Palestinian Women's Perspectives on British Policies, People, and Values during the British Mandate, 1922-1948

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The perspectives of Palestinian Arab women during the British Mandate is a largely unexplored subject by historians, primarily due to a lack of primary sources. A handful of historians have focused their studies on Palestinian women during this time, using oral histories and the primary sources by Palestinian women, as well as British sources that provide information that cannot be found solely in Palestinian documents, enabling them to examine the experiences of Palestinian women. Utilizing the work of these historians in addition to the available primary sources, this paper will explore Palestinian women's perspectives on British policies, people, and values, relating the latter to views on Westernization and modernization as a whole. This analysis is in no way exhaustive, but it does add to a growing number of studies that address Palestinian Arab women and, most significantly, attempts to access the minds of Palestinian women and understand their perspectives. Sources by upper-class Palestinian women are more easily found, including memoirs, speeches, and letters, but finding material from middle- to lower-class Palestinian women is more challenging, largely due to low literacy rates. To access some of the experiences and perspectives of non-wealthy Palestinian women, two rich oral histories are primarily used, and play a significant role in the formation of my argument. While most Palestinian women generally disapproved of the overall policy decisions of the Mandatory Government, deeming them as pro-Zionist, opinions on British attempts to modernize Palestine, as well as British people and culture, were more varied. Women educated in missionary schools and urban middle- to upper-class women were more likely to equate the British with progress and adopt Western ideals of civilization, while rural and lower- to middle-class women expressed more ambivalence about Westernization and sometimes resisted Britain's modernization efforts.

In the aftermath of World War I, the Ottoman Empire collapsed, leaving these regions vulnerable to European imperialists. Great Britain and France were particularly interested in increasing their presence and control, and during the war British forces were able to occupy Palestine, Syria, and Iraq.[1] U.S. President Woodrow Wilson was opposed to the colonization of the former Ottoman Empire, and because of this the Mandate System was created.[2] Under this system, the League of Nations would allow Great Britain and France to temporarily take control of certain territories, with the understanding that they would "encourage the development of political, economic, and social institutions to the point that self-government would result and that the mandatory power would withdraw."[3] Although initially reluctant to accept these terms, Great Britain and France eventually agreed, and Great Britain was given mandatory control over Iraq and Palestine, while France was granted Syria and Lebanon.[4] The Mandate for Palestine was officially ratified by the League of Nations in 1922.[5]

Throughout the British Mandate, which lasted until 1948, the Mandate for Palestine was met with resistance from the Palestinian Arab population. The most notable point of grievance was its inclusion of the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which indicated Great Britain's commitment to "the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people."[6] The Arabs viewed the Mandate, as well as almost all of the British government's policies in regards to Palestine, as clearly favoring Zionist ambitions and protested this in a number of ways. Most

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[1] Smith, Charles D, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents, Ninth Edition* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins, 2017), 75.
[2] Smith, 76.
[3] Smith, 76-77.
[4] Smith, 78.
[5] Smith, 99.
[6] League of Nations Council, "The Mandate for Palestine," July 24, 1922, in *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents, Ninth Edition*, by Charles D. Smith (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2017), 100.

significant are the 1929 Arab riots and the 1936 to 1939 Arab Revolt, referred to by the British as "disturbances."[7] While men's participation in resistance to British rule and attempts to persuade the Mandatory Government to alter its pro-Zionist policies has been long studied by historians, the role played by women has been relatively ignored, the major exception being Middle East historian Ellen Fleischman's work on the Palestinian Women's Movement during the British Mandate.[8] The women's movement, which began in 1929, worked to advance Palestinian Arab nationalism, often alongside the male Palestinian national movement.[9] Therefore, despite being considered a women's movement, these women did not focus on gender inequality in Palestinian society.[10] As both Palestinian men and women experienced inequality and a lack of political rights, it was essential that they focused on gaining rights for all Palestinians.[11] And while the movement did have some connections to international women's organizations,[12] it found that these movements were not particularly relevant to their cause. Matiel Mogannam, one of the most influential women in the movement, commented in 1935 on the International Women's Union's support of "the rights of women everywhere" by stating, "What rights are these when Zionism and imperialism hold sway?"[13]

