

# Jerusalem Women's Organizations During the British Mandate

1920s - 1930s

*Ellen Fleischman*



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PASSIA

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# I.

## Introduction:

### Methodology and Sources

This article is exploratory, since it is part of a larger research project in progress that focuses on the rise of the Palestinian women's movement during the British Mandate in Palestine. Jerusalem women played a distinguished and unique role in the establishment of this movement. In the emerging years of the earliest women's organizations in Palestine, they formed its nucleus, often playing an instigating and coordinating role for the rest of the country. They were among the first to organize for explicitly political purposes, as opposed to focusing solely on charitable causes, and the leaders of the Jerusalem organizations became national leaders in their own right.

Before analyzing the specific history of Jerusalem women's role in the women's movement, however, it is important to delineate the sources for this study, and the socioeconomic, cultural and political context of Palestinian society during this period. The history of Palestinian women is being lost, distorted and eroded as time passes. It is slipping out of our hands due to a subtle process of neglect, and a lack of recognition in the traditional field of history of the narratives of over half of the population merely because of their gender. In writing about women as part of an attempt to contribute to the Palestinian

historical narrative, I am often asked, "why are you singling women out from the history as a whole?" I am not interested in segregating Palestinian women from men in history, but rather in providing a corrective to the usual historical narrative that presents history as "a universal human story exemplified by the lives of men".<sup>1</sup> As a result of this historical tradition, women are noticeable for their absence in almost all accounts of Palestinian history. Knowledge of the past in its entirety helps contextualize and deepen understanding of the current situation.

But also, this history is a rich narrative that stands on its own and deserves to be written. The relationship between Palestinian nationalism and Palestinian women is historically complex. All too often it has been dismissed, and the women involved during this period relegated to marginal footnotes in the national narrative, if that. The seemingly endless national crisis has resulted in massive dislocation, imprisonment, death and dispersal of family members, as well as wholesale economic, political, and personal deprivation. Women, of course, have been deeply affected by all of this. One of their responses early on in history was to energetically organize on their own.

History has commonly been designated as the "big events", a notion which is inherently gendered, since, as usually defined, the big events consist entirely of the activities of men in the domain of formally organized politics, wars, the economy and the like. In fact, the developments that precede and follow the major events -- what the French historian Ferdinand Braudel dubbed the "longue duree" -- are often what are most significant in affecting and shaping people's lives. The single, major event may be what caused these longer lasting developments, but how people live out its effects is arguably more

significant than the event itself. Women play major roles in this kind of history. One can take 1948 as an example of this. Without the part Palestinian women played in the wake of the Nakba sustaining families' identities and coherence, often providing for and supporting them, Palestinian society probably would have lost what little cohesion it has been able to maintain. Palestinian women are very much a part of their history, not only as passive victims but also as active participants. The more informal activities of women, such as their (unpaid) role in the domestic sphere, agriculture and unorganized protest politics -- to name a few areas in which they participate -- are considered insignificant merely because they are activities engaged in by women, not because they are in and of themselves unimportant. For their part, Palestinian women have always been active participants in the making of their own history, despite common misperceptions that they "didn't do anything."<sup>2</sup> The challenge is to redefine what constitutes "doing" in the historical imagination.

A major consequence of attempting to "make women a focus of inquiry, a subject of the story, [and] an agent of the narrative"<sup>3</sup> is that the historian must unearth sources on people and topics not considered worthy of documentation. This process involves engaging in a difficult hunt for material, which creates an extra challenge and burden.

The sources for this research have to a large extent dictated the trajectory of the work. The historical data on Palestinian women are inherently limited in type, scope and actual number. The sources do exist for those interested in unearthing them, but they must also be used with care. I have been investigating four major sources:

1) the press of the Mandate period, particularly the major Arabic newspapers, such as Filastin, Al-Difa`, and others;

2) British government documents located at the Public Records Office in London, the Israel State Archives in Jerusalem, and the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem;

3) personal interviews with women and men who remember the period, and

4) miscellaneous personal memoirs or letters (primarily British), pamphlets published by women's organizations, and secondary sources such as books and articles.

Each source has its own problems, not the least of which is that some -- particularly personal papers -- are very sparse. The dispersal of the Palestinian people during the Nakba contributes to the problem of constructing -- or reconstructing -- history. Potentially valuable archival material has been destroyed in war, or disappeared in the chaos of flight and dispossession. That most delicate source, human memory, has been erased by the passing away of many from the Mandate generation, leaving behind silences and gaps that can never be filled. The remaining members of that generation are difficult to locate because of their dispersion throughout the globe.

None of the sources named above is unproblematic. For example, certain generalizations can be made about the press: generally, most of the press reports about Palestinian women cover only urban, educated, elite women involved in organizations. This fact reflects limited notions of what constituted "news", (both then and now) in that



the major activities of women deemed noteworthy were primarily organized, semi-political ones, and the personalities considered significant were women of the notable families. There is usually no way of verifying the accuracy of the newspapers; because they are often the only source of information about certain events, developments or issues, one cannot cross-check the information contained in them, resulting in uncertainty about factual matters. One newspaper may contradict another, or even itself in different articles.

The limitations of government documents are myriad: primary amongst them is their selective nature. The British had their own interests in Palestine, and where they chose to mention women or deal with them on the governmental level was limited both by the government's lack of interest in matters affecting Arab women, as well as by individual government officials' own personal prejudices and attitudes towards women. Thus, there tends to be a ghettoization of women in files about education, health, and religious affairs.

Interviews with those who lived the time and events are simultaneously the most rich and interesting, yet frustrating of the sources I have perused. Obvious problems in dealing with human beings as sources are memory impairment, different interests or focuses between the interviewer and the narrator, and individuals' personal or political agendas that influence their interpretations or recollections of the past. There are pitfalls in narrators' mediations between how they want their experiences to be perceived, and the historian's particular narrow interests and questions. The Palestinian context poses additional problems: people are fearful and frustrated with talking about a past that is painful and which still affects the present so hauntingly. Finding older women to interview has been difficult. Society's and women's own

deprecation of their role and historical identity has resulted in their perception that they have little to contribute. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Because of the above, I reiterate that the sources have played a determinant role in the narrative that follows. I cannot pretend to present a representative, comprehensive account of all Jerusalem women during this period. What I can offer, to paraphrase one of the Jerusalem women who has generously spent hours talking with me, is a window to a world.<sup>4</sup>

## II.

### The Scene:

#### Jerusalem and Jerusalem Women During the Early Mandate Period

In what follows below I sketch some of the broader social and economic contours of the British Mandate period in Jerusalem. Because the article could not possibly do justice to the much-needed task of providing a comprehensive history of Jerusalem during such a long period, I focus on the 1920s and 1930s, which constituted the seminal period in the emergence and development of the Palestinian women's movement. These were years in which Palestine experienced a series of turbulent, signal events interspersed with intervals of relative calm.

