *Bāb al-Shams* in which a fictional former resident arrives in the village to meet her Jewish counterpart.⁹⁹ Importantly, like the nearby 'Amka, al-Nahar or al-Kābrī—it was Muslim only.

Kuwaykāt lay a few kilometres down the road North-West from Kafr Yasif, closer to the predominantly Druze Abu-Sinān and indeed served many Druze who came to pray at the grave of the venerated Druze Shaikh Abū Muḥammad al-Qurayshī.¹⁰⁰ At the onset of the mandate its population was around 600 people, all Muslim, whereas at the end of the mandate its population was estimated as 1,218.¹⁰¹ The Shai Zionist intelligence reports on the village was based on contacts with local informers, reliance on British intelligence reports as well as the information gathered by the field agents themselves. The information in these files is considered reliable.¹⁰² Only one government school existed in the village in the early 1940s, which served around 60 boys. It is clear that throughout the mandate it relied on Kafr Yasif for transportation to Acre, large-scale shopping and other facilities.¹⁰³ It was mentioned in the Zionist press of these years only for occasional crimes or because of its role in the fighting of the 1936-39 rebellion of and during the 1947-49 war.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Elias Khuri, *Gate of the Sun*, translated to English: Humphrey Davies, Harvill Secker, (London: 2005).

¹⁰⁰ See oral interview with former resident of the village, Muḥammad Aḥmad Sanūnū, <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Kuwaykat/Story19426.html>, recorded on 8.4.2010, last watched on 10.4.13.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows*,

¹⁰³ Sanūnū, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁴ "In the villages: the youth Ahamd Salim from the village Kuwaikat...was found dead due to axe-related strikes in his head", *Davar*, 18.8.32; "Death sentence for Woman: Love crime near Acre", *Palestine Post*, 20.6.34. "Kuwaykāt"-breakdown of the different criminal and anti-British offences in the village in 1947 (eleven total), "Kuwaykat", HA ,105/345.

These crimes as well as other aspects of the relationship between the two communities play an important, yet subtle (and suppressed), role in the communal history of Kafr Yasif concerning the mandatory period. We will touch upon these stories using mostly external sources that shed light on issues that were not raised during interviews, while focusing on the main themes that preoccupy the *kafārsa* as those that best symbolize what they perceive as the past glory of Kafr Yasif: Land, Education, and Government.

i. Land

The issue of acquisition of land stands in the centre of much of the literature on Palestine in the mandatory period as it became the focus of the Zionist-Arab struggle. Arabs who sold land to Jews were condemned as traitors, and both national narratives focused their rhetoric on the land and its symbolism. Among the Palestinian Arabs, the acquisition of land invariably determined social status. Since the mid-nineteenth century Ottoman land reforms, however, old social structures were shifting as these reforms "facilitated the dissolution of the *musha* ' [community-owned lands that were cultivated by all peasants in a village]... and ownership of village lands by the peasants and the rise of absentee landlordism".¹⁰⁵ The consequence of "absentee landlordism"—an issue much discussed among scholars of Palestinian history— was the creation of the class of landless *fallahīn* and the acceleration of previous social and economic gaps in Palestinian Arab society.

Irrespective of the social gaps that existed in Kafr Yasif during the 1940s, it seems that all families owned land. The Shai reports stated that each family owned an average of 30 *dunam* and that there were no absentee landlords in the village. Two thirds of the land owners were Christian (which correlated about with the general ratio

¹⁰⁵ Salim Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea*, University of California Press, (Berkeley etc: 2009), p. 6.

of the population in the early 1940s) and the village as a whole had in its jurisdiction 4,000 *dunam*. Importantly for the case made by *kafārsa* concerning class in Kafr Yasif, none of the families owned land in other places. Kuwaykāt from the other side, had a total of 5,000 *dunams* registered under its jurisdiction. The report noted that there were "effendis" in the village (i.e. large landowners not resident in the village)—the Bani Ṣaliḥ al-Amīn family. In Kuwaykāt as well each family owned in average 40 *dunams*, yet the report notes that more than two thirds of the residents of the village were landless, pointing to a much higher degree of inequality in assets, and probably also in income.

The way communists in Kafr Yasif retrospectively viewed the consequences of the equal land distribution in their town demonstrates the place it takes in the local *kafārsawī* communal story; land arrangement in the village "was not concentrated in the hands of a few families during the Ottoman and British periods, as was the case with other towns and villages. This situation allowed many families to own small pieces of property and enabled many to get their children educated..."¹⁰⁶ However, Kafr Yasif's tax-payer register from the mandate period (that lasted continually from 1939 to the tax year of 1953/54) as well as the absentee land registration from 1949 shows that this picture might be a bit rosy, as the differences in land ownership varied between families who owned tens of *dunams* and families who owned much less. This utopian image of equal land distribution thus serves as a central "fact" concerning the democratic and egalitarian Kafr Yasif which its communists wished to remember. The fact that the local council managed to prevent the annexation of *kafārsawī* land to a nearby *kibbutz* during the 1950s and 1960s and that one of the communist party's prime goals during this period and following it was the prevention of annexation of

¹⁰⁶ From a document published on the 50th anniversary of the local council (the "Jubilee Celebrations in 1975) by the communist party in Kafr Yasif, quoted in Shihade, *Colonialism and Conflict*, p. 94.

Palestinian land by the state should be seen relative to this memory of the mandatory period.¹⁰⁷

ii. Education

On the importance of education there are no disagreements among the *kafārsa*. They pride in their town's legacy of educated women and men in the past and present and tie their town's centrality to its education facilities, asserting that their town's reputation as "Kafr Yasif the Capital" was much related to the excellent secondary school there that became prominent during the Mandatory period.¹⁰⁸ As 'Ilyas said when trying to refute the Zionist argument that Palestine was barren and empty before the Jews came: "Take Kafr Yasif as an example: It was flourishing before the state of Israel was established; we prospered—there were people who studied here all along...there was one woman doctor here! People who did not know how to read and write used to come here and study".

Zionist intelligence officers were clearly aware of that during the 1940s and discussed with elaboration the education facilities that the village offered: in 1942 there was a government school for boys that had seven classes and taught 90 students, as well as a girls' government school that taught 30 girls.¹⁰⁹ The government school that was built a year later, in 1943 from government compensation funds, was probably still gender segregated—but unlike many other rural schools taught students until the 7th grade which was considered secondary schooling, and much more than the four years of education most villagers received.¹¹⁰ The physical conditions for teaching and studying during the mandate were not easy, as there was no electricity,

¹⁰⁷ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 206.

¹⁰⁸ Nimr and Nabīha Murqus, *ibid.* Suliman Murqus, *ibid.* Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁹ "Kfar Yasif-Acre district"- village report, 22.12.42, HA, 105/223.

¹¹⁰ Ela Greenberg, *Preparing the Mothers of Tomorrow: Education and Islam in Mandate Palestine*, University of Texas Press (Austin: 2010), pp. 57-58.

the classes were crowded, and the general infrastructure difficult to handle for outside teachers who came from the cities, as Wadia Būlus who was a teacher in the village said: "my life in Kafr Yasif is very difficult and it is not in my ability to remain and here my health was diminished..."¹¹¹

Būlus's expansive sections on education in the village demonstrate the importance he sees in communicating this aspect of his town's history to his readers, of them "the school pupils, the university students and the researchers".¹¹² According to Būlus, the first government school was established in 1927 on the previous "*madrasat al-muskūb*" (The Russian school) that had been operating in the village since the Russian missionaries arrived in the spring of 1883.¹¹³ Yet differently from the French, the British and the Germans missions, "The Russian missionaries opened schools primarily in Greek Orthodox villages in the Galilee, far from the scrutiny of the church's hierarchy in Jerusalem... as part of its competition with the Catholic and Protestant missions, the Imperial Orthodox Society also advanced girls' education beyond the primary level by establishing a female teachers' training school..."¹¹⁴ The classes in the Orthodox school consisted of Arabic, Russian, Mathematics, and religious classes on the Orthodox belief. Girls and boys studied together in the same room sitting on the floor, when classes actually happened since the teaching is remembered to have been rather inconsistent.¹¹⁵ Excellent students could continue their studies after finishing the eighth grade in a seminar for teachers in Nazareth.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Quoted in Greenberg, *Preparing the Mothers*, p. 61.

¹¹² Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. g. The section on education stretches from p.219-247 (out of 419 pages) and discussed throughout the book.

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 219.

¹¹⁴ Greenberg, *Preparing the Mothers*, pp. 27-28.

¹¹⁵ Mikha'il Baṣal, interview, Kafr Yasif's 11.7.13.

¹¹⁶ Būlus, quoting communist booklet produced by the party in Kafr Yasif "*Nashrat Kifah*" and the memoir written by Dr. Nikula Ziyāda, p. 219.

Adding to the overall international competition on the Holy Land the "burst of evangelical Anglo-Saxon religious fervour" during the 1820s joined the fray of religious competition among communities in the Ottoman Levant.¹¹⁷ The Anglo-Saxon mission societies established in the early nineteenth century initially aimed to proselytize Jews yet quickly adjusted and the Eastern Christians became their main object. The school established by the "British missionary ladies" in Kafr Yasif was explicitly aimed at winning the lost souls of the Greek-Orthodox. Established in 1890, by the Jerusalem and East Mission, *Dar al-Sitāt* was a missionary school that was initially a mixed school but was later transformed into a girls-only school. In the school year of 1900-1901 70 girls were enrolled with the ladies,¹¹⁸ who were more organized than their Russian counterparts and taught Arabic, English, Mathematics, and the Protestant faith.¹¹⁹ These girls studied until the 6th grade and could then proceed to a seminary in Nazareth or Jerusalem and in later years during the British Mandate, use the Protestant network to study at the American University of Beirut.

The Russians abandoned their missionary attempts with the October Revolution and the *sitāt* (ladies) had a few years of exclusivity on education of girls in the village until 1927. For lack of other evidence one must assume that the boys had to use the education facilities of other schools during this decade. As Ela Greenberg argued, the British had very different policies for urban and rural education. In rural areas the priority was training for agricultural work, as well as enforcing a very strict gender policy in general: "The imposition of gender segregation, that is, the creation of "harim conditions" and the refusal to allow coeducation, reflected very conservative assumptions about Islam and Muslim society, shaped by British

¹¹⁷ Masters, *Christians and Jews*, p. 146.

¹¹⁸ Greenberg, *Preparing the Mothers*, p. 29.

¹¹⁹ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 220.

experience with the elite upper-classes in India and Egypt".¹²⁰ This policy contradicted at times education facilities that offered co-education, as Būlus argued in pride concerning his town: "in Kafr Yasif we had mixed education since the 19th century where in the Russian school girls and boys studied together".¹²¹

Yet like in other places in Mandatory Palestine, the private missionary schools were compensating for the shortcomings of mandatory government education policies. Students who were taught in English before the Mandate could now take advantage of the increasing educational opportunities in Palestine and beyond. As Mikha'il Baṣal said: "Kafr Yasif was defined as a Christian village [so] the British founded a school, so did the Russians, and that's the reason for the background we have—and it only strengthened, we just started teaching before the other places..."¹²² Būlus gives a two-page-long list of students, female and male, who studied in prestigious educational institutions during the mandate such as the Young Men's English College in Jerusalem and al-Rashīdiyya; He quotes Dr. Nikula Ziyāda who was a student at the Arab College in Jerusalem who remembered six students from Kafr Yasif who studied there during the mandate.¹²³ The list includes the eight students who studied in the American University in Beirut during the Mandatory period, as well as Hīfa' Yūsif Būlus who studied in Cambridge.¹²⁴ It seems that Būlus even omitted a few names like Shukri Fa'iz Khūri who studied during the Mandatory period at Harvard¹²⁵ and Widād Khūri who received her BA in Arabic language from AUB.¹²⁶ The degree of importance attached to education and especially education outside of the village among the *kafārsā* today cannot be underestimated as Būlus

¹²⁰ Greenberg, *Preparing the Mothers*, p. 58.