The women involved with the Palestinian women's movement tended to be urban, educated, and middle- to upper-class,[14] and they interacted with the British Mandatory Government in a variety of ways, including letters, memoranda, and resolutions. Some women

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[7] Young, Elise G, *Gender and Nation Building in the Middle East: The Political Economy of Health from Mandate Palestine to Refugee Camps in Jordan* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2012), 63.
[8] Fleischmann, Ellen, *The Nation and its "New" Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920-1948* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003).
[9] Fleischmann, 115.
[10] Fleischmann, 7.
[11] Fleischmann, 7.
[12] Fleischmann, 3.
[13] Fleischmann, 86.
[14] Fleischmann, 134.

were able to interact with British men face-to-face as a part of their attempts to advance the movement's nationalist agenda.[15] The ways in which Palestinian women involved with the movement interacted with British male authorities reveal both their strategies for success and their opinions on British policy.

In October 1929, the first Arab Women's Congress of Palestine was held in Jerusalem, producing a number of resolutions pertaining to Arab rights and nationalism. Mogannam remarked that through these resolutions the women hoped to "ensure that, through such endeavors as they may be able to exert in supporting National bodies, they will acquaint the Mandatory Power and other Powers of the injustice done to the Arab, and explain the basis of their National demands so that Palestine, the land of peace, may again enjoy peace and harmony."[16] Despite being an Arab woman who was born in Lebanon and raised in the United States, Mogannam, who moved to Palestine after marrying her Palestinian husband, was a staunch Palestinian nationalist. Her book, *The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem*, first published in 1937, sought to present the Arab perspective on what was happening in Palestine to a primarily British audience.[17] Throughout the book, Mogannam quotes resolutions and speeches made by the Palestinian Women's Movement, and further explains them in their context; both the original efforts of the women's movement and Mogannam's book were intended to influence British opinions and the policy decisions of the Mandatory Government.

The primary strategy employed by the women's movement was to harshly criticize British policy and the actions of the British government, while simultaneously expressing hope

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[15] Sakakini, Hala, *Jerusalem and I: A Personal Record*, 1987 (Reprint, Amman, Jordan: Economic Press Co., 1990), 28.
[16] Mogannam, Matiel, *The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem*, 1937 (Reprint, Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, Inc., 1976), 73.
[17] Mogannam, 11.

that the Mandatory Government would come to recognize their wrongs and change their policies to align with the desires of the Palestinian Arabs. During a march in Jerusalem in response to the arrival of Lord Allenby, the Commander of the British Armies in Palestine during World War I, Madame Ouni Abdul Hadi, a Muslim woman involved with the movement, gave a speech that was directed at Lord Allenby and the promises he had made in the past.[18] She stated, "It will be recalled that fifteen years ago this great soldier made his official entry into Jerusalem after its capture by his troops, to whom the Arabs rendered their ready assistance. The Arab women still recall the Proclamation which was made by Lord Allenby, and his appeal to the Arabs to join his forces against the Turks for their liberty and independence."[19] The speech went on to accuse the British of having "violated their pledges, divided their country and enforced a policy on the people . . . which will inevitably result in the annihilation of the Arabs,"[20] but ended by stating, "the Arab women of Palestine trust that Lord Allenby will not be forgetful of these facts during his stay in Palestine, the Holy Land, and will convey to the British nation the message which is given to him to-day."[21] Madame Hadi harshly denounced British decisions, but was also careful to not completely villainize the British, as the Palestinians were relatively powerless and relied on the Mandatory Government to make decisions that would advance their cause and improve the conditions of the Arabs in Palestine.

