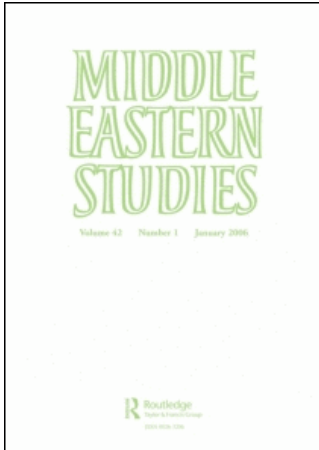


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# The Collapse of the Palestinian-Arab Middle Class in 1948: The Case of Qatamon

ITAMAR RADAI

The study of Palestinian society in 1948, though still in its incipient stages, has begun to address the emergence of an urban middle class – practitioners of the liberal professions, clerks, officials, businessmen – within Palestinian-Arab society during the British Mandate period, together with the reasons for its collapse in 1948.<sup>1</sup> The overall education, occupations, economic situation, and way of life of the residents of Jerusalem's Qatamon neighbourhood encapsulate the Mandate-era Palestinian-Arab middle class: bourgeois, generally well educated, its occupational structure similar to that of the new classes which sprang up in Europe beginning in the late eighteenth century and in the two centuries which followed.<sup>2</sup> In addition to being a quintessentially Arab bourgeois middle class neighbourhood, Qatamon is an appropriate subject of study because of its strategic location; as such it was the major locus of the fighting in south Jerusalem and caused the residents great hardship, although some of them stayed on and tried to maintain a civil life in the shadow of the war.<sup>3</sup>

The relatively large number of available sources makes possible a microhistorical study of the Qatamon neighbourhood and its residents. Indeed, research at this level is essential in order to understand the diverse factors that underlay the collapse of the bourgeois middle class, as part of the general disintegration of Palestinian-Arab society in 1948. Microhistory, which in recent decades has become an accepted research method, undertakes a thorough examination, within narrow geographic confines, of particular phenomena, from which it draws inductive inferences vis-à-vis a broader context.<sup>4</sup> In this specific case, the main hypothesis is that the distinctive traits accruing to the Palestinian-Arab middle class in 1948 accelerated the process of collapse by rendering it ineffectual in the face of a severe crisis fomented by external circumstances: the disintegration of British rule and the decline of civil order, and the military pressure which attended the intercommunal confrontation with the *Yishuv* (the pre-1948 Jewish community in Palestine). The way of life and bourgeois values of the middle class alienated it from the combatants, who were mainly from the rural population and lower classes; and its largely Christian ethnic affiliation further reduced the desire to take part in the war effort and in some cases heightened the mistrust of the fighters. The Qatamon neighbourhood will serve as a test case for these hypotheses.

Qatamon hill lies about two kilometres south-west of the walls of the Old City, Jerusalem's ancient historic core. Qatamon and its Arab neighbours, Talbiyya and Baq'a, were settled and developed rapidly during the British Mandate period. Christian and Muslim families built their homes there in the 1920s and 1930s, concurrent with the rise of the Arab middle class in Jerusalem. By the mid-1930s the area had developed into a residential suburb, comprising hundreds of houses.<sup>5</sup> Qatamon became an affluent neighbourhood: within a short time, beginning in 1924, about 40 spacious and in some cases luxurious and costly houses were built there. By 1948 the neighbourhood had about 200 buildings, the majority private homes, along with two- or three-storey buildings offering rental apartments.<sup>6</sup>

In 1947 the population of the Arab neighbourhoods in south Jerusalem stood at approximately 22,000 – 13,000 Christians, 9,000 Muslims, and about 550 Jews.<sup>7</sup> No precise data exist concerning the population of Qatamon, but based on the number of buildings and the overall number of residents in these Arab neighbourhoods, it was probably between 2,000 and 3,000. The total population of Jerusalem in 1947 was 164,440 – 99,320 Jews, 33,680 Muslims, and 31,330 Christians, the latter including about 13,000 non-Arabs. A few thousand were Eastern, mainly Armenians and Greeks, who preserved ties within their communities and with their countries of origin, but tended to blend into the Arab Christian population; the others were British and other European Christians. Many of the non-Arab Christians resided in the southern neighbourhoods.<sup>8</sup>

The non-Arab Christian residents became part of the rich Arab mosaic in Qatamon, consisting of Christian Arabs from the Greek Orthodox community, who constituted the majority, along with members of the Latin (Catholic), Protestant, and Muslim communities.<sup>9</sup> Members of the Greek Orthodox community moved increasingly to Qatamon, settling initially on church land close to the Greek Orthodox St Simeon Monastery, for social and communal reasons. They were encouraged by the *mukhtar* of the Greek Orthodox community in Jerusalem, 'Isa Mikhail Toubbeh (1882–1973), who was one of the first to settle in the neighbourhood.<sup>10</sup> Overall, though, most of the residents espoused a primarily secular outlook, attending church only on holy days or for family events such as weddings or funerals. The neighbourhood's pluralistic-secular character attracted renowned intellectuals and men of letters, such as Khalil al-Sakakini, the siblings Ibrahim and Fadwa Tuqan, Iskandar al-Khuri al-Baytjali, Tawfiq Jawhariyya, Hasan Karmi, and Sami Hadawi. The residents' sources of livelihood were diverse: occupations ranged from contractors, businessmen, and merchants to physicians, architects, and lawyers. Many were Mandate Government officials or employed by the British Army.<sup>11</sup>

European styles (Eclectic and International) predominated in architectural design. Individualism was expressed in particular stylistic elements which aimed to reflect personality traits.<sup>12</sup> In her memoirs, Hala al-Sakakini, the daughter of Khalil al-Sakakini, refers to the high quality of the construction, the simple modern style and the meticulousness about small details, in which personal taste was demonstrated. The residents were thus highly conscious of both their external appearance and the exterior of their houses, which they cultivated assiduously along with the courtyards and gardens. Together, these affluent and fashionable Arab neighbourhoods, consisting largely of private family homes, constituted a 'garden suburb' of

Jerusalem. In the 1930s and 1940s the low population density gave rise to a pastoral feeling of living close to nature and to the agricultural cycle of the surrounding villages, whose farmlands abutted the new neighbourhoods. The proximity to the villages encouraged the purchase of fresh farm produce, which the villagers supplied daily, door to door.<sup>13</sup>

In this atmosphere, and against the backdrop of the consequences of the 1948 War, recollections by former neighbourhood residents tend towards idealization. Hala Sakakini described the daily ride to school, in a bus run by a private company which plied a route between Qatamon and the city centre at Jaffa Gate, as an idyllic social experience, with passengers vying to pay the fare.<sup>14</sup> However, it is clear that social harmony in fact prevailed in the neighbourhood owing to the overall uniformity of the residents' cultural and socioeconomic background. It was also a cohesive, mutually supportive community for which, as is characteristic of the bourgeois middle class, the education of the young generation was a paramount priority.<sup>15</sup> Most of the children attended prestigious private schools run by Christian orders, which taught in a European language. The multilingual education further enhanced the European influence and the cosmopolitan atmosphere in Qatamon – it was not uncommon for several languages to be spoken at home, although Arabic remained the common language – which was further heightened by the fact that higher education was often pursued abroad.<sup>16</sup>

European education, acquired under British rule, exerted a powerful influence on cultural and social life. Schoolchildren read the finest works of English literature, some of which could also be found in home libraries. Hala Sakakini and her sister Dumya were taught piano by a German teacher in the German Colony, and their elder brother, Sari, purchased an expensive Bluthner grand piano. The family gathered around to listen to Sari play classical works.<sup>17</sup> In addition to attending concerts in the auditorium of the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) building, Sari and his sisters also went to hear the Palestine Philharmonic Orchestra in the Edison Jewish Cinema. Other educated middle class residents also evinced a fondness for European classical music. For example, at the home of George Khamis, a friend of Khalil Sakakini, the Sakakinis listened to records from Khamis's large collection of European classical music.<sup>18</sup>