¹²¹ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 335.

¹²² Mikha'il Baṣal, *ibid.*

¹²³ Dr. Nikula Ziyāda, in Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 228.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ Abū Aimān, *ibid.*

¹²⁶ Greenberg, *ibid.* p. 134.

recounts: "It is important to say that the excelling students who studied out of the village and especially out of the country, played an important role in elevating the social and cultural level in the village, and they brought back to it an abundance of civilized and civil phenomena from their places of study, as they established clubs and influenced the town with theatre, cultural and gymnastic activities..."¹²⁷

iii. Mandatory Government, The Great Arab Revolt, and- *‘ala al-zamān al-‘inglizi, lamma ḥaraqū al-balad*"¹²⁸

A comparison with the neighbouring Kuwaykāt illustrates Kafr Yasif's ambiguous relationship with the British mandatory government during the decades in which Palestinian nationalism first started to express itself. The Shai intelligence village reports from 1942-43 focused on internal politics in villages, their involvement in the 1936-39 revolt and on local notables. Kuwaykāt's population in 1943 was not registered in the report (the numbers of men in between the ages of 18-48 were said to be "about" 200) but it was probably around a thousand people.¹²⁹ One of the most interesting aspects of the Shai report is that no families in Kuwaykāt had "important relatives" in contrast to the list in the report on Kafr Yasif naming eight distinguished personalities working out of the village. Among these names are Dr. Dawūd Būlus, who was an advisor on health to the Mandatory government and lived in Jerusalem,¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 229.

¹²⁸ "In the time of the English, when they burnt the village". Tūmā Abu-‘Aqel, in Wasfi Abu-Aqel' house, Kafr Yasif, July 2012.

¹²⁹ The difference between Kafr Yasif and Kuwaykāt's population was about 100 people more in Kafr Yasif in 1948. <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Kuwaykat/index.html>

¹³⁰ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 15.

or Ḥabīb Tūmā al-Khūrī who was an inspector in the education department in Jerusalem.¹³¹

Another section in these reports discussed the activity of the villagers in the "events" (*Me'ora 'ot*, as Jewish writers referred to what Arab Palestinians would call the Great Rebellion—*al thawra al-Kubra*). Kuwaykāt's activities during the rebellion included active participation in the revolt under the regional command of Rabbah al-ʿAwwad from the nearby al-Ghabsiyya, and an arrest of "more than 100 for a period of a month to three months" by the British police. About 20 people (or more) died during the revolt, and the village was forced by the government to pay a fine of 500 Palestinian Pounds.¹³² This was at the time when the "state bureaucrats and indigenous colonial officials, medical doctors, lawyers, military officers, middle-man agents, bankers, journalists, state high school teachers..."¹³³ of Kafr Yasif were probably trying not to lose their jobs (and their lives, as we shall see later).

Kafr Yasif was granted the status of a local municipal authority run by a local council as early as 1925 a fact that was mentioned in the beginning of most conversations I had in Kafr Yasif as Buṭrus said soon after we met: "Kafr Yasif has [so and so] Christians, Muslims and Druze, and we have a local council—and this is one of the first villages to have a council, that was in 1925 during the Mandate".¹³⁴ As we can understand, the local council plays an extremely important part in the collective memory of the town, and is remembered by its middle class Christians as a "protector of the people". The administrative independence of Kafr Yasif was much celebrated by its own people in years to come as representing their resilience and

¹³¹ "Kfar Yasif", HA, 22.12.42, 105/223.

¹³² "Kuwaikat", 7.1.43, HA, 105/223.

¹³³ Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*, p. 19.

¹³⁴ Buṭrus, interview, 21.7.13. Photocopy of original document, personal copy.

responsibility.¹³⁵ This heritage was created during the mandate and is closely associated with the large number of middle class government employees from the village. Būlus provides a two-page long list of these employees, arguing (and probably exaggerating) that there was no government office in which there were no workers from Kafr Yasif.

However, this close and in several ways dependent relationship with the British mandatory government was fraught with tension by the early 1930s when the local and personal priorities of the *kafārsa* clashed with their political choices and identification. Things came to a head during the revolt of 1936-39 and especially in 1939, "*alla al-zamān al-`inglizi, lamma ḥarakū al-balad*" (the time the English burned the village) an event stamped so firmly in the collective memory of the village that it came up without prompting in all the interviews with people of different outlooks and social positions.

The "Great Arab Revolt", considered by some a rare moment of anti-colonial indigenous insurgency against the British occupiers, was indeed a turning point for the Arab Palestinians. It began with a blast and ended with complete failure and disintegration of the Palestinian Arab struggle.¹³⁶ It started as an Arab workers' strike directed from the cities which lasted 175 days¹³⁷ and included violent clashes between the Arabs, the British, and Jews.¹³⁸ The general strike was followed by an acute economic slump (especially for the Arabs), a British clamp-down and threats of imposing a military rule. During the strike "the face of Palestine's cities changed"¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Celebrations commemorating the establishment of the local council were (and still are) central events in the town, celebrating the 30th, 50th, 60th anniversaries and so on. See Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 14.

¹³⁶ Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917-1948*, trans. Haim Watzman, University of California Press, (Berkeley: 2008), p. 171.

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 95.

¹³⁸ Ann Mosely Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine: 1917-1939*, Cornell University Press, (Ithaca, London: 1979), pp. 217-221.

¹³⁹ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 98.

as businesses and schools closed, and young schoolboys marched in demonstrations to prevent people from breaking the strike and opening their shops. Yet "the residents of northern Palestine, including Galilee, had been relatively quiet during the strike".¹⁴⁰ That was until the publication of the Peel commission and the recommendation for partition, under which the Galilee would be in the Jewish state.

During this first part of the rebellion, it is not exactly clear to what extent people in the small villages of the Galilee were active participants in the city-led struggle. Būlus explains the fact that Kafr Yasif did not really participate in the strike because it was "not effective". He then goes on to explain the other reasons why Kafr Yasif's politicians and people of influence did not join in—because it was not "one of the centres of the revolt," and as "most of them worked as government employees for the mandate" and had important and "sensitive" prestigious jobs. Another explanation that he adds towards the end is that Kafr Yasif was very close to the central British army camp in Acre.¹⁴¹

However, any government employee in Kafr Yasif could sense the shifting political climate as the nationalist press was becoming increasingly more explicit concerning the widening definition of treason which now included not only land-sellers, informers and opponents of the Hussaynī camp but strikebreakers as well.¹⁴² Newspapers such as the *Majlisī* (Hajj Amīn al-Hussaynī's party) *al-Liwaa* were giving updates concerning such items as strikebreakers who dared to open shops with explicit warnings as to publishing their names in future editions of the newspaper.¹⁴³

Thus, when the strike moved on to its second stage, the more violent one, educated people such as those in Kafr Yasif could probably sense that they had two

¹⁴⁰ Mosely Lesch, *Arab Politics*, p. 122.

¹⁴¹ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 21.

¹⁴² Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, Land sellers: pp. 44-50, Informers: pp. 50-51, political opponents: pp. 51-55 and strikebreakers: pp. 98-100.

¹⁴³ Ibid. pp. 98-99.

options—to join in the rebellion or flee. The second stage of the revolt was characterized by a move to the countryside and increased violence by the rebels both against the British and the Jews as well as against Arab "collaborators". Cohen argued that unlike the claims of some Israeli historians, the internal terror did not account for thousands of victims but perhaps 1,000, which was much less than the numbers of Arab casualties of fighting and British retaliation.¹⁴⁴

The social reversal described in the literature between the urban elites and the subaltern countryside peasants was probably accurate in the cases of the cities but less accurate in the western Galilee. A unique rural middle class had evolved quite rapidly in these small, mainly Christian villages of the Western Galilee, of which Kafr Yasif was not the only one. They all found themselves in complex situations during the revolt, as they lived in rural surroundings, where it was difficult to hide and impossible to ignore the ways in which political power had shifted. Sectarian tensions increased during this stage of the revolt, as more Christians were non-fighters than fighters, and the majority of the rebels were Muslim. The conflation of religious identity with class and politics was underway, especially since so many Christians were government employees, and were increasingly under attack by the rebels.¹⁴⁵ As noted earlier, the nationalistic discourse on collaborators did not leave much room for ambiguity since government employees working as police-officers or for the army, of which there were about 20 from Kafr Yasif during the revolt (if not more) were targeted.¹⁴⁶ This discourse is very much still at play in the descriptions on the revolt by *kafārsa*.

¹⁴⁴ Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p. 144.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid p. 104.

¹⁴⁶ Būlus writes that during the revolt there were seven *kafārsa* working for the army, and his list of police officers is very long yet does not state a specific period in the mandate. Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 25.

Swedenburg supplies valuable and interesting information on the dynamics of the revolt in this area, if the reader is able to ignore his nationalistic worldview that depicts the subaltern villagers-rebels as heroes and the rest as villains. His research is valuable for his focus on oral history and the interviews he managed to conduct with rebellion commanders in the areas such as Rabbah al-‘Awwad and someone he called by the pseudonym Abū Fāris (who died by now, and might be Mabda Farhāt) who were both active in the area of Kafr Yasif.¹⁴⁷ Villagers from some of the surrounding villages (the Druze from this area did not join the rebellion) like Kuwaykāt and al-Ghabsiyya joined the rebellion as fighters, under the command of Rabbah al-‘Awwad. Fighters from Kuwaykāt such as ‘Ali Husayn Baytam raised money in their villages for acquiring weapons, and were then sent on different missions—mainly fighting and collecting money from other villages, like Kafr Yasif. Būlus uses a few valuable sources when discussing the revolt, of them the memoir of Mabda Farhāt who was a commander from Majd al-Kurūm and eventually left the rebels and joined the government before the end of the revolt and settled down in Kafr Yasif as well as other memoirs of people from Kafr Yasif who lived through the revolt.¹⁴⁸

From Būlus's very honest review, it is clear that the richer government employees in the village were going through a very rough period at this stage of the revolt and they were targeted for their money as well as their political stance. There were a few assassinations and many assassination attempts, of which his father was one of the targets. He mentions the "survivors" of these attempts, one of whom was the current head of the local council and a future hero in the village-Yanni Yanni, who survived a siege on his house by rebels from the near-by villages of al-Birwa,

¹⁴⁷ Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*, 2nd Edition, University of Arkansas Press, (Fayetteville: 2003), p. 156.

¹⁴⁸ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 22.

Tarshiḥa, and other unidentified armed men.¹⁴⁹ The reason for the attack on him, Būlus reluctantly tells us, was that Yanni Yanni was blamed for serving as a middleman in a land deal in Acre after which he was nicknamed *khawāja* (an insult literally meaning "master" used as a synonym for a European, colonizer or foreigner). He was blamed for collaboration and for being non-nationalistic and as a result took the strictly Muslim title "Abū Muḥammad" as protection.¹⁵⁰ This aspect of Yanni Yanni's life in which he was involved in anti-nationalist activity that gave him the dubious nickname *khawāja* was not mentioned by anyone else but Būlus. Būlus furthermore argues that the revolt strayed from its original purpose, when lower class peasants took revenge of their masters and reverted to "immoral actions".¹⁵¹ He does not mention the fact that the council members fled to Lebanon (probably together with other who feared rebel violence) and that they returned only when it seemed safer sometime in 1939,¹⁵² and thus avoids discussing the aspects of his community that are not "first-class patriotic".¹⁵³

By early 1939 Kuwaykāt was known to the British as a "nest" of rebels and many of its men participated in ambushes on British forces—many were consequently arrested. The Shai reports of three years later demonstrate how this reputation was important for the village's well-being and development. Similarly to Kuwaykāt—Al-Nahar, al-Ghabsiyya, 'Umm al-Faraj and Shaikh Danūn, were probably more what Swedenburg had in mind when he pictured the revolt; small villages with Muslim-only villagers, peasants who were often landless, who fought in the rebellion and were

¹⁴⁹ Bulus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 24.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 24

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 23.