Members of the Palestinian Women's Movement also often interacted directly with British authorities, usually the High Commissioner, either in person or through letters. Hala Sakakini, an Arab woman raised during the British Mandate, stated that her Aunt Melia was very

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[18] Mogannam, 99.
[19] Mogannam, 99.
[20] Mogannam, 99.
[21] Mogannam, 100.

active in politics during the 1930s, and described a situation in which Aunt Melia and "many other Jerusalem women went up to the Government House to deliver a strong protest to the High Commissioner in person."[22] Hala reports that Aunt Melia told her that a number of women were prepared to speak, and Aunt Melia's part was to recite a well-known Arab poem.[23] The Arab Women's Association (AWA), an organization within the Palestinian Women's Movement, sent hundreds of letters to British government officials, as well as leaders of the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC) and sympathizers in the British press and public.[24] Even before the formal creation of the women's movement in 1929, Arab women began communicating with British authorities about their grievances. Twenty-nine Palestinian women sent a letter to the chief administrator in the region in March 1920 that argued against the promises made by the Balfour Declaration by stating, "We Moslem and Christian ladies who represent other ladies of Palestine protest vigorously against these declarations that cause the sub-division of our country."[25] Attempts to communicate directly with British authorities represent both the need to work with the British and the relative sense of hope activists must have felt about the success of these endeavors. The fact that the Arab Women's Association sent hundreds of letters indicates that they were extremely determined as well as hopeful that their efforts would be rewarded. The Mandatory Government was not seen as being inherently anti-Arab; rather, it had pro-Zionist tendencies that the Arabs needed to work to change.

While limited in their ability to participate in the women's movement, which was organized primarily in urban areas,[26] rural peasant women also expressed their disapproval of the

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[22] Sakakini, 28.
[23] Sakakini, 28.
[24] Fleischmann, 165-166.
[25] Fleischmann, 108.
[26] Fleischmann, 112.

Mandatory Government and its policies through participation in revolts and resistance to British raids.[27] It is difficult to study the perspectives of peasant women, as they were largely illiterate — a 1931 census reported that a mere three percent of Muslim women in Palestine were literate[28] — but their disapproval of the British government can be inferred through their anti-British actions. During the 1926 Arab Revolt, peasant women sometimes joined the men in their military tactics, and they were also frequently arrested for weapons possession and arms smuggling.[29] Due to a lack of primary documents from peasant women, it is unclear how much they actually knew about the details of British policy; therefore, it may be inaccurate to assume that their actions were a result of frustration with the policy decisions of the Mandatory Government. Additionally, the involvement of peasant women in the Arab Revolt often occurred as a reaction to attacks from the British on their communities.[30] Peasant women's opinions about the British government were shaped by confrontations and interactions with the British as a result of government action, rather than policy decisions, which is in stark contrast to the urban women's movement.

Frustration with the decisions of the Mandatory Government did not always affect how Palestinian women viewed British people, however, both within the government and outside of it. While it is difficult to ascertain how rural peasant women felt about British people, there is evidence of how middle- to upper-class Palestinian women, particularly women who had been educated in British missionary schools or who were a part of the women's movement, viewed British people. Although, perhaps also viewable as a strategy to win British favor, the Palestinian

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[27] Fleischmann, 125-126.
[28] Greenberg, Ela, *Preparing the Mothers of Tomorrow: Education and Islam in Mandate Palestine* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010), 68.
[29] Fleischmann, 126-127.
[30] Fleischmann, 125.

Women's Movement consistently stressed that they had no grievances with British people or even British government officials. In *The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem*, Matiel Mogannam wrote, "If the reader therefore has observed an expression of bitterness against the Administration, it is the policy of this Administration and not the British officers or people which give rise to such bitterness."[31] As Mogannam's audience is largely British, it is logical that she would be cautious to not offend the British people and distract from the main points her book is trying to make about the the needs of the Palestinian Arabs. This does not mean, however, that her sentiment is entirely false. Mogannam and other women involved with the movement frequently interacted with the wives of government officials at charity events and tea parties, indicating that at least to some degree there was an amicable relationship between women in the movement and British women.[32] Mogannam's positionality as a woman raised in the United States probably helped foster relationships with British women, as her own experiences were more similar to those of British woman than to lower class women in Palestine. Even upper-class Palestinian women who had been raised in the Middle East generally could identify more closely with British women than peasant women, which perhaps helped prevent feelings of ill will towards British citizens.[33]

Palestinian women who had attended British missionary schools also frequently interacted directly with British women. Prior to the British Mandate, Protestant and Catholic missionary schools began to open across Palestine, offering opportunities for both Christian and Muslim Arab girls to obtain an education.[34] Although there was some tension between Muslim