Participation in sports, another characteristic of bourgeois life, was widespread. The Sakakini sisters took gymnastics and swimming lessons at the YMCA. Indeed, the YMCA was a cultural, social, and sports centre for society's elite, and as such a meeting place for Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, and Jews. Its tennis and squash courts, swimming pool, youth clubs, library, concert hall, and cafeteria served them all in a distinctly British atmosphere. Tennis was popular among the elite class. At the recommendation of Sari Sakakini, upon his return from six years of study in the United States, his sisters learned the sport and participated in games and tournaments that were held at the YMCA and in the Arab sports club in Baq'a. Bicycling, too, was a favourite pastime: Hala and her neighbour, Jeanne Zephyriades, a Greek, bicycled together every day for some years. In their leisure time these bourgeois families also frequented a European-style garden café in the town of Bayt Jalla, holidayed in the resort town of Ramallah and in the village of 'Ayn Karim, and sometimes vacationed in Lebanon and Egypt.<sup>19</sup> The neighbourhood's Muslim residents were also involved in the local social life, and friendships

sprang up between Christian and Muslim families. Single young men and modern Muslim families took part in activities at the YMCA. Many of the women, who did not yet work but had maids, spent much of their time socializing with friends in their homes.<sup>20</sup>

The European influence and the thrust towards modernization were manifested also in the form of household consumer products. Already in the 1930s and 1940s some of the residents had electric refrigerators and gas or electric ovens. Some of the wealthiest families owned a car. Popular food items included European cakes and American products such as Heinz ketchup and Kellogg's Cornflakes. The affluent residents of these Arab neighbourhoods favoured European attire – the women elegant in dresses and shoes that were the height of fashion in Europe, the men in suits and ties, though some men also wore a tarbush, the only eastern element in their clothing.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the pronounced western orientation, the Arab and Mediterranean cultural character was also preserved, though more commonly in the older generation. Its members, such as the *mukhtar* 'Isa Toubbeh, wore a tarbush and smoked a narghila. Like many of his generation, Toubbeh was fluent in Turkish and Greek but not in English.<sup>22</sup>

Khalil al-Sakakini (1878–1953), a leading Palestinian intellectual and one of the most colourful figures in Jerusalem during this period, was a prominent socialite and man of culture. Among those who frequented his Qatamon house were local political leaders and younger Muslim and Christian Palestinian intellectuals, as well as prominent intellectuals from the Arab world, some of whom were his house guests for lengthy periods. Sakakini was a productive autodidact who possessed a rich library and spent much of his time reading *belles-lettres* and non-fiction, in Arabic and English, on a wide range of subjects. He preached secular Arab nationalism, urged the introduction of modern, liberal, humanistic education, and advocated the simplification of the Arabic language and the methods by which it was taught – principles he applied in his textbooks and articles. At the beginning of the Mandate period he resigned from the government's Education Department in protest at the appointment of Sir Herbert Samuel, a British Jew, as High Commissioner. However, following Samuel's tenure he was appointed chief inspector of Arabic language studies. After retiring in 1938 Sakakini founded al-Nahda [revival] High School, which became an important centre for the dissemination of Arab culture and nationalism. Sakakini introduced numerous innovations in his school, such as eliminating examinations and grading, forgoing religious studies, and creating an atmosphere of camaraderie and equality between students and teachers. He also endeavoured to implement the same principles of equality and openness in his family.<sup>23</sup>

Like other intellectuals of his time, Sakakini, too, was captivated by the idea of Arab nationalism as the new century dawned. The struggle mounted by Arab Orthodox Christians, Sakakini prominent among them, against the Greek clergy led them into the Arab national movement, and, after the First World War, into the ranks of the emerging Palestinian-Arab national movement. However, Sakakini harboured private doubts and shared them with his son in a letter of 1932 in which he expressed a preference for European culture and values, and concern about his family's future in Muslim surroundings. 'As long as I am not a Muslim, I am

naught', he wrote. This duality was typical of the contradiction-filled attitude of the Christian Arabs, and especially the Orthodox among them, towards Palestinian-Arab nationalism. Orthodox Christians were in the vanguard of the Arab national movement and were active in the Palestinian national awakening from its inception. Below the surface, however, the centuries-old schism persisted: Muslims were hostile towards and suspicious of Christians, while the latter, who tended to pin their hopes on the British authorities, were both patronizing and fearful of Muslims.<sup>24</sup> The Muslims viewed the Christians as the natural allies of the European rulers; even the Muslims who lived in the southern neighbourhoods of Jerusalem and as such were socially involved in a Christian milieu and belonged to the same class, looked askance at the prominence of middle class Christians in government service.<sup>25</sup>

On 29 November 1947 the General Assembly of the UN adopted the resolution to partition Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. In its wake, Britain declared that its Mandate in Palestine would terminate on 15 May 1948. Even though the UN resolution called for Jerusalem to be a separate international zone, it triggered a fierce intercommunal war in the city, which began with violent demonstrations and sporadic acts of hostility by the Arabs, who opposed the partition, followed by retaliation by the Jews. The situation escalated rapidly, as hostilities erupted between armed groups and the civilian population became the target of terrorism.<sup>26</sup> In short order Arabs and Jews living in outlying and mixed neighbourhoods or in enclaves where the rival community was dominant began to flee, among them the Jews of Talbiyya and Qatamon.<sup>27</sup> It is noteworthy that Qatamon remained outside the fenced 'security zones' which the British established in Jerusalem in early 1947 as protection from attacks by Jews against the Mandate government. Some of the Arab neighbourhoods in south Jerusalem were included in security zone A, and their residents were permitted to stay. The residents of Qatamon received transit permits to cross the security zone which separated them from other Arab areas.<sup>28</sup>

In December 1947 attempts were made in Qatamon and its surroundings to create a community organization amid the deteriorating situation and the vacuum left by the British, who all but ceased to enforce law and order after they announced the Mandate's termination. On 7 December the paramilitary Arab Youth Organization held an assembly for young people mainly from the Christian neighbourhoods – Baq'a, Qatamon, Talbiyya, and Abu Tur – at the Arab Orthodox Club in Baq'a. Newspaper notices urged the youngsters 'to take part in the assemblies and to consider this a personal invitation', though how many actually turned up is not known.<sup>29</sup> On 9 December a neighbourhood committee to be 'responsible for guarding' was established in Qatamon. The group's composition reflected an attempt to strike a balance between Christians and Muslims, even though the latter were disproportionately over-represented as compared to their share of the population.<sup>30</sup> One of the committee's Christian members, Anton Albina, wrote to the British District Commissioner, James Pollock, to complain about the breakdown in public order and the growing number of burglaries in Qatamon. He asked for a special police force to be stationed in the neighbourhood, or for additional Arab police, to ensure the residents' safety and prevent criminal acts and 'assaults of whatever nature'. Albina proposed that the guard committee organize the residents to help underwrite the guard force, together with government funding. His proposal drew no

response. At the beginning of 1948, as throughout the Mandate period, the upper middle class still tended to rely on the British.<sup>31</sup>

Ultimately, the Qatamon neighbourhood was apparently obliged to organize its own guard force, a loosely knit group of residents who possessed or had access to weapons. According to reports of *Shai*, the Jewish *Haganah* intelligence service, the force numbered about 160 people, mainly local artisans from the lower middle class, or servants. They set up rooftop positions and conducted patrols in the streets. The commanders, though, were from the educated bourgeois upper middle class.<sup>32</sup> Concurrently, the Palestinian-Arab Women's Union (*al-ittihad al-nisa'i al-'arabi al-filastini*) organized solidarity gatherings and, as volunteers, provided first aid for the wounded, in cooperation with the Palestinian-Arab Medical Association (*al-jam'iyya al-tibbiyya al-'arabiyya al-filastiniyya*). Much of this activity was centred in Jerusalem: efforts were made to organize a medical network to treat casualties, including the establishment of emergency centres in the various neighbourhoods, utilizing suitable buildings and existing private clinics. It was there that the women volunteers received first aid instruction from local physicians. Nevertheless, treatment of casualties was unsatisfactory, owing to a shortage of equipment, materials, and professional personnel.<sup>33</sup> In Qatamon the first aid lessons were given in the Catholic Club, which was located in the house of Anton Albina. Characteristically, initially enthusiasm ran high – a newspaper report of 16 December speaks of 1,000 volunteer women in Jerusalem – but by the time the short course ended, at the beginning of January 1948, the number of participants had declined sharply. Moreover, some of the volunteers declared that they would be available solely in the daylight hours and refused to be on call at night.<sup>34</sup>

On 1 January 1948 the guard force in Qatamon received a number of Bren machine guns from the Arab Higher Committee (AHC, *al-hay'a al-'arabiyya al-'ulya*). In addition, the AHC supplied the *mukhtar* Toubbeh with a pistol and urged him to encourage his community to practice self-defence. He thanked the envoys politely and after they left gave the pistol to his wife. The weapon was carefully hidden and never used; either the elderly *mukhtar* declined or did not know how to use the firearm.<sup>35</sup>