¹⁵² Mikha'il Başal, *Lidhikra al-marḥūm Mikha'il Başal*", self-publication, (2005), p. 208.

¹⁵³ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, pp. b, d.

later marked and discriminated against by the government unless the village leaders changed sides and worked with the British.¹⁵⁴

"The fire", serves as a suitable example of the ambiguity of the relations with the British as well as a tragic insight into the relations between Kafr Yasif and Kuwaykāt. When I asked Rawḍa, a nurse working in the nearby Jewish town of Nahariya, if she remembered stories from her grandmother, she answered very quickly, without thinking much, and said:

"Yes, for example when they burnt the village. They came to burn the village. There was a *mukhtār* [village head]¹⁵⁵ ... [he] was replacing the head of the municipality, [because all the council members were in Lebanon] they came and asked him: where are the neighbourhoods of the Muslims? He said: we have no neighbourhoods of Muslims. They more or less knew where... We lived in a mixed neighbourhood, by the Church... and our houses were burnt... then someone told us that they burnt it here because they thought it was the Muslims' neighbourhood".¹⁵⁶

In mid-February (14-17) 1939 a British military Jeep was blown up by a roadside bomb and one British soldier was killed and others wounded.¹⁵⁷ British soldiers who witnessed it "went on a rampage" and burnt around 70 houses in Kafr Yasif because its men were suspected of planting the mine.¹⁵⁸ Around 10 people from Kuwaykāt approached when they saw the village in flames: they were shot at by British soldiers with machine guns. Eight were killed.¹⁵⁹ The report sent by the Chaplain of the Anglican Church of St. Luke in Haifa to his Bishop in London on the

¹⁵⁴ Hagana village files, "'Umm al-Faraj", date NA, HA K/244/105; "Al-Nahar"ibid.; Danūn, ibid.

¹⁵⁵ A form of local "traditional" governance that the British maintained. In Kafr Yasif the local council co-existed with the "traditional" *mukhtar* form until 1960 when the local council demanded its abolition, Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p, 195.

¹⁵⁶ Rawḍa, interview July 2012.

¹⁵⁷ Date not clear, see Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 108.

¹⁵⁸ Eric F. Bishop, Anglican minister, quoted in Shepherd, *Ploughing*, p. 214.

¹⁵⁹ Swedenburg, ibid. p. 109.

event sheds light on the importance these missionaries saw in villages like Kafr Yasif as well as the uneasy relations they had developed with the Mandate government by the time of the revolt:¹⁶⁰

"We have some anxiety in regard to Kafr Yasif. A landmine exploded near the village and one British soldier was killed and others wounded. The village was searched and 70 houses set on fire; 40 houses were totally destroyed. About 250 people were homeless. I do not think the circumstances differ from those with which we are familiar. I have not heard that there is any evidence that the village was responsible for placing the landmine. At the same time nine men from Kuwaykāt village were shot dead. It is reported from Kafr Yasif that they were ordered to run before the troops and then fired on. I cannot confirm this."¹⁶¹

Mikha'il Baṣal's description is representative of the way "The Fire" is remembered today as it both entails the personal connection to the event as well as depicts its aftermath, which is significant. After describing the landmine and the fire he said that his father told him that they ran away taking only what they wore as his father's house was completely burnt. "Later it turned out that the band [of the perpetrators] did not even enter Kafr Yasif and the British gave us compensation." Baṣal noted that by the time the British actually paid the people of Kafr Yasif it was 1942 and people "organized themselves and went back to normal" so the money was given to the local council to build nine classes for the school, a building for the council itself and a spacious plaza for the market.¹⁶²

The story of "The Fire" encapsulates in a sense the way *kafārsa* today remember their community's history during the British mandate as well as their

¹⁶⁰ See another correspondence between a missionary man in Palestine and London in which he says of the British army's retaliation that he is "not sure that their rather heavy handed replies to each 'incident' don't tend to embitter feeling" .MECA, GB 165-0161, 62-2.

¹⁶¹ Jerusalem and East mission papers, MECA, GB 165-0161, 61-1.

¹⁶² Mikha'il Baṣal, *ibid*.

relation to their own middle class history. The story is overall spoken about in nationalistic terms: "during the revolt against the British the village was burnt by the British".¹⁶³ Yet as soon as the details of the events are discussed there is a feeling that the *kafārsa* were merely bystanders in their own story: the British burnt and took revenge in a village that was never really involved, so-and-so houses were burnt, they were later repaired, etc. Some people mentioned the people of Kuwaykāt who were killed during the same eruption of British violence, they were, however, not central in the narratives that were focusing mostly on "The Fire" itself. The main themes that were discussed concerning the fire were the mixed neighbourhoods of Christians and Muslims in which the *kafārsa* lived and the development projects that were undertaken due to the compensation funds from the government. As this is the central local event that signals the community's participation in the revolt it is interesting that the *kafārsa* depict themselves more as peplexed bystanders than active participants.

III. Conclusion

The statement that "we are middle class" might not be true of the entire town of Kafr Yasif today in terms of statistics but it was undoubtedly more fitting at one stage during the mandatory period and was one of the reasons that Kafr Yasif did not suffer the tragedy of its neighbour Kuwaykāt. Two major factors appear to have been the drivers of this phenomenon and the self-perceptions that accompanied it that in turn shaped the decisions by community leaders: religion and relative equality of land ownership.

¹⁶³ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 26.

It was religion that bought the missionary schools to the village long before they reached the village's Muslim neighbours. This in turn led to aspirations of modernity and educational attainments that provided jobs and non-agricultural income from the British mandatory government. The relatively less unequal distribution of land ownership meant that the *kafārsa* were less desperate than their Muslim neighbours during the time of the revolt. They also had more to lose; government jobs and security.

However, beyond the immediate differences between Kafr Yasif and Kuwaykāt the middle class history of Kafr Yasif is inherently entwined with the effects of colonialism and nationalism. The historical ambiguities of the 'colonial civic order' that was created during the British rule in Palestine, are very much in play when discussing education in Kafr Yasif and its consequences, government employment. It is the story of "The Fire" and its dominance over other local stories of the revolt that frames the *kafārsa* in the as equal participants in the history of Palestinian nationalism (they suffered the violent British assault) "despite" being considered and considering themselves being middle class. Other aspects of the revolt are downplayed: Yanni Yanni's reputation as a land-seller, the local leadership's flight to Lebanon, and sectarian-class tensions. Yet once the *kafārsawī* local story moves to less pressing issues it manages to present us with a much more nuanced and crafty claim: they present us with an alternative to the binary collaborationist/nationalist narrative in which the historical complexities of being middle class are encapsulated. They pride in their engagement with the state as government employees of the British colonial rule because in that story they present themselves as active agents who were active in cultural and educational work as well as bureaucracy. They argue that this is the source of their "patriotic" endurance and pride. This pride and legacy of education

and bureaucracy as well as the difficult dilemmas that accompany the specific *kafārsawī* story of delivering a dignified communal history reverberate to this day and are most prevalent in the way stories about the 1948 war are told.

Chapter 3: "*Takafrasū ya 'arab!*"¹⁶⁴—The Fall and Rise of Kafr

Yasif

With Nimr Murqus's death on January 29 2013, an important chapter in the history of Kafr Yasif and the Palestinians in Israel came to an end. Murqus, who died in his early 80s, was the head of the Kafr Yasif local council for about 20 years between the 1970s and 1990s and an active member of the communist party from 1953. I had the good fortune to interview Murqus just a few months before his death and both his recollections and his analysis were an important source for this chapter, and the thesis as whole. Obituaries about Murqus in the Arab media in Israel demonstrate how important he had become as a symbol for a generation that was now long gone. Summing up her personal and political grief Nabila Espanyoli, a member of the communist party (*Hadash*- acronym for Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, known as *al-jabha* in Arabic) wrote on her Facebook page an obituary saying that "this is the generation of our remaining, our endurance and pride, our identity, and this is the generation of our party and Democratic Front schooling...if not for them and their struggle we would not have risen and become proud of being Palestinians..."¹⁶⁵

This chapter deals with the central and most important claim coming out of the *kafārsa* regarding their communal past; that they are both *waṭāniyūn*— nationalistic and patriotic—and pragmatic—able and rational decision makers. This claim, unlike the other two, binds the *kafārsawī* story to the story of all Palestinians in Israel, framing how and why they remained in the town, and the nature of their relationship

¹⁶⁴ "Become like the people of Kafr Yasif, Arabs!" Attributed to Emile Habibi who called all the Arabs in Israel to follow the example of Kafr Yasif during the early 1950s, exact date unknown.

¹⁶⁵ Nabila Espanyoli official Facebook page, 1.2.13.

with the state in the decades following the war. My focus in this chapter will thus be the 1948 war and the decades that followed it, especially the years of the Military Government that was imposed on most Palestinians in Israel from 1948 until 1966. This period is definitive of the way the *kafārsa* look at themselves today, in particular, the story they tell of why and how they surrendered in 1948 explains in the following decades how the *kafārsa* came to perceive themselves as the political vanguard, fighting for the rights of Palestinians in Israel.

The chapter will present a historical continuum divided into two parts. The first deals with the 1948 war as it was experienced in Kafr Yasif and its surroundings, and as it is remembered today by the generation who lived through it, as well their children who heard and interpret these stories. The second part deals with the decades that followed the war, in which local politics became an arena for debating national issues and loyalties as well as political interests and sectarian (or non-sectarian) affiliations. This chronological framework challenges previous narrations of this period in multiple ways, stressing the possibility of continuity from the Mandatory period, especially with regard to local middle class political activism that was enabled and manifested through the activity of the local council headed by Yanni Quṣṭandi Yanni. This narration also challenges previous assumptions concerning the passivity and docility of Palestinians in Israel in the decades following the war, demonstrating how the small community of Kafr Yasif was engaged during this period in active political resistance to state policies. Finally, as mentioned earlier, the sources used for this thesis allow an investigation of the actual lived experience of the 1948 war from a unique angle. This local micro-history of the period of the war demonstrates how important it is to listen to voices that are easily marginalized and dismissed by nationalist narratives, voices of people who cannot easily be termed as

"collaborators", as they present well-argued claims for being something else altogether.

I. The Fall: Remembering the 1948 war

The 1948 War: History and Historiography

The 1948 war began in 1947 with the UN General Assembly Resolution on the partition of Palestine, and ended with the truce between Syria and Israel in July 1949. The war is usually seen as divided into two parts, the first following the UN declaration, which was manifested in fighting between the citizens of the British government, Palestinian Arabs and the Jews, and the second following the British withdrawal from Palestine and the establishment of the state of Israel on May 15 1948, after which the armies of Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, Egypt, and Iraq joined in the war.¹⁶⁶ Israel was established on 77% of Mandatory Palestine whereas about 750,00 Arab Palestinians became refugees.¹⁶⁷

Historical research on the *Nakba-Komemiyut* (catastrophe-independence) is prolific. Polemical debates about the reasons for the Palestinian dispersal (transfer/flight) are still ongoing among Palestinian, Israeli and international academics, and reflect the extent to which perceptions of the war and its outcomes serve as a starting point for most debates about the present Israel/Palestine

¹⁶⁶ Walid Khalidi, "The Palestine Problem: An Overview", JPS, Vol. 21 (1), (1991), pp. 8-9. Benny Morris offers a different division, Morris, *1948: The First Arab Israeli War*, Yale University Press, (New Haven: 2008).