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[31] Mogannam, 248-249.
[32] Fleischmann, 173.
[33] Fleischmann, 173.
[34] Greenberg, 10.

families and the missionary schools, primarily in regards to Muslim parents not wanting their children to convert to Christianity, many Muslim girls did attend Christian missionary schools, largely due to a lack of other options.[35] In the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire began creating legislation that called for the establishment of girls' schools across the empire[36]; however, widespread poverty made this project difficult and often unsuccessful in areas where families could not afford to send their daughters to school.[37] For middle- to upper-class families, who were becoming increasingly interested in education for their daughters, missionary schools were able to fill the gap left by the Ottoman schools and later the British Government schools, both of which were ultimately insufficient.[38] Girls' education was most successful in urban areas, with approximately sixty percent of urban girls receiving at least some education during the British Mandate, in contrast to only 7.5 percent of village girls.[39] In urban areas, families were more likely to be able to choose between sending their daughters to missionary, British government, or Islamic schools.[40] The British purposely left education underdeveloped in rural areas, as they were concerned that "too much education in the villages would disrupt the social fabric and lead to migration and unemployment."[41] They worried that if those in rural areas became educated, they would want to move to the cities for better work, causing mass unemployment as urban populations soared. To justify the lack of educational development in rural areas, however, the British government argued that in Muslim villages there was a low

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[35] Greenberg, 72.
[36] Greenberg, 33.
[37] Greenberg, 42.
[38] Okkenhaug, Inger Marie, *The Quality of Heroic Living, of High Endeavor and Adventure: Anglican Mission, Women, and Education in Palestine, 1888-1948* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2002), 29.
[39] Greenberg, 70.
[40] Greenberg, 13.
[41] Greenberg, 57.

demand for education, leading the government to invest less in education in these areas.[42] As a result, women who attended school tended to be urban and middle- to upper-class, much like those involved in the women's movement. British schools were also appealing to upper-class families as they believed learning English would solidify their belonging to the elite.[43]

Women who attended British missionary schools generally regarded the missionary women as stern, but also worthy of respect, and this can be seen in their reflections on their school experiences many years later. Nigar Abu Hamad, who became secretary to Miss Emery, the headmistress of the English High School in Haifa, expresses respect for Miss Emery and indicates that the lessons Miss Emery taught her greatly influenced her own life and how she raised her children.[44] Hamad also noted the strictness of the staff, remarking that if a student saw one of the British teachers while they were out in public and were not dressed or behaving properly, that they would be reprimanded at school the next day.[45] Wadad Rizik, who attended the English High School for six years, praised the British teachers, calling them "devoted" and "well-trained," but criticized the school's curriculum for over-emphasizing memorization.[46] For at least some of the women who attended the missionary schools, the British school teachers were respected and regarded as overall positive influences.

All Palestinian women may not have been as forgiving of the British, however, particularly as the situation for Palestinian Arabs worsened, culminating in the end of the Mandate and the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. Hala Sakakini, who had been

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[42] Jad, Islah, "Rereading the British Mandate in Palestine: Gender and the Urban-Rural Divide in Education," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 3 (2007): 339.
[43] Greenberg, 75.
[44] Stockdale, Nancy L., Colonial Encounters Among English and Palestinian Women, 1800-1948 (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 175.
[45] Stockdale, 179.
[46] Stockdale, 176.

displaced from Palestine during the war, wrote in her diary in 1949, "We are filled with hatred towards the British as never before. They and they alone are the criminals that have caused this evil to come to the Arab Near East."[47] It is clear that while during the British Mandate Hala may have been angry with the British, the fact that the British facilitated Jewish immigration, leading to the creation of Israel and the displacement of thousands of Palestinian Arabs, heightened her resentment. Additionally, her hatred seems to extend to the British people as a whole, as she said "the British," and not "the British government" or "British policy." This is corroborated by a similar statement she made in a 1951 letter to her cousin who was planning on emigrating to the U.S. Hala indicated that she could never move to the U.S. because of the role it played in the founding of Israel. Hala wrote, "You may say it was the American government that played that role, but in our opinion the American people are just as much to blame. People on their level of civilization could not be excused for being led so blindly by propaganda."[48] Although she was speaking about the Americans, based on her earlier statements about the British, is it likely that she felt the same about British citizens. Her indication that Americans are more civilized and therefore capable of making the "right" decision is interesting, as it seems as though she is viewing the Americans as a superior people. Presumably this language is a result of British influence, however, as they equated the West with civilization and the East with backwardness.