Exchanges of fire between Qatamon and the adjacent Jewish neighbourhoods soon became commonplace. On the night of 2 January, Jewish *Lehi* blew up a number of abandoned buildings west of Qatamon. The explosions caused panic in the neighbourhood, and in their wake 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, the commander of the irregular Arab forces in the Jerusalem area, paid his first visit to Qatamon. According to some accounts, 'Abd al-Qadir and his men met with the residents at the Hotel Semiramis, a small family establishment in the centre of the neighbourhood, and made plans to defend the area.<sup>36</sup> The *Haganah* apparently got wind of the event through *Shai*, and this was one reason for the attack on the hotel on the night of 5 January. It was intended as retaliation against the Arabs for causing the flight of Jews from Qatamon and other neighbourhoods.<sup>37</sup>

The Qatamon guard force received a report (perhaps a police warning) of an imminent attack on the neighbourhood. On the night of 5 January 1948 most of the force was sent to the neighbourhood's northern boundary, opposite the Jewish neighbourhood Kiryat Shmuel, from where, they believed – rightly – the attack would originate. Seven guards were stationed on the roof of the Hotel Semiramis,

which at three stories was one of the tallest buildings in the neighbourhood. However, the guards dispersed towards midnight due to a thunderstorm, believing that it ruled out the possibility of an attack that night. Shortly afterwards the *Haganah* force arrived at the hotel in two vehicles, blew it up, and withdrew without interference. The guards rushed out of their homes and opened fire wildly, but to no effect.<sup>38</sup> The explosion illuminated the sky above the neighbourhood for several minutes and shook the walls of houses hundreds of metres away. Frightened residents leaped out of bed and rushed to find shelter in the bowels of their homes. Close to the site of the explosion some people went into shock.<sup>39</sup> The hotel's eastern wing collapsed; 18 people were killed and dozens wounded. Most of the dead were from two Arab Catholic families of Lorenzo and Abu Suwwan, the hotel's co-owners. They had taken refuge in the hotel, believing it was safer than their homes in the Nikophoria Jewish-Arab neighbourhood.<sup>40</sup>

Few people dared to leave their homes in the dead of night to see what had happened. Those who did saw a heap of ruins in which British soldiers were digging in a futile attempt to rescue possible trapped survivors. Hala Sakakini, who remained at home, heard about the event in the morning from a neighbour, Miss Tlil, who had gone to the site during the night to offer first aid. Hala joined a group of women who went to the Catholic Club and in a dispirited atmosphere prepared dressings and other medical equipment. Throughout the day residents were seen carrying belongings and entering the British security zone or beyond: the explosion brought about the first wave of departure from Qatamon, which included Arabs, Armenians, and Greeks. The deep shock and fear are reflected in the correspondence between Albina and the District Commissioner, whom he asked, on the day after the Semiramis explosion, to incorporate Qatamon in the security zone. Pollock replied on 15 January, assuring him that steps would be taken to ensure the security of the area and its residents – an empty promise.<sup>41</sup>

On the day after the explosion the men from the immediate neighbourhood met at the Sakakini house and decided to undertake the defence of their homes. However, of the approximately 20 men present only four had rifles and three had pistols, and the majority did not know how to use firearms. They decided to collect money to purchase additional weapons (which were exorbitantly expensive on the black market) and to hire guards. Afterwards the group, along with the local children and some of the women, erected roadblocks made of barrels filled with dirt and stones at the two entrances to the semicircular street. Three engineers who lived on the street went from house to house, pointing out vulnerable places and showing the inhabitants where to put up barriers. The group felt confident about first aid, as two physicians lived on the street, in addition to the volunteer women. It was decided that everyone who owned a weapon would do guard duty that night. Khalil Sakakini summed up the developments in his diary, on a note of merriment mixed with sarcasm: 'We have turned our neighbourhood, which is encircled by a road and is a kind of island, into an entrenched fortress, compared to which the fortresses of Sebastopol, Verdun, Gibraltar and Malta are as nothing.'<sup>42</sup> The days following the hotel's detonation went by in a state of acute tension. The slightest noise at night sent the residents rushing to inner rooms of their homes, which were considered safer. The men stayed up to guard, or socialize with the guards, and many were afraid to go to sleep altogether. According to Ghada Karmi, daughter of Hasan Karmi, the



guard effort was soon abandoned, after a guard was shot one night, probably by a Jewish outpost or patrol.<sup>43</sup>

The blowing up of the Hotel Semiramis was the most extreme in an unfolding sequence of events which made normal civilian life in Qatamon increasingly difficult to maintain. The exchanges of sniper fire between the Arab and Jewish neighbourhoods made travel to work or to shop in the city centre and in the Old City dangerous, and in some cases the road was cut off. Similarly, the deteriorating security situation meant that the villagers could no longer deliver agricultural produce. With basic commodities increasingly difficult to obtain, the neighbourhood committee decided, from the beginning of January, to distribute food in return for coupons. The distribution centre was in the house of the architect Daud Tlil.

An event which deeply affected the residents around this time was the killing of the donkey belonging to Mahmud, the milkman, by a stray bullet. The result was that milk, too, was no longer delivered. The Karmi children, Ghada and Ziyad, witnessed the shooting of a Bedouin peddler by a sniper on the threshold of their house. The event compounded the trauma from which the two had suffered since the Hotel Semiramis incident and which was triggered anew by any loud noise, even the slamming of a door. The anxiety felt by all the children in Qatamon was further heightened after they were forbidden to leave their homes and when government schools did not reopen after the New Year's holiday.<sup>44</sup>

The tragic events that occurred in this period elsewhere in Jerusalem and throughout the country also left their imprint on the residents of Qatamon. In one case, on 7 January 1948, Jewish *Irgun* activists rolled a barrel filled with explosives into the crowd around the National Guard (*al-haras al-watani*) checkpoint at the entrance to the Jaffa Gate plaza in the Old City. Nineteen Arabs and one Armenian were killed in the blast, and 36 people were wounded. Most of the victims were men, some from the National Guard and others innocent passers-by, owners of businesses, and people waiting for a bus. Two women were also killed, one of them a relative of the Sakakinis.<sup>45</sup> A few weeks earlier, probably shortly after the intercommunal violence erupted, 'Isa Toubbeh, the *mukhtar*, had been involved in a tragic event at Jaffa Gate. A young Jew whose life was being threatened by a group of Arabs ran towards him. When Toubbeh, an elderly man of dignified appearance, saw that the young man was in distress, he wrapped his arms around him to protect him from the would-be assailants. Toubbeh then released the young man, positioned himself in front of him, and declared him to be under his protection. According to custom, the young man's life now depended on Toubbeh's life. As the *mukhtar* turned around to inform the young man that he was safe, one of the assailants pushed him aside and shot the young Jew dead. The elderly *mukhtar* was deeply shocked; he could not understand why the person under his protection had been killed but his life spared. Over the years, Toubbeh had maintained friendly relations with Jews of Middle Eastern origin, with whom he shared both language and culture. The narrow nationalism that motivated the assailants at Jaffa Gate was alien to him. His own son, Jamil Toubbeh, who was then a high-school student, almost fell victim to the rampant nationalism and paranoia at the same place, the Jaffa Gate plaza. He arrived there in short pants and was suspected of being a Jew (wearing short pants is forbidden by Islam); he was spared the wrath of the mob only by the chance arrival of a friend of his father's, who identified him.<sup>46</sup>

The incident that befell Jamil Toubbeh at Jaffa Gate illustrates the situation of the Palestinian Christian Arabs in early 1948. As in the Arab Revolt of 1936–39, the Christians again played a marginal role in the Palestinian war effort (this time against the Jews). The Christians dreaded the idea of living under a Muslim majority, which they expected after the end of the Mandate.<sup>47</sup> Christian residents, who did not join the local guard forces, ran afoul of Tahsin Kamal, the Muslim commander of the Musrara neighbourhood, who shot and wounded one of them. In Upper Baq'a, which, like Qatamon, was outside security zone A, the sons of the automobile and electrical appliances importer Shukri Dib, George, Gaby and Raymond took the lead in organizing a guard force. They recruited about 75 volunteers from a potential of hundreds. Some of the particularly wealthy residents had already sent their young sons to Beirut or Amman, to keep them out of the war. Through the AHC the Dib brothers hired 28 guards – villagers from north of Jerusalem – who were lodged in attics and garages and given food by the residents. A young Christian and former British Army sergeant, 'Abd al-Nur Khalil Janho, was hired as their commander. However, like Tahsin Kamal in Musrara, Janho and his men became a nightmare for the residents. Apart from looting the homes of families that had fled from the neighbourhood, they opened fire indiscriminately at the slightest chance noise, panicking the residents, and the accidental explosion of a hand grenade in their possession caused the first casualties in Upper Baq'a.<sup>48</sup>