¹⁶⁷ W Khalidi, *ibid.* p. 9, Ahmad H. Sa'di and Lila abu-Lughod, introduction, *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the claims of memory*, Columbia university press, (New York: 2007), p. 3.

situation.¹⁶⁸ Its role in Palestinian and Israeli historiography is, as Sa'di and Abu-Lughod argued, best exemplified by the fittingly dramatic metaphor of death and life.¹⁶⁹ Inevitably, much of the academic polemics revolved around the potential use of the scholarly research for proving nationalist points, where central questions have included that of whether the Palestinian exodus was planned or "was born of war, not by design", whether it was ordered or not by the Arab leadership and so forth.¹⁷⁰ However, in recent years, scholars have been arguing for a need to shift from such a top-down political perspective to a bottom-up historical approach, in order to fill in, and sometimes challenge to the assumptions underlying these debates. Introducing voices that were previously unheard, these researchers focus on local and personal experiences of people and communities through the war.¹⁷¹ Scholars have begun to focus on the way personal and national memory and remembrance serve as the main

¹⁶⁸ Examples: Benny Morris, *The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem 1947-1949*, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge, 1987), Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, Institute For Palestine Studies, (Washington D.C.: 1992), Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948*, Institute For Palestine Studies, (Washington D.C., 1992). Yoav Gelber, *Palestine 1948: War, Escape, and the Emergence of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, Sussex Academic Press, (Brighton: 2004), etc.

¹⁶⁹ Sa'di and Abu-Lughod, Introduction, *ibid.* p.4.

¹⁷⁰ Morris, *The Birth*, p. 286. Nur Masalha, "A critique of Benny Morris", *JPS*, Vol. 21 (1), (1991), pp. 90-97, Norman Finkelstein, "Rejoinder to Benny Morris", *JPS*, Vol. 21 (2), (1992), pp. 61-71. Benny Morris, "Response to Finkelstein and Masalha", *JPS*, Vol. 21. (1), (1991), pp. 98-114. Rashid Khalidi, 'The Palestinians and 1948: The Underlying Causes of Failure,' in E. Rogan and A. Shlaim, eds., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), and introduction of Issa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine: Arab Factionalism and Social Disintegration, 1939-1948* (SUNY Press, 1991), etc.

¹⁷¹ Some examples: Mustafa Abbasi, "The fall of Acre in the 1948 Palestine war", *JPS*, (summer 2010), Vol. 36. (4), pp. 6-27; Abbasi, "Nazareth in the war for Palestine: The Arab city that survived the 1948 Nakba", *Holy Land Studies*, (2010), Vol. 9(2), pp. 185-207; Itamar Radai, "Jaffa, 1948: The fall of a city", *Journal of Israeli History*, (2011), Vol 30 (1), pp. 23-43; Radai, "The collapse of the Palestinian-Arab middle class: The case of Qatamon", *MES*, (2007), Vol. 43 (6), pp. 961-982; Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, "The Palestinian village of Ijzim during the 1948 war: Forming an anthropological history through villagers accounts and army documents", *History and Anthropology*, (2002), Vol 13 (1), pp. 13-30; Susan Slimovics, 'The rape of Qula, a destroyed Palestinian village', in Sa'di and Abu-Lughod eds. *Nakba*, *ibid.* pp. 27-51.

locus of these debates, as demonstrated both by Sa'di and Abu-Loghud and Ben-Ze'ev.¹⁷²

As Sa'di and Abu-Loghud note, the 1948 war serves for many Palestinians and Israelis as the "demarcation line between two qualitatively opposing periods."¹⁷³ It is difficult to overestimate the emotional and political weight of this war, and its symbolic and mythical significance, for both people's national narratives. According to Edward Said, both the Palestinian and the Israeli national ideologies work similarly on the connection between self and national identity, creating a "corporate self" subordinated to the nation.¹⁷⁴ In national memories it splits life and death, catastrophe and birth, into two chronologically mutually exclusive periods of time—before the war and after it. Those Palestinians who remained in Israel and comprised 10%¹⁷⁵ of Arab Palestinians in Palestine before the war did not fit in with either narrative. Their sheer existence demonstrated that it was possible to remain on the land; and with the passing of time and the realization that refugees were not to return, demonstrated too how crucial this decision was. After a few decades of being ignored in the Arab and Palestinian discourse about Palestine, their having stayed put has, in recent decades, gradually been incorporated into the Palestinian national narrative, retroactively merged into the nationalist concept of *Ṣumūd* (steadfastness). Yet traces of the discourse blaming the Palestinians who remained for collaborating are still present in the undercurrents of the stories of those who remained, as in the stories presented here.¹⁷⁶ The *kafārsawī* story of the war has many of these undercurrents. On the one hand, its narrators consciously frame their story as a Palestinian one that directly

¹⁷² Sa'di and abu-Lughod, *Nakba*, and Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, *Remembering Palestine in 1948: Beyond National Narratives*, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge, NY: 2011).

¹⁷³ Sa'di and abu-Lughod, *Nakba*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁴ Edward Said, *Afterword: the consequences of 1948*, in in E. Rogan and A. Shlaim, eds., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 257.

¹⁷⁵ Ghanem and Mustafa, "The Palestinians in Israel", p. 182.

¹⁷⁶ Robinson, *Occupied Citizens*, p. 17.

connects to other *Nakba* stories and to other "nationalist cultural forms."¹⁷⁷ On the other, the *kafārsawī* stories also highlight their village leader's activism by comparing it to the actions of the Palestinian national leadership of the time (which either fled or was silent). Unlike other Palestinian *Nakba* stories, which tell of a paradise lost and the beginning of life as refugees, the Kafr Yasif *Nakba* stories help define a beginning as well as an end. This section deals with how the *kafārsa* reconcile this fact with the general Palestinian narrative and provides a moral and ideological map that deals with the painful issues of resistance, leadership, class and religion.

i. *Political Cohesion*

When Nimr Murqus was asked about his memory of the 1948 war he told his personal story. Comprised of two parts, his story is almost a conscious answer to Edward Said's analysis mentioned above, a skilfully-knitted narrative that moves between the personal and the public in a way that only a well-practiced public man could offer. Murqus was 18 years old and beginning his career as a teacher in 1948. Like many of his village compatriots, he was then a government employee who was sent to teach in a government school. He taught in the Druze village of Daliyat al-Karmil which needed teachers like Murqus from more educated villages. He used to come back home to Kafr Yasif once a month to "wash his clothes and himself".¹⁷⁸ Using public transportation, he used to travel from Daliyat al-Karmil to Haifa once a week to read the newspapers, get some cash, and sometimes buy a book. In Daliyat al-Karmil there was not a single radio at the time, not to mention a shop with newspapers.

¹⁷⁷ Sa' di and Abu-Lughod, introduction, p. 7.

¹⁷⁸ Nimr Murqus, *ibid.*

In early April 1948, young Murqus made his way to Haifa in order to cash his pay slip in Barclays Bank, on his way to Kafr Yasif. The bank was closed. He then realized that the streets of Haifa were empty and that there was no public transportation. He did not know that "the war between the Jews and the Arabs had already started at the time in Haifa".¹⁷⁹ Someone advised him to go to the port, where he would be able to find boats that would take him to Acre, which was less turbulent at the time and much closer to Kafr Yasif. A dock labourer carried Nimr on his shoulders for fifty meters in the low sea-water to the Acre- bound boat. Murqus returned to the village without his salary and later would remember this journey as his "first encounter with the *Nakba*."

That April, the village's population was growing quickly. Poor villagers from the area who fled from their now-occupied villages were congregating in Kafr Yasif,¹⁸⁰ and natives of Kafr Yasif who were worked all around the country as government employees were coming home. Fleeing refugees were probably causing rising tensions and panic all over Palestine.¹⁸¹ The bureaucratically and economically central city of Haifa was emptying of its Arab residents, which only increased the panic in the countryside, which was seeking guidance from the leadership in the city.¹⁸² In Murqus' narrative, the regional and national political disintegration of the Arabs was both symbolized and caused by the lack of Arab leadership. He referred to the leadership of Acre with contempt and called it the "blah-blah leadership" (*qiyādat al-ṣawt*), which was preaching to the people of Acre to remain while "being the first

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Abū 'Ayman, 2.8.12, Rafa'il Bulus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 30.

¹⁸¹ Morris *The birth*, p. 52.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* p. 65.

to run away".¹⁸³ He made it clear that he was referring specifically to Ahmad al-Shuqayri who, for him, was the worst of them all.

In stark contrast to the national leadership, Murqus and others viewed the local leaders, organized through the local council, as exemplifying the kind of leadership that didn't abandon its people. Or as Murqus said: "Before the Jews conquered the village, we already had a smart head of council, with experience. What more can I say—Yanni Yanni".¹⁸⁴ Similarly speechless in admiration was Abū 'Ayman when he talked about the period leading up to the village's occupation; "How did Kafr Yasif survive—how? No one touched a house! They [the Israeli army] razed 'Amka and Bet Ha'emek"¹⁸⁵, but we had a head of council, so..."[gestured to being speechless].¹⁸⁶ Yanni's role in the way the war is remembered is pivotal, especially since he bridges the war and martial law periods, thus providing a continuum central to the narratives of those who remained. One specific story relating to him explains why the *kafārsa* did not fight and later chose to surrender.

"Al-qaḍiyya mabyū'a"- Palestine is sold

Būlus, describing the situation in the village during the months of April, May and June 1948, says the people of Kafr Yasif discussed the fate of the village in public meetings where they debated the question "should we resist or not?" (*hal nuqāwim am ala nuqāwim?*). He says the village was split into two camps—those who supported, and those who opposed armed resistance to the approaching Israeli army. Yanni Yanni led the group that opposed resistance (and which comprised 95% of the village

¹⁸³ Nimr Murqus, *ibid*

¹⁸⁴ *ibid*.