Since the Egyptian occupation of Palestine in the early nineteenth century, Jerusalem had, over the course of time, become transformed from a "relatively minor provincial town" into the "biggest city of Palestine and the political and cultural center of the country" on the eve of the British occupation during World War I.<sup>5</sup> The city experienced a post-Crimean War building boom, during which schools, hospitals, churches, mosques and other public buildings were built,

alongside improvements in its communications systems, such as the construction of roads, railway, telegraph and telephone lines, and the development of a postal service. Additionally, throughout this period the city began to expand outside the walls of what is today called the Old City.<sup>6</sup>

Although it has always been a city of religious and cultural significance, during the British period Jerusalem became for the first time the seat of a national<sup>7</sup> government that ruled the entire geographical area of historic Palestine. During the 30-year period of British rule, many important social, economic and cultural changes occurred, some of them gradual, others more abrupt. New schools were established, government departments and the jobs that they brought were created, clubs and associations were formed, a radio broadcasting station was founded. This period witnessed profound changes in the texture of life for Jerusalem people. Active urban life began to flourish; people attended films, literary and cultural lectures, sports events, concerts, and courses held by various clubs and institutes. Schools had bazaars and fetes, including theater presentations.

Government jobs opened up to both men and women. The British were interested in establishing a corps of capable government civil servants who could administer efficiently to their own political and strategic interests in Palestine, while in general maintaining the social status quo. These goals dictated to a very great extent their educational policies, which were closely linked to their development strategies for Palestine. Very quickly, however, the government began to confront the contradictions inherent in its own policies; education invariably acted as an agent of social and economic change, challenging the very status quo the government was trying precariously to maintain. As Palestinians'

education levels increased, so did their expectations for commensurate employment. The issue of employment, along with the migration of increasingly landless peasants to urban areas, affected other cities differently than Jerusalem, which had a distinctively consumer-oriented economy, due to its unique role as a tourist, pilgrimage and administrative center. But the British slowly developed new government departments and services, such as departments of social welfare, public works, land registration, health, civil service, and post, for example. This phenomenon contributed to the creation of government jobs in the area.

Many Jerusalem women lived active lives. Some women from the middle to upper classes were able to slowly begin to challenge traditions that had kept them secluded from public life. Education played an important role in opening up the world of work -- be it paid employment or voluntary -- and women began to participate in the political, economic and cultural life of the city. Women interviewed remember attending lectures at the YWCA or YMCA and various cultural clubs, going to the cinema, and taking courses in subjects such as typing or first aid.

The activity of women -- and men -- of the poorer classes was focused more on the exigencies of feeding and providing for their families. World War I had devastated the country, resulting in a depletion of the population, famine, locust plagues, deforestation, currency devaluation, and a disruption of the economy.<sup>8</sup> In Jerusalem -- for those living in the Old City in particular -- poverty was pervasive; living conditions were conducive to disease, housing stock was inadequate, and during times of crisis, such as in the wake of World War I and the economic crises of the 1930s, starvation was a real threat. Along with increasing urbanization came the resultant problems of an expanding population that came to the city seeking work. Thus it was

perhaps natural that the earliest women's organizations worked in the charitable realm in their own back yard, so to speak.

But economic transformations also opened up opportunities to women. Other than during the World War II years, the economic situation in Palestine during much of British rule remained depressed. The economic problems produced pragmatic changes in attitudes about women working outside the home. A British feminist visiting Palestine in 1921, observed that the economic impact of World War I had created financial pressures which influenced Muslim parents in particular to obtain education for their daughters:

*There are many Moslem fathers who cannot afford to keep a whole family of girls who bring in nothing to the family income...They see educated Christian and Jewish girls obtaining posts in Government Offices and doing well for themselves and their families by this means...without bringing about any violent disruption of domestic life.<sup>9</sup>*

The writer does not distinguish among the different classes and how they were affected by the economic crisis, so it is unclear who she means precisely in her use of the all-embracing category "Moslem fathers", but it would be safe to assume that her contacts tended to be primarily with the middle to upper classes whose men were more disposed to educate their daughters during this period. The observation illustrates how the economic situation affected the better-off as well as the poor. Although the type and number of jobs<sup>10</sup> available to women were in fact limited<sup>11</sup>, they did begin to slowly infiltrate the work force. Many of the women of the upper and middle classes worked as teachers, some as government employees in the departments of health, public works, or in

telegrams and posts. Because Jerusalem was the seat of government, much of the employment available to women was located there; women sometimes commuted from places like Ramallah<sup>12</sup> or nearby villages, or relocated in order to obtain work. Teaching seems to have been the most socially acceptable and desirable work for women of the upper and middle classes, although a small number of women became doctors, midwives and nurses. The British government played a push-pull role in developing sectors that required professional women. British officials in the education department constantly deplored the lack of trained Muslim women teachers (using this dearth as an excuse for the sluggishness of their pace in establishing schools for girls -- especially in villages)<sup>13</sup>; they also assumed that women doctors were needed to treat women, particularly to deal with sensitive areas of health such as venereal diseases, obstetrics and gynecology. The government even provided limited scholarships to help train women in the medical profession and established midwifery training centers.<sup>14</sup>

Sa'ida Jarallah's father, an eminent judge in the Islamic courts<sup>15</sup>, was unusually progressive regarding the education of his seven daughters. He recognized that providing them with the ability to earn their own living reduced their vulnerability in insecure times. Mrs. Jarallah recollected, "He would say that a woman should have her diploma like a bracelet in her hand. For if she did not get married, or married but was widowed or divorced, she would be independent and have her own job and life, and not depend on her father or brother to support her."<sup>16</sup>

In the interviews I have conducted with women of this generation, virtually every woman has emphasized the important role of education in her life. The distinctive tendency of Palestinian society to

place high value on education began early on. Many women's male relatives encouraged them in their education. Quite a number of women from other parts of the country, such as Nablus, Jaffa, and villages all over, migrated to Jerusalem for various reasons, such as attending school. Nimra Tannous, who later became renowned as the telegraph operator linking communications between the Arab armies in 1948, was from a village close to the Lebanese border, which had no secondary schools for girls. She came to Jerusalem with her mother and sister so that the two girls could continue their education, and later worked for the Mandate government.<sup>17</sup> Nahid `Abduh al-Sajjadi, from Nablus, attended the only secondary school run by the government at the time, the Women's Training College in Jerusalem, and then later moved to Jerusalem in 1934 with her husband, who was an engineer in the Department of Public Works.<sup>18</sup>

The British government never established more than two secondary schools for girls during its 30-year rule, so that most women attended private schools run largely by church or missionary groups. Jerusalem thus was a center for education, as many of the religious groups had their schools there. In order to go beyond the secondary level, women had to leave the country, and, considering the obstacles that existed during that time preventing women from attending universities away from home, it is noteworthy that quite a number managed to attain higher degrees in places like Beirut and England.<sup>19</sup>

Sa'ida Jarallah was the first Muslim woman to travel to England on her own to complete her education, in 1938. Her father supported his daughters' engaging in various activities outside the house, and their not wearing the hijab. Although they incurred some criticism for their



free behavior and public activities, they were protected because of his support and stature.<sup>20</sup>

The skills provided and world opened up to women through education were important factors in the development of the women's movement, since the initial tactics of the organizations relied heavily on written communication. Educated women were the ones who tended to have "more social freedom to organize".<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the social ties between women attending school together lasted for lifetimes and helped them to form bonds that developed into political ones as well. One woman attributed the good working associations and interreligious friendships between Muslim and Christian women of this generation to their attending school together. "The schools taught ideas; we had the same mentality", she commented.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, the increased education of women was both a subject of controversy as well as a liberalizing influence in Palestinian society. The role and status of women stimulated lively discussions and even debates in the press, for example. In the late 1920s, *Filastin* newspaper ran a series of articles, some of them contributed by women, with headlines such as "Women's Rights and Her Duties", "The Veil and the Duty to Lift It", "The Necessity to Liberate Woman" (written by a man), "The Veil is an Obstacle to Girls' Education", and "Respect for Woman is a Duty". In a long series entitled "Veiling and Unveiling", different authors debated each other, citing the Quran or examples of women from Arab history to support their position. Generally, those proposing unveiling outnumbered their opponents. All of these articles were published in a short period of time, from March 4, 1927 till the end of the year, thus there were at least several articles a week on such topics. *Filastin* also published a series of articles on the "marriage crisis" in 1927 and 1928.