It is not clear whether such incidents were behind the decision by 'Abd al-Qadir Al-Husayni to appoint Shafiq 'Awis, a Christian and a former police officer, as the commander of Qatamon. 'Awis, like Janho, was one of the few Christians in the 'Holy Jihad Army' (HJA, *Jaysh al-Jihad al-Muqaddas*), as the irregular forces that were loyal to the Mufti, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, were known. 'Awis had a force of about 60, consisting of local villagers and volunteers from Iraq and the Hijaz.<sup>49</sup> Their deployment in Qatamon led to an escalation in the exchanges of fire with the Jewish neighbourhoods,<sup>50</sup> and soon caused a dispute with the residents, who were opposed to the 'Awis force's attacks on the Jewish neighbourhood of Makor Hayim. The underlying cause of the disagreement was apparently the entry into Qatamon of the foreigners and villagers, with their very different customs and way of life. In addition, at least some of the residents realized that 'Awis' aggressive tactics were prompting retaliatory attacks and as such were endangering their lives and their property. The objections to the outsiders and to their actions against the Jews were immediate. Already after the detonation of the Hotel Semiramis, Anton Albina wrote to the District Commissioner, 'We do not want innocent people to be butchered in their sleep in the middle of the night and at the same time we are most anxious that no one whomever he may be should be assaulted in this quarter by irresponsible elements who are strangers to the place and do not care of the result of their action [*sic*]. In his letters Albina reiterated his opposition to harming civilians, whatever their national identity.<sup>51</sup>

Following a *Lehi* retaliatory operation, with *Haganah* support, on 20 February, in which the Jewish force tried to blow up a house in northern Qatamon, adjacent to Kiryat Shmuel – killing a member of the neighbourhood committee, Kamil 'Awayda – the residents turned for help to the AHC. Its secretary, Dr Husayn Fakhri al-Khalidi, sent the neighbourhood committee a letter authorizing it to supervise the local guards, including the right to choose their commander. However,

apparently aware that this would have little effect on 'Awis and his men, he advised them to send a delegation to 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni at his headquarters in Bir Zayt. 'Awis, for his part, sought from 'Abd al-Qadir an official letter of appointment as commander, and for some time apparently enjoyed the latter's support.<sup>52</sup>

The fighting in the Qatamon area continued, as did the attacks from there on Makor Hayim. *Lehi* carried out a further series of bombings in the north of the neighbourhood in coordination with the *Haganah*, which provided mortar fire as cover. On the night of 10 March bombs were planted in the Shahin, 'Anabtawi, and Budayri houses, and serious damage was caused to additional houses near the Budayri house, including that of Dr Fawti Frayj, a member of the National Committee (NC, *al-lajna al-qawmiyya*) of Jerusalem. A bomb that was planted in the Shahin house, which was still under construction but on the roof of which the 'Awis force maintained an outpost, failed to explode. On 13 March *Lehi* attacked the house again, this time destroying the post along with other parts of the building and another structure as well; the Arab fighters sustained casualties, but apparently the buildings that were blown up were uninhabited and most of the damage was to property.<sup>53</sup> The rift between 'Awis and the civilian population came to the fore again during the attack on the Shahin house, when residents opposed shooting at the assailants, for fear that their homes would be destroyed as well. Shortly after the attack, 'Awis ordered a list to be drawn up of the local non-Arab families (Greeks, Armenians, and others) in order for them to sign a commitment to desist from commercial dealings with the Jews. He threatened that anyone who refused to sign would suffer 'the lot of traitors'. This step attests to the depth of alienation between the non-Arab Christian population, which found itself caught in a war that was foreign to it, and the Arab fighters.<sup>54</sup>

During the war the Sakakini house continued to be a social magnet for the neighbourhood's residents. A regular practice developed in which every evening a few neighbours, some of them relatives, gathered there in order to pass the tense hours together, conversing, listening to the radio, playing cards, or otherwise socializing. In some cases the gatherings were disturbed by attacks in the area. In her diary, Hala Sakakini described the night of 13 March and the morning after:

We had just heard the nine o'clock news yesterday evening and were all sitting in the dining room when an explosion took place. It was followed by shooting, so we all ran for safety to the hall. The firing was so strong everybody's nerves were on edge and we all began ordering each other to take safer positions in the hall. Then two more loud explosions shook our house and we guessed that they were very near. Fadwa Sfeir was almost panic-stricken, so we hurriedly took our coats and some blankets and ran downstairs where we stayed cold and shivering until things began to quiet down around midnight. Sari, Uncle Najeeb and George Sfeir remained upstairs listening to the police station on the radio. . . . When it had calmed down a little, our neighbours Mr Daoud Tleel, Mr Fakhri Joharieh and Mr Sruji joined us in Sari's flat and shared our bottle of cognac with us.

Shooting did not cease until morning. It was a terrible night. Today, from early morning, we could see trucks piled with furniture passing by. Many more families from Katamon are moving away, and they are not to blame. Who likes

to be buried alive under debris?! The defence system of Katamon is just miserable and no one of the responsible people is doing the slightest thing about it. If strong security measures are not taken immediately, our turn of leaving our home will come soon. We cannot be expected to wait empty-handed for the Jews to come and blow us up.<sup>55</sup>

Following the bombings in March another wave of residents fled Qatamon, after much of the neighbourhood had emptied out in the two previous months. Those who could afford it made for Arab metropolitan areas outside Palestine – Beirut, Damascus, Alexandria, Cairo – where they used to vacation. Families with less means found shelter in the Old City or made do, for the time being, with entering the British security zone adjacent to Qatamon. The *mukhtar* Toubbeh and his family at first moved in with their daughter, inside the security zone, and a few days later took up residence in the spacious villa of a Muslim family which had left – many felt that even the security zone was too dangerous, and those who were able fled from there, too – but did not want the house to remain empty. The Toubbeh family, which lacked the means to leave the country but could have gone to the Old City, preferred, at this stage, to stay close to home. During the day it was still possible to visit the house and remove items from it, and the Toubbehs still felt at home in their familiar neighbourhood. The Karmis, in contrast, remained at home during the day but at night made their way through the gardens of the neighbours' backyards – to avoid possible snipers – and slept in the empty house of Christian friends in the security zone, the friends themselves preferring a safer haven in the Old City.<sup>56</sup>

The Qatamon residents sent another delegation to complain about 'Awis and his men to the AHC members who remained in Jerusalem – Dr Khalidi and Ahmad Hilmi – but they could do nothing under the circumstances.<sup>57</sup> A second delegation, with the participation of Dr Frayj, whose house was destroyed, and others, went to see 'Abd al-Qadir in Bir Zayt on 14 March, with far better results: 'Awis and his men were removed from the neighbourhood and transferred to Upper Baq'a, and were replaced, on 15 March, by a force under Ibrahim Abu Dayya, one of the finest commanders in the HJA.<sup>58</sup>

To facilitate Abu Dayya's deployment in Qatamon, 'Abd al-Qadir himself came to the neighbourhood again a few days later, accompanied by his deputy, Kamil 'Ariqat, and by Abu Dayya and his second-in-command, Abu 'Ata. The delegation was received willingly in the house of Khalil Sakakini, who had long been on good terms with the Husayni family. Sakakini used the opportunity to ask them to uphold the always binding rules of war: to take care of the wounded, treat prisoners well, and turn over the bodies of the dead to their families. He cited to his Muslim guests a hadith on the words of Abu Bakr, who enjoined his warriors not to kill elderly people, women, and children, burn trees, destroy houses, pursue refugees, mutilate the bodies of the dead, or harm clerics (apparently rumours had reached Sakakini about the perpetration of atrocities during the intercommunal war). In his diary Sakakini did not note the guests' response, though he appended a pacifist thought: 'Sheath your swords and do not fight anyone, there is enough room in this world for everyone.' However, he did not dare utter such a thought to 'Abd al-Qadir and the

others. He concluded the diary entry by invoking Jesus' words, 'My kingdom is not of this world'.<sup>59</sup>