¹⁸⁵ Abū 'Ayman used the Israeli-Hebrew names of the Jewish *Kibbutz* and *Moshav* that were established on the Palestinian villages of 'Amka and Kuwaykāt. Interview with him.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid*.

according to Nimr Murqus). The deciding element, as the story is recalled today, was a meeting between Yanni and King Abdullah of Jordan. According to Būlus "Yanni Yanni went with a high-ranking delegation to meet King Abdullah in Damascus for understanding the fate of Palestine. There Yanni Yanni discovered that... Palestine was sold."¹⁸⁷ Hanna Shihāda Makhūlī recalled a slightly different version, saying that Yanni Yanni and a Palestinian delegation went to a meeting in Jordan with King Abdullah where they told the king: "Jaffa fell, Your Majesty! And he answered: "the canon will retrieve it". They said: "Haifa fell Your Majesty... "[and the same answer], then Yanni addressed those present and said: "Friends, the question [of Palestine] is sold, everyone should return to their homes and make a decision concerning their towns..."¹⁸⁸

Available evidence does not support the story of Yanni's trip to meet King Abdullah, but the story about the trip reveals how much the decision not to fight was anchored in the large-scale discourse of Palestinian history. The *k̄frasā* are thus transformed from an insignificant small community to the proud village that decided its fate and kept its land. Yet the reality of the war in Kafr Yasif's region, as in the rest of Palestine, was more complex, as the *kafārsa* themselves acknowledge. According to Būlus's account, a local *kafārsawī* armed resistance was organized during April by one Ḥalīm Jiryis Shihādah, with the support of the commander of the ALA Syrian-Druze Battalion Shakib Wahāb.¹⁸⁹ Ammunition was bought for the local guard of the village, which was divided into four groups, one for each of the village's neighbourhoods. Būlus then writes that some of the local soldiers participated in some battles during April. Yet at the end of the month, the resistance headquarters were moved to Acre, which took the place of Haifa in terms of regional command until its

¹⁸⁷ Bulus, *Kafr Yasif*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁸⁸ Makhūlī, interview in al-haqiqa, ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Būlus, ibid. p. 28.

fall in May 17.¹⁹⁰ Following the move to Acre, Shiḥādah left the country and the military command over the village moved to different commanders who, like Shakib Wahāb, were following orders (when these were given) from the Arab Liberation Army headed by Fawzi al-Qawuqji.¹⁹¹ Rafʿat ʿAwāyid from Nablus was replaced by Shaikh Rabbah who was then replaced by an "aggressive" commander from Gaza called Sulimān, who probably came in mid-July 1948. Yanni Yanni seemed to have taken a step back during this period, as noted by Būlus.¹⁹² The *Hagana* report from June 6 1948 quotes a local "Abū-Shām" who complained that Sulimān is terrorizing the *kafārsa*.¹⁹³ Būlus suggests that Sulimān's reign of terror was what encouraged the local *kafārsa* leaders to look for other options. Their story of a local community seeking the guidance of the national leadership in vain and then having to manage with its own resources repeated itself in other Palestinian communities in the area.¹⁹⁴

ii. "Non-Fighters"

Kafr Yasif was occupied on July 9 1948, together with the nearby Abū Sinān, as a part of operation "*Dekel*" (palm tree).¹⁹⁵ This operation had other, more important strategic goals, yet these remote villages in the Western Galilee were important, mainly for their proximity to Fawzi al-Qawuqji's ALA, whose headquarters were in Tarshiḥa.¹⁹⁶ Another reason the area was important was that it was surrounded by

¹⁹⁰ Morris, *The Birth*, p. 107.

¹⁹¹ Avi Shlaim, 'Israel and the Arab coalition in 1948', in Shlaim and Rogan "*Palestine*", p. 81.

¹⁹² Būlus, *ibid.* p. 29.

¹⁹³ "From Abū-Shām: Regarding Kafr Yasif", 28.6.48, 412-263-1966, IDFA; Būlus, p. 29.

¹⁹⁴ Abbasi, "The Fall of Acre", p. 8.

¹⁹⁵ Operation Dekel military log, IDFA, 56-1046-1970.

¹⁹⁶ *Toldot milhemet hakomemiyut*, Hapoel Hatza'ir, 1960, p. 247. "*Hilukey hade'ot bamahane ha'aravi notnim ototeihem behazit*", The disagreements in the Arab side are showing in the front, Davar newspaper, 12.7.48.

Druze villages which, at the time, were not yet explicitly aligned with the Israelis.¹⁹⁷

The operation followed the first truce, and was a part of the "Ten Days War" by which time it was clear that the then Israeli army had the upper hand. Jaffa and Haifa were under Jewish control, and the "ten days battles" that lasted between July 7 1948 and July 18 1948 were aimed at striking different fronts simultaneously.¹⁹⁸

Yanni Yanni had reached an agreement with the Israeli field intelligence agents Mordekhai Shekhvitz and Haim Aurbakh over the terms of surrender. As in other cases, Shekhvitz and Aurbakh, who were bitter enemies, seemed to have signed conflicting agreements.¹⁹⁹ From the intelligence report dating August 8 1948, it seems that "Operation Broom", aimed at clearing the villages of weapons, had reached a deadlock. Yanni Yanni was insisting that Shekhvitz promised him that the men from the village would not have to turn in their guns.²⁰⁰ About a month later, Aurbakh met Yanni Yanni and reached an agreement according to which the minimum to be handed in was to be 30 pistols and 20 guns.²⁰¹ It seems that the original agreement did not work out, but the fact that the villagers were left with some weapons may have demonstrated their leader's good negotiating abilities.

The way Kafr Yasif's local leaders dealt with the approaching Israeli army and its intelligence agents was very different from other villages in the vicinity. The people of Kuwaykāt, for example, feared Israeli retribution for their participation in the Yehi'am convoy battle in March, which resulted in the death of 46 Jewish *Hagana* soldiers. Dov Yirmiya, who participated in the occupation of Kafr Yasif and

¹⁹⁷ Laila Parsons, *The Druze between Palestine and Israel 1947-1949*, (London, New York: 2000), p. 86.

¹⁹⁸ *Hakomemiyut*, *ibid*, pp. 240-283.

¹⁹⁹ Laila Parsons on the rivalry between the two men, Parsons, *The Druze*, p. 79.

²⁰⁰ Report dating from the 11.8.48, IDFA, 412-263-1966.

²⁰¹ Unnamed Report, 14.8.48, IDFA, 412-263-1966.

Kuwaykāt (which was occupied during July 7-8 1948²⁰²), said that the fact that latter were known to have participated in the Yehi'am battle led to a heavier artillery barrage on the village, which in turn made the villagers flee.²⁰³ According to the Israeli intelligence report, there were only a few old people left in the village on July 11 1948.²⁰⁴

In Kafr Yasif today, the story of the surrender is told with pride and is associated with wisdom of the local leadership, even though traces of the political uneasiness can be found in the terminology and the difficulty of defining surrender that is not betrayal.²⁰⁵ As in other villages and towns, a group of old men bearing a white flag welcomed the Israeli army.²⁰⁶ The occupation of the village was swift and the occupying soldiers were probably impressed by Yanni Yanni, as their successors would be, as a "man with stature, notable, with connections and influence".²⁰⁷

The failure of the general national Palestinian-Arab leadership in the 1948 war has been discussed extensively elsewhere. Traditionally, Israeli historians and non-historians argued that not only did the Palestinian leadership not stop the Palestinians from leaving the country, but actually pushed them to do so.²⁰⁸ In Rashid Khalidi's article on the reasons for the failure of the Arabs in the war, a central reason is the internal fragmentation of the leadership, a chronic state of affairs since the Arab revolt in the 1930s.²⁰⁹ And it is clear today that this fragmentation was only aggravated by

²⁰² Operation Dekel military log, IDFA, 56-1046-1970.

²⁰³ Morris, *The Birth*, p. 198.

²⁰⁴ "The testimony of As'ad al-Gharbān, an 80 year old man from Kuwaykāt who was brought to Acre after the occupation of the village", 412-263-1966, IDFA.

²⁰⁵ Būlus elaborated on the term *'Istislām* (surrender) and on the uniqueness of the surrender in Kafr Yasif that was not an act of treason. *Kafr Yasif*, P. 29.

²⁰⁶ Nimr Murqus, *ibid*.

²⁰⁷ "Kfar Yasif-Acre district", report from A. Shlush and M. Piamente on refugees, financial situation and local leadership. 16.10.48, ISA, g 302/69.

²⁰⁸ See Morris, *The Birth*, p. 65.

²⁰⁹ Rashid Khalidi, 'The Palestinians and 1948: The Underlying causes of failure', in Rogan and Shlaim, *"Palestine"*, pp. 21-24.

the official entrance of the Arab states into the conflict by May 15th.²¹⁰ The national leadership commanded the war from Damascus, and thus "given the lack of clear direction from the Arab states and from the AHC, the burden of decision-making fell mainly on the shoulders of local Palestinian leaders, both civil and military".²¹¹ As a consequence, *Hagana* policies that differentiated between Christians, Druze and Muslims were more easily executed, as the case of Operation "*Dekel*" demonstrates clearly.

iii. Sectarianism

Hagana and IDF documents from the period before the occupation of Kafr Yasif make it seem like the religious differences between villages were the main reason for their different fates..²¹² During the spring and summer of 1948, informers were questioned by Jewish intelligence officers seeking religious tensions in the villages.²¹³ Where they existed, they were interpreted as opportunities for manipulation. Most interviewees, though, did not see their leaders as acting according to sectarian divisions, or think of the "politics of remaining" as an outcome of a sectarian policy.

As discussed in the first chapter, anti-sectarianism is a central claim and argument made by Christian *kafārsa* vis-à-vis what they perceive as state-led institutionalization of divide-and-rule policies. Two questions are raised here. The first is whether sectarian affiliation was in fact a deciding factor separating villages that remained and those that didn't. The second, which is more relevant to this thesis,

²¹⁰ Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate*, Owl, (New York: 2000), p. 509.

²¹¹ Benny Morris, *The birth*, p. 68.

²¹² Morris, *The Birth*, p. 201. Example from a "War Log", June 1949, 721-72-841, IDFA.

²¹³ A letter from "Tzvi" to "Utz", 14.7.48 that reports on the population in Kafr Yasif and the neighboring villages and explains the political differences among them. IDF, 14.7.48, 412-263-1966.

is whether the general claim of non-sectarianism plays a critical role in the memories of the war. In the interviews conducted for this thesis, the inter-communal Palestinian-on-the-ground activity and unity were highlighted, especially concerning the nearby Druze village of Yirkā. Rawḍa recounted her memory of 1948 and the special relationship that the people of Kafr Yasif had with the Druze inhabitants of Yirkā." From among the Druze, we have the most ties with the Druze of Yirkā. Because they really stood with us in the times of 1948...All young people [who held guns] fled to Lebanon, the women remained and all the families went up to Yirkā...I was four years old...We were there for a few months, a few families in one room...When we went back, I remember that my father...was not afraid...He was not involved in the fighting...there were [fighters in the village] but most of them not Christians. The majority of them were Muslims".²¹⁴ Despite the council's demands, the people of Kafr Yasif fled from their village and sought refuge in the nearby Druze village of Yirkā. According to Abū 'Ayman, the people of Yirka owed the *kafārsa* a favour as they had been using the village's education, health and commercial facilities for years.²¹⁵

Thousands of refugees were seeking refuge in the olive groves from all the nearby villages that were occupied. Not all the refugees who fled to the olive groves of Yirkā were treated in the same way, though. Both Būlus and Abū 'Ayman remember the supremacy the *kafārsa* had over the other refugees from such villages as Dir al-'Assad and Majd al-Kurūm.²¹⁶ IDF intelligence reports sent in late July transmitted the information brought by a "Druze" from Yirkā", saying that there are tensions between the Muslim refugees and the Druze inhabitants of Yirkā.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Rawḍa, *ibid.*

²¹⁵ Abū 'Ayman, *ibid.*

²¹⁶ *ibid* and Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 30.

²¹⁷ IDF report from "Tzvi" to "Utz", 26.7.48, 412-263-1966.

These occasions are explained in Kafr Yasif today, by local identifications rather than sectarian ones. The fact that some Druze leaders from the nearby Yirkā and Abu Sinān were at the same time in touch with Jewish commanders and intelligence officers concerning the terms of their surrender was explained by Būlus not as an act of treason but as an act of responsible local leadership. He said that they, like the leaders of Kafr Yasif, were trying to mitigate their communities' harsh predicament.²¹⁸ Moreover, Būlus stresses that the people of Yirkā proved in their actions that they were "true Arabs, brothers to us" during hard and good times.²¹⁹ In the same passage he discusses how, after the fall of Kuwaykāt, the leadership of Kafr Yasif was approached by 'Abū Ahmad Sharqiyya, who tried to convince them to resist. Then he recounts how following the fall of Kuwaykāt, the village of 'Amka fell and how Yanni Yanni, among other leaders from the village, met with a delegation of people from Yirkā in the secondary school and decided to surrender and not to resist.²²⁰ The fact that the villages that fell were Muslim and that the political allies were Druze is not highlighted.