Sometimes writers would respond in one newspaper, such as Filastin, to an article published in another, such as al-Sirat al-Mustiqim. Although press readership was probably limited during this period -- considering that the majority of the population was illiterate -- nonetheless the press coverage indicates that the issue of women's status and position in Palestinian society was undergoing fierce, public scrutiny. As one writer summed it up, "the core of the matter is for women to take part with men in active, national life as she does in other aspects of life."<sup>23</sup> It is important not to idealize life in Jerusalem. After all, the British Mandate period increasingly became a time of intense political strife. Always below the surface of normal life in Jerusalem, simmered the tensions produced by the duplicitous, conflicting, dual promises to the Jews (in the form of the Balfour Declaration) and the Arabs (as represented in the Hussein-MacMahon correspondence). Ultimately the contradictions of these irreconcilable promises were responsible for producing political conflict that accompanied the other transformations that occurred during this period,<sup>24</sup> which was punctuated by disturbances: the Buraq (Wailing Wall) disturbances in 1929, the Strike and Revolt of 1936-1939, and the post-World War II years of increasing Jewish-Arab violence culminating in the Nakba. It was these events and the intense anxiety and uneasiness about the future that propelled women to act politically.

Yet many women of this generation look back nostalgically and fondly at this period. It seems that, despite the violence and turbulence, a certain precarious stability was maintained -- with interruptions, especially from 1936-1939 -- that only began to seriously unravel towards 1947 and 1948. People managed to work, go to school, and survive. This and social and economic changes provided a period in which Palestinian Arab women could develop and grow into expanding

roles. Furthermore, Jerusalem, as a flourishing urban center, provided not only social and economic opportunities, but also an atmosphere in which this was possible. Two sisters of a Jerusalem family from this generation, in looking back on life in the city in those days, told me, "Jerusalem... was something different; people were open, [and] not narrow."<sup>25</sup>

### III.

## The Women's Movement in Jerusalem, 1920s to 1930s

What is the chronicle of events in the founding of the Palestinian women's movement, and what impelled women to enter the public and political arena? Women's organizations were established in the early twentieth century in Palestine; however, it is difficult to obtain accurate, primary data on the earliest women's organizations, resulting in conflicting, obscure accounts -- most of which are glancing references. The earliest association is probably the Orthodox Ladies Society of Jaffa, founded in 1910.<sup>26</sup> There are vague reports of an Arab Ladies Association formed in Jerusalem in 1919, an Arab Ladies Club in 1921, which only lasted a year, and mention of other groups without specific names and dates.<sup>27</sup> All of these were apparently charitable organizations, often under the auspices of religious institutions, and one was pseudo-governmental: the inter-communal Palestine Women's Council in Jerusalem, presided over by British wives of high government officials. Few Arab women were involved in this organization, and those listed on the rosters seem likely to have been token representatives whose participation eventually disappeared.<sup>28</sup>

Arab women had certainly been active early on in protesting the British government's policies, although reports are sketchy and few. As early as 1920, for example, women began writing protests to the

government, such as one that Arab women of the North sent about Jewish settlement to the Chief Administrator of what was then the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration (OETA).<sup>29</sup> A group of women in Jerusalem collected donations to finance the nationalist delegations' trips to various countries to explain the Palestinian cause.<sup>30</sup>

Rosemary Sayigh has astutely observed that "the early emergence of women's political groups...suggests that national crisis acted directly on women rather than through the mediation of men's organizations."<sup>31</sup> A clear pattern emerges from perusal of the various written sources on the women's organizations, where women were most active in tumultuous times, responding to the political situation. As one of them put it,

*If, until now, the Arab woman of Palestine has preferred to work unobserved, it is because she felt that time was not ripe for her to emerge from her home. But events, of late, have prompted her to step forward in the limelight...to work side by side with the man...*<sup>32</sup>

Thus, it was the 1929 Buraq (Wailing Wall) disturbances and their aftermath that first propelled women to the forefront of the news when they held the Palestine Arab Women's Congress in Jerusalem on October 26, 1929. This event has been heralded as the "first time" that women entered the political arena. The women who organized the 1929 congress demonstrated for the first time a sophistication and self-conscious purpose about their specific role as women acting politically.

It is interesting to note that various press accounts of the congress used practically identical language in describing it as "the first time the Palestinian women is raising her voice...in protest", or "the first time in history that Arab women indulge in political activities".<sup>33</sup> The women themselves were very self-conscious about their defiance of perceived tradition, and their emergence on the public arena. Accounts of this congress, engaging in a certain amount of hyperbole, frequently invoke its historical significance, obscuring the fact that women had acted before this event.

The congress was held at the home of Tarab `Abd al-Hadi, wife of `Auni `Abd al-Hadi, who later became prominent in the Istiqlal party and was active in politics. She was one of the members of the congress' Executive Committee, which consisted of 14 women primarily from notable Jerusalem families such as the Husseinis, `Alamis, Nashashibis, and Budeiris.<sup>34</sup> Reports differ as to how this Executive Committee was formed; on the actual day of the congress, Filastin published an article listing the Executive Committee's members, stating they were elected at a preliminary meeting held a week before the convening of the congress, and that certain resolutions had been passed at the "preliminary meeting".<sup>35</sup> However, one of its members, Matiel Moghannam, writing later in her book, The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem, claims that the Executive Committee was elected before the closing of the session, and that its resolutions were adopted at the congress itself.<sup>36</sup> Unless the date of Filastin was incorrect, we must accept its account of the Executive Committee's activities as the authoritative one, since it predates the actual congress itself. The fact that the women's executive already had elected themselves and formulated the resolutions to be "passed" at the congress before it was even held demonstrates a certain amount of slick organization on their part. Also, it must have been one

of them who provided the detailed information published in Filastin before the congress was yet convened.<sup>37</sup> I relate this incident to illustrate the degree of sophistication and dominance of the Jerusalem women in this initial effort to organize Palestinian women at the national, rather than local level.