Abu Daya, the new Qatamon commander, was born in Surif, a village at the edge of Mount Hebron, in 1920. He completed elementary school, and after his father's death replaced him as the village barber. He took an active part in the revolt of 1936–9. From late 1947 he was the commander of the HJA training camp in Surif and in charge of the main weapons depot, which was also located in Surif. His prestige as a commander soared after he led the battle in which 35 *Haganah* men were killed on the way to Kfar Etzion in mid-January 1948. 'Abd al-Qadir assigned him to establish an offensive force, the 'Third Company', whose members were carefully chosen from among army and police veterans and were well paid. Its core numbered a few dozen men from Surif and the surrounding villages who had been fighting together since December 1947, and had trained together at the camp in Surif and afterwards in Halhul. There they were joined by Iraqis, five British Army deserters, and ten Yugoslav Muslims who were fortifications and mine-laying experts. Abu Daya's force in Qatamon was about 130-strong. As chief quartermaster, Abu Daya enjoyed a steady supply of arms, including mortars and several light and medium machine guns. He enforced strict discipline and punished violators severely, in some cases expelling them from the unit. He lived among his men, in the same conditions, and led them into battle. As with many commanders of irregular forces, Abu Daya's authority derived from his personal charisma and from the enthusiasm he instilled in his troops. In Qatamon he made St Simeon's Monastery, on the outskirts of the neighbourhood, his base and set up a kitchen in the institution, where the troops enjoyed plentiful food and so did not become a burden on the residents. A fortified line of outposts was set up along the boundaries of Qatamon, reinforced by dominant positions within the neighbourhood. Qatamon was also their staging ground for participation in other battles, such as the battle against the Jewish convoy at Nabi Daniyal, south of Bethlehem, in late March 1948, and the fighting at Qastal at the beginning of April.<sup>60</sup>

Shortly after the arrival of the Abu Daya force the residents' sense of security improved somewhat, though exchanges of fire with the Jewish neighbourhoods continued incessantly.<sup>61</sup> Abu Daya and Abu 'Ata (the *mukhtar* of the village of Rafat, north of Jerusalem) were popular and even admired by some of the residents, owing to their personalities and their spirited nationalism. Following the battle against the Nabi Daniyal convoy, Khalil Sakakini wrote in his diary:

He [Abu Daya] is a young man in the springtime of his life, small and lean, but in an emergency is as strong as a lion. Nevertheless, the newspapers do not mention him, as though he is the Unknown Soldier. This young man imposed his conditions on the commander of the British police, who did his bidding... If this young man were from a city, from this or that family, people would drum and sing and hold parties for him, in his presence or his absence, and ply him with huge sums of money. I am apprehensive that he will notice this himself, or that someone will draw his attention to it, and then we will return to the townsman versus peasant tune and all will fall apart, heaven forbid... There is someone else, the *mukhtar* of Rafat (a village north of Jerusalem), Abu 'Ata, who assumed command of the guard in Qatamon in the absence of Ibrahim

Abu Dayya. This *mukhtar* is imbued with much wisdom, experience, and nationalism. When you talk to him you think he is a graduate of an institution of higher learning: he expresses himself well, his opinions are mature and he has noble ambitions, not only in comparison to other *mukhtars*, but also in comparison to several members of the AHC, who as compared to him are ignorant while he is educated...<sup>62</sup>

Abu Dayya's popularity among the Palestinian-Arab public reached its zenith in the wake of the stirring address he delivered in the courtyard on the Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount) on 9 April 1948 at the funeral of 'Abd al-Qadir Al-Husayni, who was killed the day before in the battle for Qastal, west of Jerusalem. In his diary Khalil Sakakini noted that Abu Dayya, who was wounded in the battle, insisted on attending the funeral despite his condition, after the doctors removed bullets and shrapnel from his body.<sup>63</sup> The enthusiastic support for Abu Dayya by the Sakakini family and their circle in Qatamon was reflected as well in a letter from Melia Sakakini (Khalil's unmarried sister who lived in his household), to her nephew Sari in Cairo:

Ibrahim's [Abu Dayya's] health improved and he is busy with his affairs, but he has few dirhams [historical silver coins]. Please inform Raja'i [al-Husayni: financial director of the AHC] accordingly and tell him that Ibrahim deserves [money] more than all those who are active in Egypt, and here and there. After [the death of] 'Abd al-Qadir, Ibrahim is all they have left, and it's high time they woke up.<sup>64</sup>

On 21 April, a few days before the fall of Qatamon, Hala Sakakini wrote in her diary:

I am determined to stay here as long as Ibrahim Abu Dayyeh is here to defend us. I adore that man. He is wonderful, overflowing with patriotism, working day and night tirelessly, not caring for food or comfort. He is intelligent. He is genuine. Abu Dayyeh and Abu Ata drop in almost every evening. We drink coffee and have a little chat together. It is a pleasure to listen to these men talking.

Two days later, Abu Dayya was taken again to the hospital. In the wake of rumours of an impending Jewish attack on the neighbourhood, Hala Sakakini made the following diary entry:

Around six o'clock in the evening, Mr Sruji came in and announced that Abu Dayyeh had run away from the hospital in pyjamas and slippers. It is typical of him. Uncle Najeeb sent him a woollen jumper and Father a pair of woollen socks. About nine o'clock Abu Dayyeh dropped in. His presence among us made the evening most pleasant. He is a character that I shall never forget so long as I live. When he talks he fascinates you. He uses short sentences, his words are powerful, his remarks original and just right. You feel he is capable of overcoming all obstacles.<sup>65</sup>

The ability of Abu Dayya, a relatively uneducated Muslim villager, to integrate into a sophisticated bourgeois urban Christian society was probably due to his

natural charisma combined with his admirers' romantic, idealized notion of village life. Even the rural dialect, which was usually considered crude and simple as compared with the more polished urban dialect, drew praise when Khalil and Hala Sakakini noted the linguistic prowess of Abu Dayya and Abu 'Ata. Similarly, the Sakakinis were willing to overlook the considerable difference between the colloquial Arabic of the uneducated and the educated, the latter drawing on literary Arabic in conversations of supreme importance. It is noteworthy that while adopting a patronizing, hostile attitude toward villagers (which was reciprocated), bourgeois urban Arab society tended towards an idyllic view of village life. Thus, for example, townspeople who normally dressed in European attire liked to have themselves photographed in ostensibly rural dress.<sup>66</sup> The idealization of the 'noble villager' derived from a sense of national identity – also characteristic of the bourgeoisie – which intensified during the war. This was the start of the transformation of the village and its 'authentic' residents into an ideal in the Palestinian national movement, a development found in other national movements as well.<sup>67</sup>

Though most of the remaining Qatamon residents viewed Abu Dayya as their defender and saviour, their last hope for being able to remain in their homes, others were highly critical of his aggressive approach and its consequences. Thus, a Christian physician wrote on 24 April:

Yes, I am still in Qatamon; in fact I am the only one who has not yet evacuated his apartment, and I have no intention of doing so. Jerusalem is now a war zone, and filled with irresponsible people carrying Bren machine guns and wearing 'abayas [village attire], who shoot at the moon at night and during the day at the horizon. They think they are having a good time.

Hasan Karmi, whose family was among the opponents of the Mufti and whose brother was murdered by his henchmen in 1939, a victim of the political feud between the Husayni family and its rivals, was aware of the part played by the Arab fighters in the escalation of hostilities. Karmi received Abu Dayya in his house cordially but after he left was sarcastic about the commander's self-confident boasting. This mistrust of the Palestinian-Arab forces, together with a habitual reliance on the British, resulted in a loss of direction and the expectation that salvation would come from outside: from the Arab states, the Arab League, even from the UN or the British, who had proved a disappointment in the eyes of the Arabs.<sup>68</sup>

As the termination of the Mandate and the British Army's departure loomed ever closer, civilian life continued to break down. From mid-April fuel and food supplies to Arab Jerusalem became increasingly erratic. Enforcement of law and order ceased, and robberies, kidnappings, and murders became widespread. Towards the end of April the situation became so untenable that it was impossible to find technicians for jobs such as electricity repairs. The massacre at Dayr Yasin (9 April) terrified the Arab population, and towards the end of April the Arab neighbourhoods outside the Old City were largely vacated, leaving mainly fighters. Many residents moved to the Old City, which was considered relatively safe because of its surrounding wall and the large concentration of Arab fighters there. About 40,000 permanent residents and refugees sought haven in the walled area, creating serious

overcrowding and substandard sanitary conditions. Many in the British security zones now also departed to the Old City, among them the *mukhtar* Toubbeh and his family, who arrived in a taxi while porters brought their belongings on mule-back. (Toubbeh felt so confident inside the walled city that he did not bother to bring with him the pistol he had been given by the AHC, which he had not used in any case.)<sup>69</sup>