Only two of the interviewees mentioned or discussed a specific "Christian" experience of the war. One, whose uncle was a headmaster in the neighbouring al-Baṣṣa, said that "the Muslims in al-Baṣṣa resisted the *Hagana* during the war, yet the Christians said-enough! Israel will exterminate us, enough! Raise the white flag!" (Al-Baṣṣa, which also had a long history of involvement in the Great Rebellion, suffered the same fate as Kuwaykāt—its people fled and the village itself was razed shortly after).²²¹

²¹⁸ Būlus, *ibid.*

²¹⁹ *ibid.*

²²⁰ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 30.

²²¹ *Hikāyat Balad- 'Omrin yeshna Eretz*, A tour-guide for Palestinian villages depopulated in 1948, Sedek-Zokhrot, pp. 22-23.

The debate about whether the IDF was ethnically cleansing Palestine according to a transfer plan, or whether the flight of the refugees was a by-product of war has captured much attention both within and outside academia. Following Morris's seminal *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* and his argument that the expulsion was a product of the war and not of a plan, much has been written by scholars such as Nur Masalha, Norman Finkelstein, Ilan Pappé, and Laila Parsons²²² It is of interest here only with respect to that aspect of the debate that focuses on the different treatment of religious minorities, which, for some, proves the existence of a master-plan for expulsion.

The facts on the ground in the area of Kafr Yasif are these. Most of the Palestinian villages that were depopulated during the war, and to which people were not allowed to return, were Muslim-only villages, like Kuwaykāt, 'Amka, al-Ghabsiyya, al-Nahar, al-Kābrī, 'Umm al-Faraj etc. None of the Druze villages were depopulated and most villages with Christian population in them were allowed to remain (with notable exceptions of al-Birwa and al-Baṣṣa). Yet the absence of reference to sectarian differentiation during the war by *kafārsa* today suggests we should be wary of accepting a simple theory to the effect that it was top-down policy of the Israelis that allowed the *kafārsa* to remain, rather than their own communal decisions. At the very least it shows how important it is to listen to voices that do not fit in with nationalist narratives if we are to understand how a community, which would easily be marked as traitors according to nationalist narratives, begin to narrate their own version of history. The following section, dealing with the rise of the *kafārsa* as local, regional and national political activists justifies this approach.

²²² Masalha, *Expulsion* Laila Parsons, 'The Druze and the Births of Israel', in Rogan and Shlaim, *Palestine*, Ilan Pappé, *The ethnic cleansing of Palestine*, Oneworld, (Oxford: 2006).

II. The Years of Military Rule

"Kafr Yasif my love...the fortress of the free, the birthplace of the revolutionaries"²²³

With the end of the 1947-49 war, a new era began. Military rule was imposed on Kafr Yasif, as it was on all the Arabs living in the new state of Israel. Workers, peasants, doctors, and teachers were all dependent on the local military governor for permits that would allow them to travel and work. The heavy restrictions imposed on all Palestinian citizens made simple daily experience cumbersome. Shira Robinson argues that "...the cultural, legal, bureaucratic, and political expertise gained during the military regime functioned as a laboratory for the settler-colonial practices of the state of Israel during the eighteen years prior to 1967".²²⁴

After the end of the long and devastating war, many Palestinians were jobless and landless. Those Palestinians who remained experienced traumatizing changes, witnessing whole regions geographically transformed within months, and losing control over whole life systems that previously sustained them. During the early 1950's, not only were people such as those living in Kafr Yasif governed by Jews in a Jewish state—they witnessed villages such as the nearby Kuwaykāt disappearing before their very eyes, to be repopulated with Jewish migrants from Hungary, the Netherlands and Britain who were surveying the land and building modern concrete buildings with governmental financial support. The shock must have been great for these ex-government employees, previously law-abiding citizens of a country that no longer existed. As this is the story of Kafr Yasif told by its middle-class Christians,

²²³ From a poem by Rafa'il Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 394.

²²⁴ Robinson, *Occupied citizens*, p. 7.

the following pages will trace the way they remember and "post-remember"²²⁵ these years and their significance.

From conversations with younger and older Christians in Kafr Yasif a somewhat paradoxical picture emerges. These years are depicted as years of financial, political, and emotional hardship, during which oppressive and arbitrary military rules were enforced upon their community. At the same time, though, these years of the military government are looked back upon almost as a lost "golden age" where true, loyal and patriotic community leaders were strenuously working for the betterment of their fellow townspeople. The way this era is remembered is of central importance to the way Christian middle class *kafārsa* conceptualize themselves and their community, as well as their place in general Palestinian and Israeli histories. The remembrance of this era complements the story of 1948 and both are remembered together; the former "fall" in a direct causal relationship to the latter "rise." The narrative that emerges, though, is neither straightforward nor uniform. In particular, two distinct stories surface as to why, in the eyes of the narrators, Kafr Yasif survived with its pride intact. Both belie accusations of passive acquiescence. But one is more romantic, with its emphasis on the struggle; the other more pragmatic, with its emphasis on the practical securing of rights for the inhabitants of the village. The first is the more commonly told, as is part of the collective, semi-official narrative. The difference is embodied in the stories of two men, both of whom were leaders of the local council, Yanni Yanni and Musa Başal. In interviews it was mainly Yanni, the symbol of resistance, who was talked about. Musa Başal, in contrast, was remembered and talked about only by his son, though with as much pride as others felt about Yanni. It seems that if one asks how Kafr Yasif survived in a way that defies

²²⁵ Lila Abu-Lughod, 'Return to half-ruins: Memory, Postmemory, and Living History in Palestine', in Abu-Lughod and Sa'di *Nakba*, p. 79.

accusations of mere passive collaboration both stories must be told. For that reason the remainder of the chapter will recount the results of interviews about each man. Before that, though, more needs to be said about the political background to these accounts.

i. Political background

Until a relatively late stage, much of the research on Palestinians in Israel was carried out by Israeli scholars with a few notable exceptions.²²⁶ Orientalistic and security-oriented views overall dominated in the 1960's, together with modernization theories and legitimizing apologetics.²²⁷ Challenges to the Israeli-state ideology concerning the Arabs in Israel came from writers such as Sabri Jiryis in his "*The Arabs in Israel*", Ian Lustick in "*Arabs in the Jewish state*" and Elia Zureik's "*The Palestinians in Israel: A Study in Internal Colonialism*". Whether focusing on Israel's expropriation of lands from Arabs living in it, Palestinians' unequal citizenship in the state, the practices of the Military Government, the political oppression of Palestinians by the intelligence agencies and the state in general, or arguing that Israel's treatment of Palestinians in it is colonial, these researches were precedential in academic circles.²²⁸

The main challenge was, and still is, to the Israeli-state conception of the Palestinians in Israel as "Israeli-Arabs" who have no connection to the Palestinian

²²⁶ Khalil Nakhleh, "The direction of local-level conflict in two Arab villages in Israel", *American Ethnologist*, Vol.2 (3), (1975), pp. 497-516; Elia Zureik, *The Palestinians in Israel: A Study in Internal Colonialism*, Routledge&Kegan Paul, (1979). Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel*, second edition (first published in Hebrew in Haifa 1966), Translated from Arabic: Inea Bushnaq, Monthly Review Press, (NY-London: 1976).

²²⁷ An Israeli exception especially for its Marxist analysis is Henry Rosenfeld, "Processes of Structural Change within the Arab Village Extended Family", *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 60 (6) part 1, (Dec. 1958), pp. 1127-1139.

²²⁸ Zureik, *The Palestinians*, Jiryis, *The Arabs*, Ian Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority*, University of Texas Press, (Austin: 1980).

people or the Arabs in general.²²⁹ Recent literature continues to challenge existing paradigms concerning Palestinians in Israel and especially the theory concerning the perceived "Palestinization" of Arabs in Israel that according to some, like Eli Rekhess, happened only after 1967 and intensified in the decades that followed.²³⁰ Scholarship such as that of Hillel Cohen, Ahmad Sa'di and Shira Robinson challenges such views, which assume that post-*Nakba* Palestinians in Israel were passive, submissive and non-political and that their "Palestinianess" was something that they lacked before and adopted later. These researchers highlight the efforts made by the state, through various control mechanisms, to suppress the political voices and demands that came from the many Palestinian activists in the 1950's and 1960's. All of this is evidence, they argue, that the post-*Nakba* generation was anything but passive. As Cohen has argued, "The Arabs who remained and became Israeli citizens, organized large-scale, adamant protest activity that lasted for two decades. This occurred despite close surveillance by Israeli intelligence and despite the military regime's intensive use of emergency regulations that enabled it to place uncooperative Arabs in administrative detention..... The first generation of Israel's Palestinian citizens, besides being beaten and subservient, were also engaged in far more protest activity than were subsequent generations..."²³¹

All scholars agree that the communist party was central in these first two decades, serving (together with the Jewish-led MAPAM socialist party, which was the only Zionist party that opposed military rule) as the main legitimate organizational political framework through which Arabs in Israel could act, congregate and express

²²⁹ Hillel Cohen, *Good Arabs: The Israeli security agencies and the Israeli Arabs, 1948-1967*, translated into English by Haim Watzman, University of California press, (Berkeley: 2010), pp. 4-5.

²²⁹ Cohen, *Good Arabs*, p.4.

²³⁰ Eli Rekhess, "The Evolvement of the an Arab-Palestinian National Minority in Israel", *Israel Studies*, Vol. 12 (3), pp. 1-28.

²³¹ Cohen, *Good Arab*, pp. 4-5.

their communal voice.²³² The party, better known by its Hebrew acronym MAKI, was reformed in 1948, but had a long prehistory in the mandate era. Formed in the 1920s as a bi-national party by the Comintern, and split into two parties, Jewish and Arab, in 1943, the communist party in Palestine/Israel was to witness more splits throughout the twentieth century.²³³ One of the reasons it was allowed to exist and act by Israel was that as a party it supported the 1947 Partition Plan and thus acknowledged Israel's right to exist, supporting the two nations' right over the land as a part of its Marxist-Leninist ideology.²³⁴ At the same time Maki's "overt opposition to the military government and its laws, their fundamental position that Israel should withdraw to the 1947 partition borders, and the systematic way they recruited supporters all made them major rivals of Mapai..."²³⁵ Finally, to complicate the picture, the communist party was, at the same time, the home of some notable Christian leaders and as McGahern states: "Until the 1990's, the leadership structure of *Rakah* [which was the party's name after another split in the 1960's] was dominated by secular Palestinian Christians..."²³⁶

Non-communist parties and organizations like the *Al-Ard* party or the Arab front umbrella organizations were active throughout the 1950s and early 1960s in correspondence with larger Pan-Arab political developments and ideologies. But their activity, though important, was not as long-term as that of the communist party.²³⁷ In addition, and perhaps of more significance, opposing both the communists and the nationalists, for a variety of reasons, were Palestinian "satellite parties" of the big Zionist Jewish parties like the ruling party Mapai and others. Through these parties

²³² Ibid.p. 4.

²³³ Kaufman , *Arab National Communism*, p. 25.

²³⁴ Joel Beinin, "The Palestine communist party", MERIP reports, No. 55 (March 1977), p. 16.

²³⁵ Cohen, *Good Arabs*, p. 41.

²³⁶ Una McGahern, *State Attitudes*, p. 90.

²³⁷ Jiryis, *The Arabs*, p. 186.

Arabs managed to become Knesset members, like Shaikh Jaber Mu‘addi from Yirkā or Saif al-Din Zu‘bi from Nazareth, who were members of the first Knesset.