The opening session of the congress was followed by the visit of a delegation to the High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir John Chancellor and his wife at Government House, where the women delivered the congress's resolutions. These were protests against: the Balfour Declaration, Zionist (sic) immigration, the enforcement of the Collective Punishment Ordinance, the retention of Mr. Norman Bentwich (a Zionist) as Attorney General, the mistreatment of Arab prisoners by police, the behavior of Mr. Bailey and Mr. Farrell (government officials) in beating students at a demonstration in Nablus, and the donation of 10,000 pounds to Jewish refugees without the allotment of funds for Arab refugees. At the meeting, the women asked that their protests be passed on to His Majesty's Government in London. In Chancellor's own account of this meeting, he notes that the fact that they were unveiled "mark[ed] the gravity of the occasion", and that they "were obviously stirred by deep emotion." He received them after shaking hands, and replied to their demands by agreeing to submit their request to the government, telling them he could not cancel the Balfour Declaration or stop Jewish immigration, but that he "had their interests at heart" and they had his sympathy. During the coffee-drinking session that followed, two women refused to drink coffee with him because they said it was the custom of the Arabs to drink only in the houses of friends. "Such a breach with the Arab traditions of the courtesy due to a host in his own house is significant of the bitterness

of the hostility now felt towards the Government in certain quarters," Chancellor comments.<sup>38</sup>

According to Moghannam's later written version of events, when the delegation returned to the congress, which was still in session, and reported on their visit, it was decided to hold a demonstration throughout Jerusalem, stopping at various consulates to deliver copies of the congress' resolutions. It is interesting to compare Chancellor's version of events: he reports that the women originally informed him before the congress was held that they wished to "make a demonstration" at Government House when they presented the resolutions. The rest is worth quoting at length:

*I caused them to be informed that no such demonstration would be permitted, but that I would consent to receive a deputation of the ladies and hear their complaints. Attempts were made to induce some of the Moslem leaders to dissuade the women from making the demonstration. At first they declined to intervene; but when it was explained to them that the demonstration would be stopped by force if necessary, and that they would have only themselves to thank if their women came into collision with the police, the arrangements were altered. It was arranged that the main body of the conference should drive from the meeting to the al-Aqsa Mosque where they would await the members of the delegation, who would join them at the Mosque after the interview with me. That arrangement was duly carried out. By arrangement with the Police the main*



*body of the conference drove to the Mosque by a circuitous route avoiding the main streets.*<sup>39</sup>

Although the British were extremely timid about challenging what they perceived to be "Moslem customs and traditions", they clearly were not so intimidated as to refrain from threatening to use force against (primarily) Muslim women -- to the extent that they compelled Muslim men to collaborate and enforce their edicts in a type of unwilling patriarchal alliance to control the women. Although Westerners were always willing to point the finger at Muslim men as the villains in oppressing women, here we have a case which clearly indicates something different and more complex. In fact, the British were to use this strategy of cooptation again and again in dealing with recalcitrant women.<sup>40</sup>

Ultimately, the women were convinced to hold the demonstration in cars, which drove them throughout Jerusalem, stopping at various consulates. According to Moghannam (in an interview in 1985), they "went all over Jerusalem tooting their horns...and...gathered more people on the streets."<sup>41</sup>

The congress, meeting with Chancellor, and demonstration of October 1929 apparently were the match set to dry tinder. From this point on, women all over Palestine became involved in the nationalist struggle in a variety of ways. The year of 1929 augured a point of no turning back for Palestinian women. Their activities ebbed and flowed according to events over the years, and their tactics and strategies reflected changing political realities; however, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Jerusalem women continued to play a central role in the forefront of the burgeoning women's movement.

Shortly after the congress, Matiel Moghannam, the secretary of the Women's Executive Committee, gave a speech in Bethlehem, in which she heralded the new moment:

*...the Arab women enter the realm of public politics and work side by side to support their men in their national struggle on behalf of life, freedom and independence...we've left our houses for the arena of public life, opposing these old customs.*<sup>42</sup>

The momentum from the congress spurred a flurry of activities. On november 17, 1929 a meeting was held in Jerusalem under the auspices of the Women's Executive Committee. At the meeting, the women decided to form a ladies association of Jerusalem, whose goals were: "from the political perspective, to support the nationalist demands of the men's executive committee; from the social perspective, to support Arab women's affairs..." The Executive Committee was to direct the affairs of the association, and gather assemblies of women's associations in Palestine.<sup>43</sup>

There is an element of confusion about this period and which group was being referred to in any given written source. Part of the problem stems from historical hindsight; currently there are two women's groups in Jerusalem who date their origins to 1929, the Arab Women's Union of Jerusalem and the Arab Ladies Society of Jerusalem.<sup>44</sup> Both published historical pamphlets in the early 1980s in which they provide names of founders, five of whom were seemingly in both groups' founding committees. This is interesting for a number of reasons:

1) the overlapping founders were some of the most prominent and active women, whose names were frequently mentioned in articles in the press, and in British government documents detailing meetings between them and the government; and

2) in 1938 or 1939, there was a split amongst the women along the lines of the Husseini-Nashashibi rivalry, despite protestations to the contrary. (Matiel Moghannam, in an interview, stated that "the women were united" and "like sisters"<sup>45</sup>, which may well have been true on a personal level; nonetheless, the division did occur). To my knowledge, none of the founding members of either group is alive to help clarify the situation. One can only conclude that the women were not "above" politics, and, as we shall see, most of their activities were entirely infused with politics, even when they engaged in charitable work. After the split, there were two groups: the Arab Women's Union and the Arab Ladies Society.

What contributes to the confusion is that there are numerous references in the written sources to different names for seemingly one group: the "Arab Women's Committee"<sup>46</sup>, the "Arab Ladies Committee"<sup>47</sup>, the "Arab Ladies Society"<sup>48</sup>, and the "Arab Women's Society". What is distinctive, however, is that the term "Women's Union" [*itihad al-nisa'i*] is not used until after 1938. For some time after the 1929 congress, there are references in the press and government documents to "the Executive Committee of the (First) Arab Women (or Ladies) Congress"<sup>49</sup>, sometimes shortened to the "Women's Executive Committee". According to Moghannam, the Arab Women's Committee replaced the Arab Women's Executive in Jerusalem.<sup>50</sup> At any rate, the use of the "Arab Women's Executive" seems to have ended sometime in the early 1930s. This plethora of names in the sources confuses attempts to reconstruct the history of the women's movement during this period,

particularly when one tries to trace the origins and effects of the split into two organizations. However, in broad outlines, it seems we can determine that, up until 1938, there was one major women's organization in Jerusalem that operated under all of the various names above; it began with the nucleus of the Women's Executive Committee, which then transformed into a broader organization, still dominated, however, by the more prominent members of the Executive. For the purpose of clarity in this research, we will refer to the organization as the Arab Women's Association or AWA until we arrive at 1938.

From its inception, the AWA relied heavily on utilizing the written word as its most common form of protest. It sent off virtually hundreds of telegrams and memoranda -- sometimes almost daily -- to the British Government, sympathizers in the British press and public, the League of Nations Permanent Mandate Commission, Arab kings and heads of state, and other women's organizations throughout the world, especially in the Arab East. In the early 1930s in particular, this tactic may have been related to a certain naive attitude on the parts of the Arabs that the British somehow were responsive to notions of justice -- particularly "British justice", which was frequently evoked in accusing tones. Musa `Alami, Arthur Wauchoppe's<sup>51</sup> private secretary, stated in a secret report on the "Present state of mind and feelings of the Arabs of Palestine" that the Arabs had developed great "respect and esteem" for the British prior to World War I, through their exposure to a small British community of "the highest personal character". "For the Arabs, to be English was to be the incarnation of honesty, justice, courage and integrity."<sup>52</sup> Palestinian Arabs subsequently felt even more betrayed during the course of the Mandate, as British officials -- many of them against their will<sup>53</sup> -- upheld the dictates of the Balfour Declaration. However, the concept of "British justice" outlived whatever reality it may

have been based on for quite some time. The AWA, for example, in a meeting with the High Commissioner over the demonstrations in 1933 that resulted in a number of shooting deaths by the police, stated

*We request you in the name of Humanity and in the name of British Justice of which we have heard so much...that you would listen to our entreaties and save so much blood shed and misery...*<sup>54</sup>

Such entreaties to this concept recurred repeatedly, and began to seem ineffective as the years wore on, as the AWA continued to resort to appealing to it.