Another wave of refugees fled the city, among them government clerks who were dismissed *en masse* as departments were shut down, and employees of the Mandate government and the British Army. Many left for safer locales, such as Bethlehem and Hebron, and the more affluent flooded the Arab consulates with visa requests. The AHC, which at first tried to stop the exodus, now adopted a more pragmatic approach and allowed the NCs to issue exit permits to men with their families. The NC in Jerusalem tried desperately to stem the tide, even stopping cars on the roads in an effort to forcibly return the occupants to the city. The hotels in Jericho filled up with middle class refugees from Jerusalem. Some were waiting for visas to enter Transjordan, while others – former government officials – anticipated positive replies from Arab governments, to whom they offered their services. By the end of April hundreds of families from Jerusalem's affluent quarters reached Amman; Armenians and Greeks, who found themselves in the same boat as the Arabs, also fled.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the efforts of Abu Dayya and his men, Qatamon's Arab population continued to shrink. On the evening of 13 April mortar shells were fired into the neighbourhood, a few of them falling near the Iraqi consulate. At the time, the majority of the remaining residents were gathered, as was their habit, in the Sakakini house, which was across the street from the consulate. Khalil Sakakini reacted to this event by noting, 'It is a good thing that our neighbour Islihit moved to Bayt Jala, and a good thing that Fakhri Jawhariyya moved to the Old City. If the two of them were here in the neighbourhood with their families, they all would have been seized by terrible fear.' Over the next few days relatives of the Sakakinis visited them to bid farewell before leaving the country. Day by day the population of Qatamon dwindled. Sakakini had to close his private school, al-Nahda, when the number of students fell from 80 at the end of January to only 30. Hala Sakakini described the evenings in the family house during her final days in Qatamon:

We have a special slogan for the evening nowadays. Not a day passes without Mr Daoud Tleel asking in his sarcastic way, 'What do you say, shall we flee tomorrow?' When we are in high spirits, and that is usually after Abu Dayyeh had visited us, we answer in the negative, but when there are explosions and shooting to be heard, we would answer, 'Tomorrow we'll leave, that's final!'

A week later, on 29 April, she wrote: 'We are now the only family left in Katamon. The Sruji brothers sent away their wives and children a few days ago. Mr Daoud Tleel and his family and Mr Elias Mansour and his family left for Syria about a week ago. I think Mrs Anton Albina has remained with her husband in Katamon.' The Sakakinis themselves planned to leave the next morning for Egypt, in their school vehicle. Two of their relatives from the neighbourhood decided to stay with them for one more night and say their farewells in the morning, before leaving for the Old City. In the evening the Sakakinis invited Abu Dayya and Abu 'Ata to their house and socialized with them until 11 o'clock. They talked about the possibility of a fierce



assault on Qatamon. Abu Dayya said that he expected such an attack imminently but that he was well prepared.<sup>71</sup>

The attack came that night, 29 April, mounted by the *Palmach*, the *Haganah*'s 'strike force'. Two companies (about 150 fighters) stormed St Simeon Monastery from the northwest and drove out Abu Dayya's men. He redeployed his fighters in houses east of the monastery and their sustained heavy gunfire forced the *Palmach* fighters to take cover in the monastery and in nearby buildings, where they were effectively under siege. Before dawn Abu Dayya counterattacked the monastery, supported by armoured vehicles and troops of the Transjordanian Arab Legion who were stationed in the Iraqi consulate. Both sides suffered heavy losses in the battle.<sup>72</sup>

Hala Sakakini described the events of that night from the vantage point of the last Arab residents of Qatamon:

... all of us were sleeping in Sari's flat when at twelve o'clock (the usual hour), not long after our visitors [Abu Dayya and Abu 'Ata] had left us, the attack on Katamon began. It was stronger than ever. The firing was heavy and continuous and it sounded so very near all of us thought that the Jews had reached our street. Every one of us deep down in his heart feared that before morning we would all be dead. When at last morning came the firing had not ceased. It went on and on, loud and strong. At about half past five, as I was standing on Sari's porch (which is protected by sandbags) I saw Abu Ata who had come to use our telephone, as no other telephone in the whole [of] Katamon is working. We asked Abu Ata about the situation and he said that everything was all right and that they were only short of certain bullets. After a while, however, Abu Dayyeh himself arrived in our square. He was nervous and shouting. We understood from him that everything was not all right at all. The Jews had come in very large numbers and they were trying to surround Katamon and besiege it. Already fifteen of our fighters had been killed and thirty wounded. The Arab soldiers in the Iraqi Consulate came running across the Consulate grounds to the fence along our street to offer their services to Abu Dayyeh. He began to give them orders. How great this young man standing there in his abaya and pointing out to those trained soldiers the positions they ought to take. His strong personality expresses itself in his every gesture and his every word. I saw some of the Arab soldiers putting away their jackets and taking off their caps and running towards the positions Abu Dayyeh had pointed out to them. I saw other soldiers in the Consulate giving handfuls of bullets to our fighters. All this was thrilling to watch.

To the Sakakinis' surprise, their driver arrived at the appointed time of 6.00 am. Quickly they loaded their luggage in the vehicle (throwing themselves on the ground at one point, as a bullet whizzed by) and, after a hasty farewell to the few neighbours and relatives who remained, they left. After passing through the gate of the security zone they waved to Anton Albina and his wife, whom they saw entering a house beyond the fence in search of shelter. As they drove through the streets of Jerusalem they were still in danger of being hit by a stray bullet; not until they passed Jewish Kfar Etzion, on their way south to the Egyptian border, did they feel safer.<sup>73</sup>

The battle for Qatamon raged unabated. Towards midday, as the situation of the besieged *Palmach* fighters in the monastery became desperate, they made a plan to retreat and blow up the building, leaving behind the seriously wounded, whom they could not carry. At the same time, the situation of Abu Dayya and his men also became increasingly untenable, despite the support they received from the armoured vehicles and troops of the Arab Legion and from reinforcements who rushed to their aid from across the city. The waves of assaults on the monastery exacted a high cost in lives, and a mortar shell that struck an ice factory, which housed the main weapons depot, took an additional toll and also destroyed arms and mortars. *Palmach* and other *Haganah* reinforcements, which tried to link up with the besieged force in the monastery, exerted pressure on Qatamon from several directions. It is difficult to estimate the impact that the Sakakinis', and other civilians' flight during the battle had left on Abu Dayya and his fighters. Abu Dayya, who was exhausted and wounded slightly again during the battle, managed to reach Arab headquarters in the Old City to recruit reinforcements and seek a ceasefire, but from there was taken to the hospital. In his absence and under the pressure of relentless assaults by the Jewish reinforcements, the residual Arab resistance collapsed: towards evening a Jewish unit from outside reached the monastery. The battle for Qatamon was effectively over, and within two days the entire neighbourhood was under Jewish domination. What little resistance remained came mainly from the Arab Legion troops in the Iraqi consulate, but pressure by the Jewish troops and a British ultimatum led the force to withdraw. (The British, under whose command the Arab Legion operated in Palestine until the end of the Mandate, objected to its intervention in the war.) On 2 May 1948 the British, fearing a Jewish advance through Upper Baq'a to Hebron Road, which they believed would endanger their evacuation route from the city, imposed a ceasefire.

After his release from hospital, Abu Dayya regrouped the remnants of his force and other fighters and tried to reach Qatamon. However, the British, who had no wish to see the fighting flare up again, blocked them in the security zone and arrested Abu Dayya briefly. He and his force then found shelter in the former al-Nahda school, which was now the Arab Legion camp. Most of Abu Dayya's men, between 80 and 100, had been killed in the battle. After the last remaining Qatamon residents fled during the intense fighting, extensive looting began in the neighbourhood by Jewish civilians and fighters alike, who broke into the houses and made off with furniture, clothing, electrical appliances, and food. After days of plunder, the *Haganah's* Jerusalem District headquarters took control of the remainder of the property.<sup>74</sup> Khalil Sakakini lamented his lost house and its contents, which he knew had been looted: the clothes, the furniture, the library, the piano, even his beloved narghila, which he had forgotten to take, along with his notebooks and papers. Above all, he grieved for the loss of his books, which he had collected painstakingly in the course of a lifetime. He would never know their fate. His only solace was that he had moved his diaries to a safe place.<sup>75</sup>