Attempts by the British to impart their culture and values on Palestine, serving to both Westernize and "modernize" the nation, were met with a variety of reactions by Palestinian women. In general, women who had increased freedoms due to new educational or employment opportunities were more likely to adopt British values, particularly if they were educated in

[47] Sakakini, 129.
[48] Sakakini, 137.

missionary or government schools or if they were involved with the women's movement and interacted with the British frequently. As discussed previously, upper-class women often had more in common with British women than they did with peasant Arab women, making them more likely to equate the changes made by the British with progress and modernity. Matiel Mogannam, who was raised in a Western country, expresses conflicting messages in her book, as one of her main goals is to defend Arab women, inscribing their significant role in Islamic history, but she simultaneously denigrates lower class Palestinian Arabs and clearly equates "modern" British values with civilization and progress. In regards to polygamy, Mogannam stated, "The practice may be more common in rural areas, where the people are more ignorant or where a man is sometimes obliged to wed more than one wife to assist him in his domestic and field duties."[49] While she did acknowledge that socioeconomic factors may play a role in the need for more than one wife, she also explicitly stated that rural people are more ignorant than those who live in urban areas. She also denigrated the Ottomans, referring to their penal code as "archaic," just as the British would have viewed it, and praised the British for attempting to bring Palestine "into line with more civilized countries."[50] Her positionality as someone from the West, but also as an upper class Palestinian woman, made her more receptive to British values and caused her to adopt their way of ranking different peoples in terms of "progress" and "civilization."

Mogannam's national vision, however, prevented her from being in total favor of British rule. While she believed in making Palestine more civilized, based on Western standards, she felt that the Mandatory Government served to inhibit this progress. Mogannam argued that in

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[49] Mogannam, 39.
[50] Mogannam, 53-54.

countries under mandate rule, women's movements that argue for more gender equality and suffrage have less of an impact because "such measures of reform can only be introduced by National Governments, or by persons deriving their authority from the people."[51] While a national government was ideal, Mogannam and other nationalists would have been happy with a representative legislative body. She stated, "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."[52] Mogannam believed that British efforts to modernize the nation would have been more successful if they allowed the Arabs to vote for representatives who could help introduce reform in a way that would be accepted by the people. Presumably the elected officials would have been men of the upper class, making them more likely to subscribe to British values and be willing to help the British make reforms. Once the Palestinian Arabs had this political representation, then it would be possible for the Palestinian women's movement to successfully campaign for increased women's rights.

Women who attended British government and missionary schools were also more likely to adopt British values and accept British attempts to modernize Palestine. In regards to the curricula of missionary schools, missionary women felt that their "aim was not to challenge the traditional life of the Eastern woman, but to improve their domestic roles as mother and wife, thus apparently creating common ground with Arab reformers of the time."[53] Arab nationalists — which included the women's movement — the British, and a majority of Palestinian Arabs retained a more traditional vision of gender relations that kept women in the domestic sphere. While some upper-class women involved with the movement may have been able to move into

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[51] Mogannam, 53.
[52] Mogannam, 54.
[53] Okkenhaug, 58.

the public sphere, they were not advocating for gender roles to be reformed, and for a majority of Arab women, their primary roles were as a wife and mother. Therefore, part of this focus on domestic skills was practical, as most students would get married shortly after completing their education.[54] A curriculum that boasted the ability to turn daughters into better wives and mothers presumably also appealed to parents, making them more likely to enroll their daughters in missionary or government schools. The education of girls came to be seen as essential for bringing Palestine into the "modern world."[55] For the British, this meant bringing Palestine up to Western standards, which required a dissemination of knowledge about hygienic household practices.[56] For Palestinian nationalists, the future of Palestine also rested on the shoulders of well-educated mothers, because these women would raise modern sons who could lead Palestine towards national independence.[57] Yusuf Haikal, the inspector of Islamic schools, wrote that an educated woman "would train her son's mind, regulate his emotions, correct his disposition and educate him for a progressive life, and for the welfare and interests of his homeland."[58] Therefore, while they had different goals, both the British and Palestinian nationalists supported girls' education for the purpose of making Palestine more "modern" and bringing it up to the standards of other Western nations.