The AWA, however, did not only send appeals for justice, but also composed long, detailed memoranda dealing with current, urgent issues such as measures of relief for the fellah, taxation, discrimination against Arab employees in the civil service, and education, to name a few.<sup>55</sup>

The large majority of the AWA's written protests during the 1930s involved the situation of prisoners and detainees, however. Once the 1936 Strike and Revolt began, their numbers increased and their situation deteriorated greatly. On the political level, the women worked unceasingly for reductions in sentences, amnesties, and releases, protesting vehemently about the unjust nature of the detentions, many of which occurred under increasingly repressive measures after Martial Law was declared in 1937.<sup>56</sup> On the social level, the AWA provided support to the families of prisoners and the prisoners themselves, collecting donations of money, clothing and food, and visiting and

feeding prisoners. They also visited the wounded and families of the martyrs.<sup>57</sup>

Over time, some of the tactics of the AWA became more militant; again, often this was in direct response to the political situation. The intensity of the women's activity mirrored what was happening in Palestine. In 1933, a number of large nationalist demonstrations under the auspices of the Arab Executive took place in major cities in Palestine. The British, who were prone to shy from confrontation with "traditional values" -- particularly those affecting women -- were alarmed in noting that "a new and disquieting feature of this demonstration [in Jerusalem] was the prominent part take by women of good family as well as others."<sup>58</sup> During the demonstration, the police complained about the women being "troublesome...screaming at [the police] and waving handkerchiefs at them...[and] kicking against the gate of the Government offices."<sup>59</sup> The Jerusalem women not only participated in the Jerusalem demonstration, but also traveled to the Jaffa one held two weeks later. Once there Matiel Moghannam made a speech from a balcony, that "excited the crowd" which had gathered upon their arrival.<sup>60</sup>

Some of the other activities of the AWA during the 1930s included: the holding of numerous meetings with government officials to protest British policy, Jewish immigration, weapons smuggling of Jews, and execution of men involved in the 1929 disturbances; and participation in the Arab Exhibition to encourage production of nationalist goods in 1932. During the Revolt, Jerusalem women were involved in demonstrations, joined young men in the Old City in "surveillance" of the merchants to enforce the boycott of non-national goods;<sup>61</sup> coordinated the collection of relief funds;<sup>62</sup> and raised money for weapons by selling their jewelry, and in some cases, donating their

own private funds.<sup>63</sup> They do not seem to have been actively involved in any fighting, unlike some village women. Young women students became involved in 1936, also, strewing nails in the streets to puncture tires of jeeps, holding their own demonstrations and secret meetings, and often working in tandem with the AWA.<sup>64</sup> In 1938, a number of women were arrested on charges of possessing weapons and/or ammunition. The AWA lodged protests to the military police asking for sentence reductions, which more often than not were granted.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to their local activities, the Jerusalem women had extensive contact with other Arab women activists, such as Huda Sha`rawi in Egypt, and the different women's organizations in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. Several Arab women's conference were held in the 1930s -- one in Beirut in April 1930, and another in Damascus and Baghdad in October 1932. But the major women's conference in the 1930s was the Eastern Women's Conference to Defend Palestine, held in Cairo October 15-18, 1938, under the direction of Huda Sha`rawi. Women came from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt. Of the twelve Palestinian women who delivered speeches (or had them read), five were from Jerusalem. Many more Palestinian women attended. Some of the resolutions of the conference included: a statement that the Palestine problem was a European creation and thus Europe should take responsibility for solving it; demands for the abolition of the Palestine Mandate; the creation of a constitutional state; the nullification of the Balfour Declaration; the cessation of Jewish immigration; the prohibition of land sales to Jews and foreigners; a rejection of partition and British government policies; and demands for the release of prisoners and detainees. Furthermore, the conference decided to form Ladies Committees to Defend Palestine in the various Arab countries, with the Egyptian committee to play the coordinating,

central role linking all of the branches. Their work was to implement the conference's resolutions.<sup>66</sup>

It was after this conference, around 1939, that the AWA split into two groups. As mentioned above, not much is known about this division; most of the principals involved have passed away. The impetus for the split was political factionalism, resulting in the Arab Women's Union becoming allied with the Husseini faction, while the Arab Women's Association allied with the Nashashibi faction. There was competition between Zlikha Shihabi and Zahiya Nashashibi over the presidency of the AWA, which also contributed to the split. According to the Palestinian Encyclopedia, most of the AWA branches transformed into women's unions, while the Jerusalem branch stayed under its first name and worked alongside the women's unions.<sup>67</sup> Different accounts suggest that from the time of the split, the Arab Women's Union, subsequently headed by Zlikha Shihabi, tended to be a more political organization, while the Arab Women's Association focused primarily on charity. Although people I interviewed were still reluctant more than fifty years later to talk about the split, one woman commented that the two groups had "mutual respect", and indeed, one finds press accounts of their joining forces in united action.<sup>68</sup>



# IV.

## Assessment of the Women's Movement

Why is it that the Jerusalem women were so highly politicized during this period? There are a number of possible reasons that suggest themselves. One is the fact that most of the women active during this period came from notable families with men prominent in the nationalist movement. It is telling that the women originally chose a similar name for themselves to the (male) Arab Executive.<sup>69</sup> Some women in the Women's Executive were married to men who were members of the Arab Executive: Matiel Moghannam (Moghannam Moghannam), Tarab `Abd al-Hadi (`Auni `Abd al-Hadi), and Na`imiti al-Husseini (Jamal Husseini).<sup>70</sup>

Another possible answer is the fact that Jerusalem was the seat of government, and increasingly, the center of the nationalist movement. Jerusalem women presumably had their ear to the ground and were aware of what was happening in governmental circles. This is attested to by the detailed amount of knowledge of the diplomatic negotiations about the Palestine issue that is revealed in many of their petitions and memoranda. Clearly, they were well informed in the political arena. One must emphasize that their class status undoubtedly played a crucial role in facilitating their access to political information as well. Another

aspect to their location in Jerusalem was the presence of high government officials whom they could target and to whom they could complain. Indeed, many of them were married to or related to men employed in the Mandate government. Also they had access to communications such as telegram offices and other amenities that facilitated links to the outside world.

Again, their high educational level played a critical role in their politicization since the printed word constituted a large part of the form their protests and activities took. They seem to have utilized the press widely and gained much coverage and support in the local newspapers. Indeed, they emphasized the written style of protest to such an extent that over time, it appears to have become ineffective, and to have diluted their militancy. Other groups later on developed more original and radical tactics such as actually buying land themselves, as the very active Haifa Arab Women's Union did<sup>71</sup>, instead of merely publishing memoranda protesting land sales to Jews.