The Karmis were also among the last to leave Qatamon. Ghada Karmi, too, describes a traumatic and dangerous departure, amid gunfire and explosions. The Karmi family travelled via Amman to Damascus, to the home of Ghada's grandparents, where conditions were cramped due to the arrival of other relatives from the Old City of Jerusalem. However, they believed that they would return home

soon. Indeed, after ensuring his family's safety, Hasan Karmi tried to return to Qatamon and to his job in Jerusalem, but in Amman he learned of the fall of Qatamon. The Department of Education, where he had worked, was dismantled ahead of the British evacuation, like the other units of the Mandate government. The Karmis remained in Damascus and a few months later moved to London, where Hasan Karmi was hired by the Arabic section of the BBC.<sup>76</sup>

The Toubbeh family was spared the cramped conditions of the majority of the refugees in the Old City. Thanks to the *mukhtar's* status, they received a fairly spacious apartment in the Greek Orthodox monastery.<sup>77</sup> The Sakakinis, who arrived in Cairo on 30 April 1948, lodged in a hotel for about a month, until they found an apartment to rent. They too felt fortunate compared to other refugees, and to their relatives, who remained in Qatamon two hours longer than they did and in the end fled to the Old City with only the clothes on their back. Hala Sakakini summed up: 'I wonder how many lives were lost during the battle. I wonder how many bombs hit our house. How sad it is that Qatamon, one of the newest, cleanest, most beautiful quarters of Jerusalem, should turn into a battlefield.' Qatamon was shortly afterwards repopulated with Jews, many of whom were also war refugees from the Old City. It is, today, a Jewish neighbourhood in West Jerusalem.<sup>78</sup>

'We are not interested, Your Excellency, in higher politics, which does not mind sacrificing life and property, but we have at heart the welfare of our quarter and the safety of innocent souls, women and children.'<sup>79</sup> These plaintive words, written in February 1948 by Anton Albina to the High Commissioner, Sir Alan Cunningham, after he despaired of his correspondence with the District Commissioner, reflect the distress of Qatamon's civilian population. The neighbourhood's residents found themselves caught up in a maelstrom of events over which they had no control and about some of which, at the national level, they were probably unaware. Tragically, though perhaps inevitably, the course of events brought about the residents' exodus from their homes. The British authorities considered 'the Arabs' as bearing responsibility for the Jewish assault on Qatamon, as it came after months of sniping and attacks originating from the neighbourhood.<sup>80</sup> The perpetrators were the rural Arab irregulars who entered the neighbourhood against the background of the escalation in the intercommunal war, which in Qatamon was manifested most dramatically in the bombing of the Hotel Semiramis and of other buildings. Apart from a hasty initial attempt to organize, in the period before the outsiders' entry, none of the residents took an active part in the military struggle. As elsewhere during the 1948 War, the collapse of the Palestinian-Arab civil population came even before the military defeat. However, it is noteworthy that the residents of Qatamon had no way of preventing, even if they had wished to, the deterioration and escalation that was brought about by the armed combatants on both sides. Moreover, even if Qatamon had not been strategically located, and even if not a single shot had been fired from the neighbourhood, its fate would have been no different from that of the rest of south Jerusalem, which was captured after the departure of the British in the *Haganah's* Operation Qilshon (14x18 May 1948) and whose residents were also obliged to leave.<sup>81</sup>

The findings of this study show clearly yet again how wrong it is to treat the Palestinian-Arabs (or any other national group) as a monolithic, uniform bloc. The

process that led to the capture of Qatamon and the collapse of its society and exodus of its residents was complex, and the residents espoused a range of attitudes towards the unfolding events. The Qatamon test case reveals the glaring disparity that existed between the declared national identification of bourgeois upper middle class urban residents, and their willingness in practice to fight and make sacrifices for the goals posited by that nationalism. It turns out that this group's bourgeois values and way of life, along with its habitual reliance on the protection and patronage of the British authorities, left them unwilling and unable to participate concretely in the war effort. Other residents did not display even outward national identity, but expressly set personal, family, and regional interests as their highest priority. In some cases, longstanding political opposition to the Mufti and his family prevented families from identifying fully with the political and military struggle under his leadership. Disparate social background fomented alienation and even hostility between these urban residents and the fighters of rural extraction. Clearly, the Christian community affiliation of the majority of the residents, together with the presence of a large Greek and Armenian population, significantly affected the level of national identification of Qatamon's civilian population, together with its readiness to participate in the national struggle and to make sacrifices. Similarly, these bourgeois and Christian characteristics most likely influenced the outcome of the war on a countrywide scale as well, especially in the three large cities – Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa – in which Christians of the bourgeois middle class, both Arabs and others, constituted a large proportion of the non-Jewish population.

## Notes

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1. See e.g., A. Sela, 'Palestinian Society and Institutions during the Mandate: Changes, Lack of Mobility and Downfall', in A. Bareli and N. Karlinsky (eds.), *Economy and Society in Mandatory Palestine* (Sede Boqer: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2003) (Hebrew).
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3. I. Radai, 'The Arab Irregular Forces and Communal Organization in Jerusalem, December 1947–May 1948' (MA thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002), pp.124–9 (Hebrew).
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29. *Filastin* (Jaffa), 6 December 1947.
30. Secretary of the guard committee in Qatamon to the Arab Higher Committee (AHC), 9 December 1947, ISA, 65/2384.
31. A.F. Albina, secretary, the Qatamon development committee, to District Commissioner, Jerusalem, 7 December 1947, Jerusalem Municipality Archive, 848/5-03/1 (hereafter: JA; Albina, as a matter of fact, acted on behalf, or tried to represent the guard committee); Karmi, pp.72, 94.
32. 'Foreign document delivered by Yossef, deputy commander of zone 4', 5 January 1948, 'On the matter of Qatamon', 13 January 1948, IDF Archive, Tel Hashomer (IDFA), 1949/2605/3; Albina to District Commissioner, 31 December 1947, JA.
33. *Filastin*, 3, 6, 10, 16 December 1947; *al-Difa'* (Jaffa), 16, 22 December 1947; The Palestinian-Arab Medical association to the AHC, 8 December 1948, and Dr H. Khalidi, AHC secretary, response in 14

- December 1947, ISA, 65/19; 'Material needed for first aid stations and those needed for the hospitals', The Palestinian-Arab Medical association to the heads of Medical associations, 20 December 1947, *ibid.*
34. *al-Difa'*, 16 December 1947; H. Sakakini, 5 January 1948, p.110 (taken from Sakakini's diary, written in 1948).
  35. Toubbeh, p.33.
  36. Levi, p.337; D. Ben-Gurion, *War Diary, 1948-1949* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1982), 4 January 1948, p.113; 'A. al-'Arif, *al-Nakba* (Sidon and Beirut: al-maktaba al-'asriyya, 1956-60), p.81; L. Collins and D. Lapierre, *O Jerusalem!* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972), p.10.
  37. 'Hotel Semiramis - A Regional Arab Base in Qatamon', 8 January 1948, Central Zionist Archive, Jerusalem (CZA), S25/4013; Y. Berman to G. Myerson, 8 January 1948, *ibid.*, S25/9200.
  38. 'Foreign Document delivered by Yossef', IDFA 1949/2605/3; Levi, p.183.
  39. Karmi, pp.86-7; H. Sakakini, 5 January 1948, pp.110-111; Toubbeh, pp.27-8.
  40. *Filastin*, 6 January 1948; 'Hotel Semiramis', 8 January 1948, CZA S25/4013; report on other two women who perished in Semiramis, *al-Difa'*, 9 January 1948; obituary reporting that two Abu Suwwan children lost their parents and uncles, *Filastin*, 10 January 1948; Jawhariyya, p.595.
  41. H. Sakakini, pp.110-11; Toubbeh, pp.27-8; Rose, p.182; Albina to District Commissioner, 5 January 1948, JA.
  42. K. Sakakini, 5 January 1948, pp.379-80; H. Sakakini, pp.110-12, map in back cover.
  43. Karmi, p.90; H. Sakakini, 8 January 1948, p.112; Toubbeh, p.29.
  44. Toubbeh, pp.26-7; H. Sakakini, 8 January 1948, p.112; Rose, p.186; Karmi, pp.79-80, 91-2, 102, 106; 'An Arab named Thil', 3 January 1948, Haganah Archive, Tel Aviv (HA), 105/23.
  45. Levi, pp.337-8; 'Arif, pp.81-2; obituaries and casualties list, *al-Difa'*, 9, 10 January 1948; H. Sakakini, pp.112-13.
  46. Toubbeh, pp.23-5.
  47. Only five Christians were among 80 Arab commanders in the Jerusalem area. 'Arab command in the Jerusalem area', IDFA 1949/7249/283 (hereafter: Arab command), pp.45-7; only one Christian was among ten cadets chosen by Jerusalem's NC for officer training in Damascus. *Filastin*, 7 April 1948; Henry Gurney, Chief Secretary of the Mandate Government, who lived in a Christian quarter, reported in his diary on the Christian-Arabs fears. Gurney diary, 23 March 1948, Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College, Oxford (MEC), Gurney papers (GUR) 1/1, p.15.
  48. Collins and Lapierre, pp.64-5.
  49. 'Shafiq 'Awis', *Arab Command*, p.12; 'Arif, p.291, claims that 'Awis and his fighters arrived in Qatamon even before the Semiramis bombing.
  50. H. Sakakini, 10-12 February 1948, pp.113-15.
  51. 'Arab newsletter', 25 February 1948, IDFA 1948/500/59; Albina to District Commissioner, 5, 19 January 1948, JA.
  52. 'Arab newsletter', 1 March 1948, IDFA 1948/500/59; Khalidi's letter, 29 February 1948, ISA, 65/1634; On *Lehi* attack see Levi, p.440; see also *Filastin*, 21 February 1948, and obituary on Kamil 'Awayda, *ibid.*, 22 February 1948.
  53. Levi, p.339; A. Vered, *Jerusalem is the Central Front - Lehi in the Independence War* (Jerusalem: Hed, 1998), pp.73-4 (Hebrew); 'Arif, p.133.
  54. 'On the Matter of Qatamon', 21 March 1948, 'Ban on Commerce with Jews', 15 March 1948, IDFA 1949/2605/3.
  55. H. Sakakini, 14 March 1948, pp.115-16 (Spelling of names in quotations hereby and after is as in the English original).
  56. Karmi, pp.102-3; Toubbeh, pp.13, 25-6, 30.
  57. K. Sakakini, 16 March 1948, p.384 (Sakakini himself took part in the delegation).
  58. NC of Jerusalem's liaison officer to the fighters, report submitted to Hajj Amin al-Husayni on the security condition in Jerusalem, Beirut 19 March 1948, ISA, 65/1633; cf. 'Arab Newsletter', 17, 21 March 1948, IDFA 1948/500/59; see also 'Ibrahim Abu Daya' and 'Shafiq 'Awis', *Arab Command*, p.12.
  59. K. Sakakini, 20 March 1948, pp.384-5; on Sakakini's relations with the Husaynis see e.g., H. Sakakini, p.125; on atrocities see Gurney diary, 11 April 1948, MEC, GUR 1/1, p.53; cf. 'Atrocity Stories on Arabic Press', *Davar* (Tel Aviv), 20 April 1948; the Arab 'Army of Deliverance' (*jaysh al-inkadh*), for its part, issued to its fighters in Jerusalem orders against murder of POWs and abuse of their bodies, 'Arab Newsletter', 18 April 1948, HA 105/143.