Women at British schools, however, particularly British missionary schools, did not fulfill the wishes of the Palestinian nationalists, as their extended contact with the British and separation from their families sometimes led them to feel as though they were not truly

[54] Okkenhaug, 135.
[55] Greenberg, 137.
[56] Greenberg, 143.
[57] Greenberg, 137.
[58] Greenberg, 137.

Palestinian and could not relate to their own people.[59] While this narrative comes in part from British missionary women, some Palestinian women did confirm that their Western education affected their life after leaving the school.[60] Wada Rizik stated, "You're not one of your own people. Although I don't begrudge anybody, I don't envy those people who are more Arab than I. But I'm different. Everyone who went to the English High School is different. We're not part of the community and we never will be."[61] Rizik describes the difficulty of not feeling fully Arab but also not being British, stating that it took her many years to accept herself.[62] The Westernization that Rizik experienced even extended to her personal tastes, including music preferences. She discussed how for a long time she did not "understand or enjoy Arabic music" because to her "it's not music, it's just noise."[63] Rizik's story indicates the lasting effects that the British missionaries had on their pupils, and how being educated and growing up surrounded by Western influence led to a preference for British society and customs, at least to some degree. Women educated at British schools had experiences that made them more likely to accept British culture and values, creating a disconnect between them and other Palestinian Arabs.

In contrast to middle- to upper-class women involved with the women's movement and women educated at British-run schools, most Palestinian women expressed more ambivalence about modernity and Westernization and attempted to resist some of these changes and continue to adhere to their traditional cultural practices. One area in which this can be seen is healthcare. The British undeniably made a significant impact on the health of Palestinian Arabs, primarily through their malaria eradication efforts, which Mogannam notes as one of the major successes

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[59] Stockdale, 167.
[60] Stockdale, 185.
[61] Stockdale, 185.
[62] Stockdale, 185-186.
[63] Stockdale, 186.

of the Mandatory Government[64]; however, their policies had an overwhelmingly negative impact on Palestinian midwives[65] and the introduction of Western science and medicine created tensions between traditional and modern health practices. The British government issued an ordinance in 1923 decreeing that without a license, women could not practice midwifery in Palestine.[66] In order to gain this license, midwives had to be retrained, and each year the number of midwives who received this training was very low.[67] By 1928, however, there were 292 licensed midwives in Palestine, in contrast to 655 doctors.[68] The British created two categories for midwives in Mandatory Palestine: licensed midwives and registered *dayat*.[69] While both had to receive training in order to practice midwifery, women who were illiterate were barred from being licensed midwives and were instead categorized as registered *dayat*.[70] Government regulations severely limited the medical issues that midwives could address, limiting them to working with mothers and children, while simultaneously increasing the prevalence and importance of male doctors, who were less restricted and could afford to charge their patients less.[71] As a result of government restrictions, many midwives became impoverished, their knowledge and experience was devalued, and they became increasingly unable to find work.[72] Palestinian midwives responded to these changes in a variety of ways as they attempted to continue their way of life.