Towards the end of the 1930s, many of the women's organizations in other Palestinian cities and towns mobilized and became as highly politicized as the Jerusalem ones. Initially, the Jerusalem women set out to establish branches of the AWA in various villages and towns, yet the effort does not seem to have been very coordinated or organized. Women from other areas probably organized themselves, although there are numerous occasions when the Jerusalem women assisted. The 1930s experienced increasing radicalization of Palestinian society, and the women's organizations were often in the vanguard. Haifa and Jaffa were particularly militant; the first woman to be arrested and detained without trial for political reasons was Sadjij Nassar, the

fiery secretary of the Haifa Women's Unions, and wife of Najib Nassar, editor of the newspaper Al-Karmal.

One discerns comparisons of different branches to the Jerusalem one, and signs of competition and even disgruntlement among the different unions over the domineering role played by the Jerusalem branch. The newspaper Al-Sirat al-Mustaqim chides the Jaffa women for not working for the benefit of the country like their Jerusalem counterparts.<sup>72</sup> The writer of an article in Filastin notes defensively that the Women's Union in Akka is "not inferior to the Jerusalem union in its activities."<sup>73</sup> Yet in another article in Al-Karmal, the writer praises the women for distancing themselves from the men's factionalism and quarreling -- this was in 1935, however, before the intensification of the factionalism caused by the Revolt.<sup>74</sup> Despite some reflections of the nationalist movement's factionalism within the women's movement, however, it does not seem to have played the same destructive role as it did among the men, nor does it seem to have been a dominant characteristic of the movement.

This raises questions as to the nature of the relationship of the women's movement to the (male) nationalist movement -- a topic about which it is difficult to obtain concrete information. There are statements by the women of their motivation to "support the men",<sup>75</sup> and there is indirect evidence that some sort of coordination may have occurred -- for example, the women participated in the demonstrations announced by the Arab Executive in 1933; they were involved in projects called for by the nationalist movement, such as support of the boycott, the Arab Exhibition, and the National Fund. In a secret report on the strike funds during the report, the British describe the women's committee as acting under the control of the local national committee.<sup>76</sup> There are tantalizing

hints and indications of mutual support and dialogues, albeit the men's support for the women was more muted. In 1933, As'ad al-Shuqayri came to the women's defense when they were criticized for participating in the 1933 demonstrations by writing an article; he mentions examples from the Quran and the hadith to show that "men and women are equal in all aspects of life and religion...in their rights and duties."<sup>77</sup> Jamal Husseini and Asma Tubi had a little exchange in the newspapers in 1931, in which Tubi responded to Husseini's chiding the women for not supporting the boycott by accusing Arab merchants of greed and taking advantage of the situation by price gouging. Husseini's response is conciliatory and even sycophantic.<sup>78</sup>

Matiel Moghannam says that the women "always combined...forces with ...the Executive Committee of the men" and that the latter would "look over" memoranda the women wrote.<sup>79</sup> Yet the evidence in British documents indicates that the men attempted to maintain somewhat of a hands-off policy -- at least overtly. Considering the family relationships between the two groups, it is difficult not to come to the conclusion that there must have been quite a bit of exchange of ideas, at the least. Nonetheless, the numerous accounts of women in the press and archives show that they acted primarily as their own organization.

Who were the Jerusalem women active in this period? Here I provide an idea, or composite portrait of a "typical" Jerusalem woman activist from the Mandate period, drawn from various sources. Because of gaps of data, it is impossible to take an actual individual as an example, but the following combines elements of various women:

She was frequently unmarried (Shahinda Duzdar, Melia Sakakini, Zlikha Shihabi, Zahiya Nashashibi), from a well-off, if not a fairly rich, notable family whose financial security was based on property ownership, religious appointments, professional salaries or business (Hind Hussein, Zahiya Nashashibi, Zlikha Shihabi). She was fairly well-educated, up to or through the secondary level at one of the private schools such as the Sisters of Zion. She usually spoke at least one foreign language, often two. She may have been in the teaching profession. She became involved in the women's association at a fairly young age, in her late twenties or early thirties. She was intensely, fiercely nationalistic.

It is regarding this last point that I wish to pose several, perhaps controversial questions related to the questions of nationalism and women's activism. Most of the Jerusalem women activists of this period probably would not have described themselves as feminists, nor would they have necessarily supported women's suffrage or rights, as we would currently define them. Indeed, during the Arab Women's Conference in Cairo in 1944, which focused more on social issues than the 1938 conference, Zlikha Shihabi, the president of the Palestine Arab Women's Union, said that women in Palestine "would not demand more rights than what is allowed by Islamic law and the holy Qur'an, and that demanding political rights for women is before its time."<sup>80</sup> Although the goals in the AWA's by-laws focus on promoting Arab women's affairs and working to "uplift" women,<sup>81</sup> its political activity centered almost entirely on the nationalist issue.

Yet, consciously or unconsciously, the women used their gender to behave subversively within the national struggle. The very fact that they chose the forms of resistance that they did, indicates both

limitations and "originality", to use Rosemary Sayigh's word.<sup>82</sup> They frequently protested the British government's lack of respect for their "traditions" -- such as in a complaint to the Colonial Secretary in 1936 about searches of women by troops being "abhorrent to equity and sacred Arab traditions"<sup>83</sup> -- yet they were eager to manipulate those "traditions" when it suited them. An example of this is when Wajiha Husseini used to hide weapons under her seat while riding in the car with her then-fiance `Abd al-Qadir Husseini, knowing that the British would not search her side of the car out of respect for women.<sup>84</sup> It is telling that Christian women such as Moghannam were as quick to invoke the "tradition" complaint as Muslim women in efforts to shame and intimidate the British. In their statements published in memoranda or articles in the press, the women drew attention to and emphasized their gender, frequently uttering the phrase, "for the first time, Arab women..."<sup>85</sup> One can speculate that they estimated very accurately that as women they could publicize -- and even dramatize -- their cause and influence it by utilizing gender distinctions subversively for political purposes.

Women's historians need to carefully re-examine notions of feminism and nationalism in the Third World context. Contemporary feminist activists and scholars criticize women of this generation for their conservatism, their bourgeois values, and their lack of interest in challenging the existing social order.<sup>86</sup> Yet one must take the historical circumstances into context. The British Mandate period eventually experienced profound transformations and upheavals in Palestinian society, the most urgent question being the national issue. Ultimately, the question was whether or not the Palestinian Arab community would survive as any kind of social order.

Palestinian women of this generation say it was difficult for them to think about demanding their rights when the men did not have any rights. There is a narrow definition of feminism lurking behind these comments, which reflect limited perceptions of equality constituting "political" rights, defined primarily as suffrage. Missing is an analysis which locates other elements that play a role in oppressing women and limiting their choices, such as the family or other internal social dynamics. The women were also imbued with Western ideas from their education, which stressed certain values -- such as representative democracy and citizenship -- portraying them as universal, with no analysis of how these concepts intersected with the specific Palestinian political and cultural situation. Palestinian women were attempting to preserve a way of life and social structure under threat from a competing political movement, Zionism. The fact that they acted at all in ways that challenged patriarchal notions of "tradition" and respectability potentially challenged and threatened the very forces they were trying to sustain. They often did not see this contradiction. Instead they equated national liberation with women's liberation; "reform[ing]" women's status could only be achieved through the realization of a national government which derived its authority and legitimacy from the people. In her book, Moghannam states, "If Palestine had a legislative council elected by the people, it could introduce any such reformatory measure without making itself liable to or risking any criticism or attack." This reflects a very naive and idealistic notion of the social, cultural and political forces behind the promulgation of legislation.<sup>87</sup>

Third World scholars, in re-examinations of the relationship between feminism and nationalist struggles, have identified that women living under imperialist or colonialist hegemonies have not necessarily defined themselves solely by gender. Crucial to understanding women's

activism within the colonial or imperialist context is "a notion of agency which works not through the logic of [gender] identification but through the logic of opposition" to colonial structures of domination.<sup>88</sup> We need to take these concepts into account in evaluating the Palestinian women's movement during this period in its own historical context.