60. 'Arif, p.293; 'Ibrahim Abu Dayya', *Arab Command*, p.12; 'Arab Newsletter', 13, 15 April 1948, IDFA, 1948/500/59; B. Abu Gharbiyya, *Fi khidam al-nidal al-'arabi al-filastini* (Beirut: Dirasat filastiniyya, 1993), pp.176, 238; I. Abu Dayya, commander of the 3rd company, to his deputy in Halhul camp, 25 March 1948, HA 105/91; 'A request to send the Hotchkiss machine-gun from Halhul to Qatamon', 20 March 1948, *ibid.*; 'Message from commander of the 3rd company', 19 April 1948, ISA, 65/35.
61. 'Arab Newsletter', 7 April 1948, IDFA 500/1948/59; H. Sakakini, Jerusalem, 30 March 1948, to S. Sakakini, Cairo, in *idem*, pp.116–17 (Sari Sakakini went to Cairo for medical treatment in his heart on late March 1948).
62. K. Sakakini, 9 April 1948, p.388.
63. *Ibid.*, 9 April 1948, p.388.
64. M. Sakakini, Jerusalem, 21 April 1948, to S. Sakakini, Cairo, 'Akhira risala min al-Quds', in H. Sakakini, *Personal Archive*, pp.6–7.
65. H. Sakakini, 23, 26 April 1948, p.119.
66. H. Sakakini, illustrations section; see 'On such days, whenever I go outdoors I miss again the country life. Oh, if I was a peasant!', in K. Sakakini, 2 March 1937, p.304; cf. Karmi, pp.18–20.
67. See e.g., H. Ben-Israel, 'Zionism and European Nationalisms: Comparative Aspects', *Israel Studies*, Vol.8, No.1 (2003), pp.91–104.
68. 'Operation of Rachil/Yair, Arab telegram to America', CZA S25/9209; Karmi, pp.9–14, 93, 101, 112.
69. 'In the Arab camp', 5, 19, 26 April, 3 May 1948, HA 105/142; 'Review on the economic situation in Jerusalem (on Mid April)', 5 May 1948, HA 105/143; 'Arab public sphere', 13 April 1948, HA 105/100; 'The Old City (of Jerusalem)', 21 April 1948, HA 105/257; 'A conversation in the YMCA', 30 April 1948, CZA S25/9209; Gen. G. Macmillan, 'The general position in Palestine', 21 April 1948, MEC, Alan Cunningham papers (CM) V/4/101; Minutes of security conference, 23 April 1948, MEC, CM IV/1/139; H. Gurney to J. Martin, 13 April 1948, CO 967/102; Toubbeh, pp.30–33.
70. 'Arab newsletter', 17, 24 April 1948, HA 105/143; 'Arab public sphere', 13 April 1948, HA 105/100; 'The inhabitants of Jericho', 2 April 1948, 'Refugees from Palestine in Amman', 23 April 1948, 'Public opinion and the evacuation of Arabs from Jerusalem', 27 April 1948, 'Arab evacuation', 29 April 1948, HA 105/257; Secretary of AHC to secretary of NC in Ramallah, ISA, 65/1634; Rose, pp.186–7.
71. K. Sakakini, 13 April 1948, p.389; H. Sakakini, 24, 29 April 1948, pp.119–20.
72. 'Arif, pp.293–4; 'Abdallah al-Tal to King 'Abdallah of Transjordan, 1 May 1948, in *idem*, *Karithat Filastin* (Cairo: Dar al-qalam, 1959), p.21; 'Arab Newsletter', 30 April, 1, 2 May 1948, HA 105/143; 'Fortnightly Intelligence Newsletter', 19 April–3 May 1948, WO 275/64; Levi, pp.214–20.
73. H. Sakakini, 30 April 1948, p.121; 'We Should Not Forget: Reflections from Lectures under this Title', in K. Sakakini, pp.391–2 (given in Cairo, 11 October, 5 November 1948).
74. Levi, pp.216–20; Radai, pp.126–9. Abu Dayya recruited new fighters to his company, and on 24 May 1948 he took part with Egyptian forces in an attack on Ramat Rachel, in southern Jerusalem, was injured again and remained paralyzed. He was transferred for treatment to Cairo and then to Beirut, where he died in hospital in 1952. In the Palestinian historiography and 'national collective memory' he is venerated as the 'hero of Qatamon'. While in Cairo, he was visited in hospital by the Sakakinis, who continued to adore him even after the fall of Qatamon: see H. Sakakini, 20 June 1948, pp.125–6.
75. K. Sakakini, pp.392–4 (The diaries were taken to the house of Sakakini's married sister, who remained in the Old City of Jerusalem).
76. Karmi, pp.115–26; cf. *idem*, 'The 1948 Exodus: A Family Story', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXIII, No.2 (Winter 1994), pp.36–7. Hasan Karmi, besides a career in the BBC, became a well-known linguist and dictionaries author. His daughter Ghada, who grew up and lives in London, became a physician, engaged in political activity for the Palestinian cause and is now a writer.
77. Toubbeh, pp.36–7. Jamil Toubbeh immigrated later to the USA and lives there.
78. H. Sakakini, 2, 20 May 1948 (Cairo), pp.122–3. The Sakakinis remained in Egypt until the deaths of Sari (from a stroke), and shortly after of his father Khalil, in 1953. Afterwards, the sisters Hala and Dumya (who both stayed unmarried) and their aunt Melia returned to the West Bank and settled down together in Ramallah. Hala died there in 2002, to be followed soon by her sister's death.
79. Albina to High Commissioner, 19 February 1948, JA.
80. High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1 May 1948, MEC, CM III/5/25; Gurney diary, 4 May 1948, MEC, GUR 1/1, pp.91, 93.
81. Golan, p.35; Abu Gharbiyya, p.279; Rose, pp.193–212; testimony of Ahmad 'Ashur, *mukhtar* of Upper Baq'a, in 'Arif, p.416.