A final piece we must have in play in describing the political background is the activity of the Israeli Security Services during this period. As Robinson, Sa‘di and Cohen all stress, the surveillance mechanisms over the Arabs in Israel, operated by the General Security Service (known by its Hebrew acronym of Shabak, or Shin-Bet), played a crucial role in determining the political culture that developed at the local and national levels during those years, and, in particular, the political language that revolved around defining collaborators.²³⁸ They did more than influence language though: as we shall see in the accounts of interviews I held, many of the local rivalries about what counted as good leadership need to be understood relative to the constant background attention paid to the village and its activities by the Shabak.

As discussed earlier, the local council of Kafr Yasif has been the source of pride for many in Kafr Yasif. It was the only Arab local municipality that continued to operate continuously between the mandate and Israel, and the first among the Arab municipalities in Israel to hold elections.²³⁹ But precisely this source of local pride also brought it to the particularly vigilant attention of the Israeli authorities.²⁴⁰ The military authorities were very aware of the political threat that local Arab municipalities constituted, and were explicitly interested in minimizing the numbers of Arab localities with elected democratic municipalities; favoring the British form of governance with appointed government-friendly *Mukhtārs*.²⁴¹ The Kafr Yasif municipality was indeed a nuisance for the local Military Government officer who

²³⁸ Robinson, *Occupied Citizens*; Ahmad Sa‘di, *The politics of ‘collaboration’: Israel’s control of a national minority and indigenous resistance*, HLS, 4(2), (2005), pp. 7-26; Cohen, *Good Arabs*.

²³⁹ Ahmad Sa‘di, "Control and resistance at Local-Level Institutions: A Study of Kafr Yassif’s Local Council under the Military Government", ASQ, Vol. 23 (3), (June 2001), p. 3.

²⁴⁰ "Today-Elections in Kfar Yasif", 26.1.54, Davar.

²⁴¹ On the *mukhtār* of Kafr Yasif and the need to replace him as he is "A Hater of Israel" see "Mukhtarim", 15.8.50, ICA, L 1/18.

had to deal from a very early stage with assertive community leaders who demanded and petitioned in the name of different workers and peasants.

It is against this backdrop that we must understand the conflicting accounts of what counted as good leadership, and the differing ways the period is remembered by activists, their family members, and those who saw themselves as neutral. An additional complication to note is that, in addition to the political differences, the differing accounts also reflect longstanding family rivalries.

ii. *Two great men*

During this period, the local council became the arena, as in other Palestinian localities, where both local and national politics were ferociously debated. In what follows I focus on how these debates are reflected in the memories elicited about two people who were heads of council, in different times, and whose style of leadership differed quite radically. Furthermore, the way both are remembered varies quite radically: the memory of Yanni Yanni is central for the community's perception of itself, whereas the memory of Musa Başal, like many other heads of council, is confined to the realms of family and friends. The men are remembered differently, and their remembrances serve different causes: Yanni's legacy was co-opted into the local communal memory, whereas Başal's is personal and familial. As in both cases many silences marked the uncomfortable and the inappropriate, especially as both men are now deceased, this section relies more heavily on the (abundant) archival material.

Yanni Qustandi Yanni

As mentioned earlier, all interviewees mentioned Yanni Yanni; he symbolizes for many in Kafr Yasif today a true, patriotic, committed leader and a vital component of the story they tell of themselves. In a sense, he encapsulates many of the images Christian middle-class men and women have of their past as they remember him as a middle class, respectable, rational and yet patriotic leader. His centrality in the communal memory of Kafr Yasif explains why the image of him as presented in the interviews was not multi-dimensional but rather confined to clichés.

A former British employee, known to be cooperative with the British, Yanni Yanni was the son of Kharisto Qustandi Yanni, an engineer who migrated from Crete to Palestine sometime in the nineteenth century and married a woman from the village.²⁴² He was the head of the local council, continuously, between 1933 and his death in 1962 (excluding the three years between 1948-1951 when the council was not officially functioning). He was never a communist yet is adored by communists, including the late Nimr Murqus, who wrote a self-published biography of him.

One momentous event he is credited with and admired for is the founding of the Arab (later: Popular) Front. This umbrella organization, established by him and other regional communist and nationalist leaders in 1958,²⁴³ was a unifying body for Arab communists and nationalists in Israel. Būlus quotes Yanni's words of address to the founding meeting: "This movement that we are establishing, Oh brothers, is an independent, free movement, that does not belong to any organization, and that is not linked— neither closely or distantly— to any of the parties".²⁴⁴ Despite these

²⁴² Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 99; Nimr Murqus, *ibid.*

²⁴³ Cohen, *Good Arabs*, p. 135, Būlus quotes from "Qissa al Kamila lilḥarakat al-arḍ" p. 14 arguing the date was July 6 1958 Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 37.

²⁴⁴ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 37. No reference this quote, can be assumed that this is "common knowledge".

sentiments, the Front soon dismantled, after disputes between the communists and nationalists made cooperation impossible, and some of those nationalists who left established the more radical Al-Ard movement.²⁴⁵ Interestingly, the disputes reflected a more general friction among Arab nationalists at the time, with the withdrawal of Iraq from the union with the United Arab Republic.²⁴⁶ The authorities realized the potential threat posed by such an organization and imposed severe restrictions on it. In particular, Yanni's involvement in national Arab politics certainly made him more of a target for the intelligence agents and for their informers in Kafr Yasif, who were ordered to inform their handlers of any suspicious political activity.²⁴⁷

Later that year, Yanni was at the center of another major political event. The 10th anniversary of Israel's independence on April 25 was approaching and even more than in previous years, Arab localities were supposed to demonstrate their loyalty to the state of Israel through organizing festive celebrations. In February, Yanni informed the Interior Ministry that his council would not pay the cost of the celebrations, and demanded government participation with subsidies as those received by Jewish villages. After some correspondence with the interior ministry and a refusal from their side, Yanni wrote to the interior ministry on behalf of the local council in Kafr Yasif, which was led by a coalition of Maki members, Mapam and independents²⁴⁸ that they refused to hold the celebration "under the yoke of military rule".²⁴⁹

Cohen, in *Good Arabs*, suggests on the basis of intelligence reports in the archives that the council boycotted the event and that this is why none of them

²⁴⁵ Cohen, *Good Arabs*, p. 135.

²⁴⁶ Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair*, Princeton University Press, (Princeton-Oxford, 2003), pp. 214-215.

²⁴⁷ Yanni's awareness of this might have been the reason for hanging three small Israeli flags on Israeli independence day a few years later. "Independence day 1961", 27.4.61, L 174/5 ICA.

²⁴⁸ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 203.

²⁴⁹ Quoted in Robinson, *Occupied Citizens*, p. 266.

showed up to the event. Nimr Murqus, however, asserts that the whole council together with other communist activists, excluding the older Yanni Yanni, was exiled to Safed. The celebration did take place eventually, without the local council members who resisted it. But the report written by the intelligence officer who was invited to the celebration reveals something omitted in the narratives of my interviewees: that there were people, some of them members of Zionist parties, who resisted the politics of the local council. After describing the ceremony and the numbers of participants ("most of Kafr Yasif's inhabitants") as well as the singing of the national anthem and the raising of the state flag accompanied by the local scouts group, the officer described the content of the speeches: "A teacher named Jubrān Būlus Jubrān said that Kafr Yasif is participating in the 10th anniversary celebrations as conscious citizens of the state. Following him Ya'kub Ḥanna Dahūd, of the Israel Labor League [a Zionist party] praised the accomplishments of the Arab minority in the state. He condemned the local council for deciding to boycott the celebration for Arab Nationalist reasons and expressed his happiness for the insignificance of this decision as most of the village does not follow the head of the local council...and as a proof for that—the whole village is participating in the celebrations, and expressed hope that in the next elections a council that would cooperate with the Israeli regime will be elected. Even if there are black spots [lit. "shadows"- *tzlalom*] in the way the state treats the Arab minority, the way to get equal rights is not boycotts...because the minority is loyal to the state".²⁵⁰

Robinson argues, concerning Palestinian participation in Independence Day celebrations during this period, that it was "to a great extent the product of fear, the awareness of surveillance, and the threat of violence." Yet, at the same time, "the

²⁵⁰ "The 10th anniversary celebrations in Kfar Yasif", intelligence report from the Acre sub district to the northern district, 27.5.58. ISA, 79, 183/2.

ornate character of these events seems to have created a momentum of its own and expectations among Jewish guests for repeat performances."²⁵¹ She discusses the local activity in Kafr Yasif at the time and specifically the activity of Yanni. Like her, Ahamd Sa'di devoted an article to the local council of Kafr Yasif during Yanni Yanni's years as its head, in which this story fits in with what he describes as the general effort of military government officials and Mapai functionaries to overthrow the nationalist-communist coalition headed by Yanni.²⁵² Sa'di, like most of my interviewees, sees in Yanni a rare example of a local leader who was involved in national politics and did not cooperate with the government of the intelligence agencies. While this story indeed reveals the extent to which Yanni's rule as an independent with coalition with the communists and Mapam was seen as a threat by the state, it also exposes the extent to which local politics in Kafr Yasif in this period were divided. Furthermore, this story demonstrates how his now remembered hegemonic rule was challenged by local political activists. It is significant that Yanni Yanni appears not only in local memories and stories but in academic literature about the period of military rule and is depicted by Cohen, Robinson and Sa'di as representing the spirit of Kafr Yasif as a "nationalist stronghold".²⁵³

Musa Mikhā'il Baṣāl

When I talked to Mikha'il Baṣāl about his work as the manager of the education department in Kafr Yasif, he talked a lot about his father, who died almost ten years ago. On the cover of his self-published book about his father there is a

²⁵¹ Robinson, *Occupied Citizens*, p. 215.

²⁵² Sa'di, "Control and Resistance", p. 7.

²⁵³ Cohen, *Good Arabs*, p.133.

picture of Musa Baṣal, his dates of birth and death (August 15 1925-August 11 2005) and a quotation of something he said when he was head of the council: "The interest of this town and its progress both dominate my thoughts and conscience".²⁵⁴ Mikha'il Baṣal looks at the politics in his town in a very pragmatic way. According to him, the communists in the 1960's and 1970's "were riding a wave" of the opportunities Israel provided them with, just as he sees Christians in Israel today as "riding the wave". The Druze too, in his view, are "playing the game" to their benefit—utilizing to the maximum the opportunities given to them in Israel. His father was a government employee most of his life, first working in the Health Department in Acre as a regional inspector. In the book dedicated to his memory and life, his son mentioned that his house was burnt during the Fire of 1939 and that as both Musa Basal's parents died young, he had to assume responsibility for the household. Head of the committee of the local Greek Orthodox Church, he was a religious man who used to go to church every Sunday. Twice the head of the local council in his town (1965-69 and 1976-1979) and very dedicated to his duties in that capacity, Baṣal emerges in the council protocols collected by son as a very pragmatic and practical man. Most of the excerpts of the protocols that his son chose for the book are concerned mainly with issues of the development of the village, education, land registration and building.

Musa Baṣal was involved in local politics from a young age and was elected to the council at the age of 29, as a Mapam party member, and in the same year, 1954, was elected to be Yanni Yanni's deputy. During 1957-58, the local Mapam candidates joined forces with the local Mapai candidates, shifting the power balance in the local coalition against the independents and communists. Baṣal left the coalition, accusing

²⁵⁴ Mikha'il Baṣal, *Lidhikra al-marḥūm*, ibid.

the council of not taking development projects of the village seriously.²⁵⁵ Sa' di insinuates that the reasons for Başal's exit from the coalition were tied in with the politics of the Mapai functionaries, who were presumably manipulating Başal and aiming to destabilize Yanni's firm grip over the council. Sa' di's analysis focuses on the manipulation of the local politics by different party functionaries, military government officers and intelligence agents. This analysis is important for understanding the background of political activity in the village, yet the framework it assumes is problematic: it depicts the local political actors as belonging to two strict political parties: the "nationalists" and the "collaborators". It deprives the political activists of historical agency, and masks the multi-faceted complexity of their motivations and actions.