## References

### Abbreviations:

|     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| CO  | Colonial Office          |
| CZA | Central Zionist Archives |
| FO  | Foreign Office           |
| ISA | Israel State Archives    |
| RG  | Record Group             |

1. Scott, Joan Wallach, Gender and the Politics of History, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 18.
2. This comment was made to me in the course of my research by a (male) Palestinian friend when I asked him if his mother might remember the Mandate Period. He replied, "You should talk to my father. My mother doesn't speak as well, and besides, the women didn't do anything."
3. Scott, Gender, 17.
4. Hala Sakakini used this phrase to describe the role of her aunt, Melia Sakakini, who was active in the Arab Women's Union, when she visited her more secluded Muslim women friends and provided them with a "window to the world" in describing theatre performances or other events she attended. Interview, Ramallah, Sep. 11, 1992.
5. Schölch, Alexander, "Jerusalem in the 19th Century (1831-1917 AD)", Jerusalem in History, K.J. Asali, ed., Brooklyn: Olive Branch Press, 1990, 233.
6. *Ibid.*, 236-239.
7. Here I mean "national" in the sense that the British Mandate Government played the role of a state government, ruling over an area that, although not politically a nation, effectively comprised the attributes of nationhood.
8. Bernard Wasserstein, The British in Palestine: The Mandatory Government and the Arab-Jewish Conflict 1917-1929, 2nd edition, (London: Basil Blackwell, Ltd., 1991), 2.
9. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Six Weeks in Palestine, 2 vols. London: Women's Printing Society, 1921 and 1922, vol. II, p. 52-53.
10. I am referring here to wage work since most Palestinian women certainly worked -- particularly in unpaid and economically unrecognized forms such as

10. I am referring here to wage work since most Palestinian women certainly worked -- particularly in unpaid and economically unrecognized forms such as domestic and agricultural labor on family farms.

11. It is important to note that the British engaged in discriminatory practices against Arab women, both as women and as Arabs. See FO files 371 10118 regarding their not allowing women to practice law, and Israel State Archives RG 2, File U/365/40 about their discrimination against appointing an Arab woman doctor, Charlotte Saba. (The issue was her being Arab, not a woman.)

12. Nabiha `Audi commuted daily by bus from Ramallah to Jerusalem, where she was a stenographer with the police department. She even made the trip in 1938 during the Revolt -- a dangerous time to be out on the roads. Interview with the late Ellen Mansur (her sister), Ramallah, Sep. 5, 1992.

13. Cover despatch to report from the High Commissioner of Palestine, Arthur Wauchope, to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, 26 August, 1936, CO 733 291/4 75080/4.

14. Letter to Director of Medical Services from Sir Arthur Rowntree, 11 Nov., 1934, ISA, RG 10 73/2 about the need for women doctors, and letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from Arthur Wauchope, the High Commissioner, about wanting to train Arab women doctors in Beirut, 30 January, 1935, CO 733 277/11.

15. He was Husam al-Din Jarallah, one time rival with the Hajj Amin Husseini for the office of Mufti, and supervisor of the shari`a courts. Wasserstein, British in Palestine, 100.

16. Interview with Sa`ida Jarallah, Jerusalem, Apr. 19, 1994.

17. Interview with Nimra Tannous in Amman, Jan. 26, 1993.

18. Interview with Nahid `Abduh al-Sajjadi, Amman, Jan. 28, 1993.

19. Some examples: Charlotte Saba trained as a doctor at the University of London, telegram from SSC to Officer Administering the Government, Jan. 4, 1945, ISA RG 2 U/365/40; Wedad Khoury attended AUB, "Women Students in the AUB", 1929, (article), Middle East Center, St. Antony's College, Oxford; Salwa Nassar attended Smith College on a science scholarship, Harriet Wilson memoirs, Middle East Center, St. Antony's College, Oxford; Nahil Habub al-Dajani graduated in dentistry from AUB and practiced in Jerusalem, Filastin, Sep. 4, 1932; numerous women I interviewed, including Hala and Dumya Sakakini, attended the Beirut College for Women during the 1930s and 1940s.

20. Interview with Sa'ida Jarallah, Jerusalem, Apr. 19, 1994.
21. Rosemary Sayigh, "Palestinian Women: Triple Burden, Single Struggle", Peuples mediterraneens 44-45 (July-December 1988), 249.
22. Interview with Wedad Qa`wwar, Amman, Jan. 23, 1993.
23. "Woman and Unveiling - the hat and the tarbush", Filastin, May 7, 1927. (Unless otherwise noted, references to Filastin are to the Arabic paper published out of Jaffa; there was also an English edition which lasted for only a few years. See below also)
24. Most accounts of Jerusalem during the British Mandate period focus primarily on the religious tensions and violence, and political events, such as the 1928-1929 Wailing Wall disturbances, the 1933 demonstrations and the 1936-1939 Strike and Revolt. See, e.g., Michael Hudson, "The Transformation of Jerusalem, 1917-1987", in Asali, Jerusalem in History, 252-256. For social history, one must rely on memoirs, such as Hala Sakakini's Jerusalem and I, Amman: Economic Press Co., 1990, or John Melkon Rose's Armenians of Jerusalem: Memories of Life in Palestine, London: Radcliffe Press, 1993. I have depended a great deal on interviews with various Jerusalemites, conducted during 1992-1994.
25. Conversations with Hala and Dumya Sakakini, Ramallah, from September 1992 until June 1994. These quotes were from visits of Sep. 28, 1992 and May 6, 1994.
26. Unpublished memoirs of Adele `Azar, December 20, 1965, kindly provided to the author by Hana Nasir.
27. Matiel Mogannam, The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem, (London: Herbert Joseph, 1937), 55, 61-63, "The Arab Women's Union of Jerusalem Golden Jubilee 1980" (pamphlet, Arabic), Jerusalem: 1983, 18.
28. Palestine Women's Council Report 1921-1922, ISA 65, File 3117.
29. Letter to the Chief Administrator from Arab Women in the North, March 23, 1920, ISA 2, No. 30/I. Palestine was under a military administration from December 1917, when General Allenby entered Jerusalem, to July 1920.
30. "The Arab Women's Union", 20.
31. Sayigh, "Palestinian Women: Triple Burden", 248.
32. Filastin (English), Aug. 1, 1931.

33. From, respectively, Mirat al-Sharq, Oct. 28, 1929, and Filastin [English], Nov. 2, 1929. Also, the Egyptian women's journal, Fatat al-Sharq, carried an article that is almost verbatim the same as the Filastin one, in their October 1929 issue.