As mentioned earlier, Başal's goals were extremely pragmatic: he wished for a more developed Kafr Yasif. In his first term, electricity was introduced to the village, a project that was much delayed throughout Yanni's term, and which was Başal pride in the following years. Its importance cannot be overestimated both practically and politically.²⁵⁶ However, it does seem that Musa Başal was distancing himself from everything to do with national politics. When Başal was elected for his first term he gave a speech listing 29 goals.. His first was internal, and concerned the importance of safeguarding the council from "those who disrespect it" probably referring to political disputes. The second and third points refer to the importance of remedying the council's critical financial situation and freeing it from the many debts it had accumulated. All the following 15 points deal with developmental projects that Başal strived to pursue during his term. Only following these does he begin dealing with more "political" issues, like the refugees in Kafr Yasif, and the demand for the

²⁵⁵ Sa' di, "Control and Resistance", p. 7.

²⁵⁶ "Three minority villages are connected to the national electricity system", 17.8.65, Davar.

cancellation of the military rule. Article 24 dealt with the "problem of the educated Arabs and their absorbance in the government offices" (which one can assume-was a problem especially felt in Kafr Yasif) and following it Başal dealt with a few other topics concerning the problems of the "Arab citizens". Only in articles 27-28 does he discuss national politics *per se*, declaring (a pretty generic declaration among communists as well) that the local council "hopes that the time of peace between Israel and the Arab states is approaching, as well as solution for the different problems".²⁵⁷

In the copious archives of intelligence material on local communist activists, their preferred songs on the radio, and the meetings they attended, there is not much written on Musa Başal except to note the elections he won, coalition agreements, and bureaucratic paper-work. In that sense, he was a typical *kafārsawī* bureaucrat—dedicated to his village, involved in modernization projects, and holding a stable government job for more than 30 years, an image very similar to the one emerging when reading intelligence reports on Yanni in the 1940s. Yet for Yanni, the transition of the war into the state of Israel changed something fundamental. If before the war he was clearly not involved in national politics, after it he was "blacklisted" for his national activity. His political activity together with communists and nationalists from the region and the village are what brought Kafr Yasif fame among other Palestinians and suspicion from the Israeli authorities. This, rather than Başal's attention to the practical elements of managing a council, is why Yanni is engraved in the community's memory and why there are many aspects of his conduct that do not appear in people's narratives.

²⁵⁷*Lidhikra*, p. 148.

iii. *"Our Front is Arab Muslim and Christian"—The days of communal struggle*²⁵⁸

The nostalgia for the old days of military rule was my interviewees' way of talking about their present, whether they were communists or not. The past they referred to changed according to their personal, political and familial affiliations. As my interviewees were mostly communists or from communist backgrounds, the past they referred to was shaped by this outlook. What they remember is a time in which the community was "united" and when "the people of Kafr Yasif were patriotic, and the establishment didn't like Kafr Yasif".²⁵⁹

However, this must be understood in the light of the now diminished power of the communist party among Palestinians in general, and *kafārsa* in particular. As such, their past is evoked for making the present more comprehensible: "There is a difference between what used to be, in the period when everyone used to be more together, the situation was better. Once people used to visit each other more, a Christian would have gone to visit a Muslim and back...Back then [if there was trouble between people from different religions] the whole village would have thrown him [the trouble-maker] out of the village...There was a period when the communist party used to do these kind of things, taking care that people would not express themselves in this manner [sectarian]".²⁶⁰

The communist party activists in the village are remembered to have taken care of other troubling issues during the early years of military rule, though, unlike activists in the local ruling party (Mapai) branch, they could not help with supplying

²⁵⁸ A slogan sung during a wedding in Kafr Yasif, "Praise songs for Abd al-Nasser in a marriage in Kafr Yasif", an intelligence report to the Northern Military Government district, 31.9.58, ISA L 79 183/2.

²⁵⁹ Jiryis, *ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

jobs through their connections in the party or the security forces.²⁶¹ Like in many Palestinian villages in Israel, the first period after the 1948 war included many attempts of the military government to expel those who were deemed "illegal", who were not registered in the national population census of October-November 1949.²⁶² A "sweep operation" was intended to happen in Kafr Yasif at the end of 1949; someone from Kafr Yasif who had connections in the military government was informed that on a certain date trucks would arrive in the village to pick up 35 heads of families.²⁶³ It was noted in the interviews that these were not from among the (by then 450²⁶⁴) registered refugees, but people from old and established families of Kafr Yasif. Some might have been absent during the census because they were in Lebanon, like Shafik Shihāda Faraj who appealed a few months later to obtain a permanent identity card.²⁶⁵ Nimr Murqus, who was by this time increasingly becoming interested in communism, remembered the event as follows: "When the party knew [of the expulsion plan], the party members went from door to door on the day before and told the people that they should demonstrate and resist, at such and such time, in front of the military government office. And then 90% of the village's population surged—and the square in front of the church was packed... This was the first blow of the anti-government discourse that came from the village. At the same day some of our youth [i.e. the communists] and more friends [*Haverim* in Hebrew, can mean comrades as well] went to the place where the trucks came, and lay down in the road and

²⁶¹ Sa' di, "Control and Resistance", pp.7-8.

²⁶² Robinson, *Occupied Citizens*, p. 64.

²⁶³ Būlus, *Kafr Yasif*, p. 32; Nimr Murqus, *ibid.* Abū 'Ayman, *ibid.*

²⁶⁴ A report from Yanni Yanni on the statistics of the village to unknown government recipient, "local statistics", 31.3.52, IDFA 1452-263-1966.

²⁶⁵ "Requesting an identity card", on the name of Shafik Shihada Faraj to the minister of the interior, 17.7.50, ISA, G 725/4.

prevented the trucks from going. [Question: so did you manage to prevent the expulsion?] **Here**, there was no expulsion".²⁶⁶

He then said that in those days there was cooperation between all religions, and that only after the 1960s they began to feel a difference (sectarian). "A change began, and it is very saddening but in the 1960's, after the end of the military rule... people that were the collaborators with the military government [*aḍhnāb*] became stronger".²⁶⁷

The older *kafrārsa* who tell these stories today are in that sense the sons and daughters of the "nationalist generation"²⁶⁸ and in that sense, part of the nostalgia for these years can be placed in the larger context of the Arab nationalism's demise after the 1967 war. The differences between them and other Arabs are obvious, yet they share a nostalgia for a past where a non-sectarian, progressive, dignified, modern and secular future was thought to be possible.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Nimr Murqus, *ibid.*

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*

²⁶⁸ Daweesha, *Arab Nationalism*, p. 1.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 312.

Conclusion

The story of the Christian community in Kafr Yasif is concerned simultaneously with the past, present and future; its audience is first of all the people of Kafr Yasif, yet it addresses other invisible listeners. It teaches us both how powerful nationalist ideologies are, but also how important it is to listen to stories that pluralize their binary histories.

The *kafārsawī* story is about a historical construction of continuities, belonging, rootedness and the enabling power of nostalgia, which allows some stories to seek grounding in historically verifiable events, and others to flow freely in time and space. Their story is internal and is directed primarily at the community itself, yet it is simultaneously addresses invisible listeners that inform much of its underlying premises which constitute its argumentative basis. Thus, in highlighting internal cohesion based on non-sectarianism and a past of shared political activity, narrators address the question of which Israeli sectarian policies are repressive towards Palestinians in the country. In discussing past class images, their stories also engage with normative Palestinian nationalist prescriptive narratives, as well as with memories of regional disparities. When discussing past political activism in the town, the stories are directed both inwards and outwards: inwards, these communal stories affirm the authority of the storyteller to include or exclude parts of the story. Outwards, they assert dignity and pride versus narratives that would prescribe shame and humiliation.

The three sections of this thesis have demonstrated the importance of the three claims made by the *kafārsa* and the way they have become woven into a communal memory, one they can pass on with pride to their children and grandchildren. They

also demonstrate that at certain times in the community's history, each of these claims was well grounded in fact, but that over the years they have become inextricably intertwined, in a way that conflates verifiable historical periods into one fabric. The interdependence of these claims is what makes for a coherent story, and justifies treating this micro-history as an entry into Palestinian history.

This narrative reveals self-conceptualizations of a community that navigates between different nationalisms and identifications, and, is primarily directed at its relation to the Palestinian people and its present position in Israel. As such it has the "bottom-up" potential of revealing aspects of these histories that were previously neglected by nationalist historical narratives. It places middle class Christian Palestinians as active agents in their history and links them to a history of Palestine and Israel rather than to a history of Palestine or Israel. The coherence and richness of the narratives the *kafārsa* offer suggests there may be much to be gained from extending this approach—which focuses on local voices in contrast to received official narratives—to other communities, for example other communities in the Western Galilee, including refugees. At the very least, doing so will tell more about the lived experiences of Palestinians and Israelis during the fundamental years in which nationalist narratives became stalemated.

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HA- Hagana Archive

ISA- Israel state Archive

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Interview with Abu Ḥisām Ḥanna Makhuli on al-haqiqa, 14.5.12, <http://www.al-haqeeqa.net/zakira/showArticlenews.asp?aid=553>, last watched on 7.1.12

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Interviews:

Sulimān Murqus, Born 1939, Stone mason and poet, interview in late July 2012.

Janet, in her 40s, ceramic artist, interview in late July 2012 in her house, studio, and parent's house in Kafr Yasif, 27.7.12 and early August.

Rawḍa, Born 1940s, nurse in a hospital in Nahariyya, interview in late July 2012 in her house in Kafr Yasif, 27.7.12.

Jamīl, Born early 1980s, teacher, interview in restaurant in Kafr Yasif, 15.7.12

Jiryis, Born 1959, engineer, interview in Buṭrus's house, Kafr Yasif, 21.7.12

ʿIlyas, Born 1964, lawyer and member of the communist party, interview in Buṭrus's house, Kafr Yasif, 21.7.12, and in his house early August 2012.

Buṭrus, Born 1958, taxi driver, interview in his house, Kafr Yasif, 21.7.12, and another in December 2012.

Nimr Murqus, 82, Former head of council of Kafr Yasif 1978-1998 and political activist in the communist party, interview, early August 2012.

Nabītha Murqus, in her 60s, Political activist, interview, early August 2012.

Mikha'il Baṣal, in his 40s, Head of the education department in Kafr Yasif, interview in his office in the council in Kafr Yasif, 11.7.12.

Nirjis, in her 40s, Academic, interview in her house, 10.8.12.

Hifa', in her 50s, Domestic worker, interview in her house, 15.7.12.

Abū 'Ayman, in his 70s, Retired teacher, interview in his house in Kafr Yasif, 2.8.12.

George, in his 50s, Restaurant owner, interview in his restaurant, 15.8.12.

Maḥmūd, Academic, interview in his office in Haifa, 9.8.12.

Amjad, in his 20s, Student, interview in his apartment in Jerusalem, 15.8.12.

'Imīl, in his 40s, Contractor, interview in his house in Kafr Yasif, early July 2012.

Tūma abu 'Aqel, in his 50s, hairdressers, interview in Kafr Yasif, early July 2012.

Aḥmad, in his 30s, Worker in a restaurant, interview in restaurant, mid-July 2012.

Toni, in his 60s, Doctor, interview in Kafr Yasif, early August.

Yūsīf, in his late 70s, Retired, interview in Kafr Yasif, 20.8.12.

All names but those with surnames are pseudonym. Other informal conversations and interviews are not included.