34. Moghannam, The Arab Woman, 76.

35. Filastin [English], Oct. 26, 1929.

36. Mogannam, The Arab Woman, 70. Mirat al-Sharq, a Jerusalem paper, reports on October 28, 1929 -- after the conference -- that the executive committee was elected after a delegation returned from visiting the High Commissioner. This article also deviates from all other written accounts in its versions of the substance of the decisions made by the conference. Mogannam's book is virtually the only written record by one of the participants about the organizing of this conference, and the beginning of the Arab Women's Association, or Committee, as it was often called. As such, however, it is often ambiguous and vague on particulars, leaving many questions unanswered. I have been unable to locate archival materials.

37. This point is elusive and interesting. Matriel Moghannam was a close friend of the `Isa family who owned and edited the Arabic Filastin, (interview with Raja al-`Isa, Amman, Jan. 26, 1993). Some of the articles that appeared in the English version of this newspaper, which only lasted from 1929-1931, are almost verbatim the same language as passages from Mrs. Moghannam's book. In addition, she and the women's association helped support Filastin-English financially, as reported in its Aug. 8, 1931 edition. Moghannam even took out a full-page ad pleading for donations for the paper.

38. Confidential letter, Oct. 31, 1929 from Sir John Chancellor to Lord Passfield, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Personal Papers of Sir John Roberts Chancellor, Rhodes House, Oxford. Permission of the author's son gratefully acknowledged.

39. Ibid.

40. A very interesting article appeared in Filastin on May 14, 1936, which describes how the British government attempted to prevent the women of Jaffa from meeting on the pretext that they did not have a permit. They subsequently called in the city's governor and the assistant director of police, both Arabs, to intervene and negotiate the conditions under which the women could meet, one of which was that "the committee commit itself to preventing the public from mixing with women upon their arrival and exit from the meeting." Here the British are imposing "tradition" upon Arab society by preventing the two sexes

from mixing; it could well have been that the government feared the eruption of a demonstration -- a frequent occurrence when the women hit the streets. Young men would often start to demonstrate in response and admiration.

41. Interview with Matiel Moghannam by Julie Peteet and Rosemary Sayigh, Washington, D.C., August 10, 1985. Transcript kindly provided by the interviewers.

42. Al-Sirat al-Mustaqim, Nov. 15, 1929.

43. *Ibid.*, Nov. 17, 1929.

44. I am translating these groups' name directly from Arabic; the Arab ladies society, in its 1980 publication, "The Arab Ladies Society", which consists of a history of the organization, translates its name as the Arab Women's Society. The Arabic, however, is sayyidat, not nisa'. As we shall see below, confusion is created from certain language use.

45. Moghannam interview, 1985.

46. For example, in a letter from the Arab Women's Committee to the High Commissioner, July 25, 1936, in which they deplore government actions taken during the strike, FO 371 20929. Many of their communications to the Government are signed the Arab Women's Committee.

47. For example, in an article entitled, "Among the Arab Ladies Committees", Al-Difa', May 27, 1934, and in Filastin in an article entitled, "The Call of the Arab Ladies Committee", July 10, 1932.

48. For example, in an article entitled, "The Arab Ladies Society and its Decisions", Filastin, Oct. 23, 1930. The British Government also varied in using different names; in notes of an interview with the High Commissioner and a delegation of women on October 30, 1933, they are referred to as the Arab Ladies Association. CO 733/239/5.

49. For example, this is the name the women use in a long, detailed memo to the Permanent Mandate Commission, Jan. 28, 1932, CO 733/221.

50. Moghannam, The Arab Woman, p. 81.

51. High Commissioner from 1931-1937.

52. Secret despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from the High Commissioner of Palestine, Dec. 23, 1933, CO 733 257/11.

53. See Wasserstein, British in Palestine, whose major thesis is the reluctance and distaste of British higher officials in Palestine to enforce the spirit of the Balfour Declaration and promote the Zionist project. They engaged in a

struggle with the Colonial Office in London over the issue. His evidence is not entirely convincing, however.

54. Notes of Interview granted by the High Commissioner to a deputation of Arab ladies on Monday, Oct. 30, 1933. CO 733 239/5 Part II.

55. Memorandum of the Executive Committee of the First Arab Women Congress of Palestine to the Permanent Mandates Commission and the High Commissioner, Jan. 28, 1932. CO 733 221.

56. "...military courts imposed the death penalty on men found with a rifle or bomb, houses were demolished if shots were fired from them...people were detained without trial (over five thousand were under detention by 1939)...over a hundred men were hanged", Ann Mosely Lesch, Arab Politics in Palestine, 1917-1939, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 225.

57. See the Arabic press during 1936-1939 for numerous reports of such acts.

58. Confidential letter to the Secretary of State from the High Commissioner, Oct. 23, 1933. CO 733 239/5 Part I.

59. Palestine Gazette, 16 November, 1933. Supplement: Report of the Commissioner. CO 733 346/8.

60. "Disturbances at Jaffa on Oct. 27th and Events Leading up to it and Following It" (anonymous report), CO 733 239/5 Part III.

61. *ibid.*, Aug. 2, 1938.

62. "Palestine: General Strike Finances", 14 July, 1936. CZA RG 25S 22768.

63. Interview with Musa Husseini (about his mother, Wajiha, wife of `Abd al-Qadir), Amman, Jan. 24, 1993.

64. Interview with Salma Husseini, Apr. 19, 1993.

65. See Filastin, Feb. 19-20, 1938, Apr. 13, 1938, Apr. 15, 1938, June 21, 1938.

66. "The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem, the Eastern Women's Conference Held at the House of the Egyptian Women's Union in Cairo, from 15 to 18 October, 1938", Cairo, 1938. Conference publication (Arabic), 170-172.

67. Palestinian Encyclopedia, (Arabic) Vol. 4, 1st printing, (Damascus: Association of the Palestinian Encyclopedia, 1984), 216.

68. Interviews with Salma Husseini, Apr. 19, 1993, Samah Nusseibeh, Nov. 23, 1993, and Sa'ida Jarallah, Apr. 19, 1994.

69. The Arab Executive was elected at the Third Arab Congress, held in 1920. It lasted until August, 1934, having experienced various vicissitudes of troubles

balance between all factions. See Lesch, Arab Politics, 95-110.

70. Ibid., 101.

71. Filastin, June 13, 1947.

72. Al-Sirat al-Mustaqim, Feb. 6, 1931.

73. Filastin, Jan. 13, 1940.

74. Al-Karmal, March 25, 1935.

75. Moghannam, The Arab Woman, 82.

76. Secret Report from the High Commissioner to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, July 16, 1936. CZA RG 25S 22768.

77. Filastin, Nov. 28, 1933.

78. ibid., Oct. 10, 1931 and Oct. 14, 1931.

79. Moghannam interview, 1985.

80. Filastin, Dec. 13, 1944.

81. Letter from the Chief Secretary to A.C.C. Parkinson, Apr. 14, 1932. CO 733 221.

82. Sayigh, "Palestinian Women: Triple Burden", 248.

83. Telegram from the Arab Women's Committee to the Colonial Secretary, 1936. FO 371 20023.

84. Interview with Musa Husseini, 1993.

85. Filastin (English), Oct. 26, 1929.

86. Islah Jad, "Dawr al-mar'a al-muqqadasiyya fil-difa` `an al-hawiyya al-`arabiyya li-madinat al-quds", paper presented at the Jerusalem Day conference in Amman, Oct. 10 - 13, 1992, p. 3.

87. Moghannam, The Arab Woman, 54.

88. Chandra Talpede Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle - Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism", in Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism, Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 38.