Much like the Palestinian women's movement, licensed midwives recognized the need to work with British officials and brought their concern to British officials in the hopes of receiving

[64] Mogannam, 260.
[65] Young, 85.
[66] Young, 85.
[67] Young, 81.
[68] Young, 81.
[69] Young, 86.
[70] Young, 86.
[71] Young, 86.
[72] Young, 85.

support. In 1937, eleven Palestinian midwives signed a petition that was sent the Senior Medical Officer of the Department of Health.[73] They wrote, "We the undersigned, licensed midwives practicing in Jerusalem, wish to draw your attention to the fact that we are faced with poverty, even destitution, due to the number of women going to the hospitals for birth of their children. Can you help us in some way?"[74] They went on to explain that they "attend many women during the antenatal period who eventually deliver in the hospital paying us nothing," and asked that they be given permission to help women deliver in the hospital and charge their normal fee, as a solution to their poverty.[75] The women who wrote and signed this petition recognized the need to work within the system in order to change their situation, and made sure to clearly articulate their problem and suggest a potential solution. It is unclear whether or not they were aware of the extent that the British devalued their skills and sought to replace them with doctors who would carry out Western medical practices. If not, they were likely more optimistic about the British responding positively to their proposition; if so, this letter may have been a more desperate attempt that they knew had a very small chance of receiving a response.

Other women similarly expressed frustration with the impact British regulations had on their ability to make a living, in some cases expressing willingness to work illegally in order to survive. Khadijah, a divorced midwife who lived in Jerusalem but received a license that was only valid in a village outside of the city, initially rejected this license before realizing how dire her situation was without it.[76] She then wrote to the law courts petitions writer, stating, "as I am a lady in loneliness, protectless and hostless, I became sorry for rejecting the Midwife License I

[73] Young, 77.
[74] Young, 77.
[75] Young, 77-78.
[76] Young, 90.

applied for, I have to maintain myself and depend on my profession's work wages."[77] She went on to declare, "I shall wait, maximum, one week from today, otherwise I shall be obliged to practice my profession as a Midwife even without a license . . . . My livelihood obliges me to practice working as a Midwife."[78] Khadijah's request was denied, and presumably she either moved and reapplied from a different location or, as she had already threatened, practiced midwifery illegally.[79] Khadijah's story very clearly represents the difficulties midwives had working within the government's new regulations; in particular, problems such as receiving a license to work in a village far from one's home. Although the decision about Khadijah's placement was likely made due to a need for a midwife in that area, it reflects a failure to take into consideration the ability of the midwife to travel that distance. While Khadijah clearly recognized the need to work with government officials in order to resolve the problems that arose after she rejected the license, she also expressed willingness to defy British law in order to survive, showing both her frustration with and lack of respect for British regulations and their impact on her life. As a whole, her story demonstrates the failure of the Mandatory Government to create a system that adequately met the needs of Palestine's midwives, forcing some to work outside of the legal health care system. Where they could, midwives resisted Britain's policies that helped Westernize Palestinian healthcare and, in some extreme cases, made the decision to ignore them altogether.

In the area of healthcare, non-midwives also experienced changes, as their options for how to receive medical services broadened. Despite the opening of hospitals and the prevalence of Western healthcare professionals, some families continued to use traditional healing practices.

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[77] Young, 90.
[78] Young, 90.
[79] Young, 90.

In order to access the experiences and perspectives of non-elite Palestinian women, two in-depth oral histories, collected by historians Michael Gorkin and Rafiqa Othman in 1994 and 1995, will be used.[80] The stories of Umm Mahmud and Umm Khaled, two women who were raised in Jerusalem in the early 1920s, illustrate traditional practices that were still used during the British Mandate and the ways in which Palestinian families navigated the options available to them.[81] Although their stories have many differences, both Umm Mahmud and Umm Khaled had fathers who were policemen in Jerusalem, placing them in Palestine's middle class,[82] both were uneducated,[83] and both were married at the age of fourteen.[84] Umm Mahmud continued to live in East Jerusalem after marriage,[85] while Umm Khaled moved out of the city and into Abu Ghosh, the small village where her parents had been raised and her new husband lived.[86] The differences that can be seen in the ways that these women, who had relatively similar backgrounds, made decisions in regards to traditional and modern medical practices, help to illustrate the ambivalence of lower- to middle-class Palestinian women in regards to British modernizations efforts. Unlike with elite women, who were much more conscious of their role in society and their opinions on the Mandatory Government and modernization, the perspectives of Umm Mahmud and Umm Khaled have to be carefully interpreted from the narratives provided. While

[80] Gorkin, Michael, and Rafiqa Othman. *Three Mothers, Three Daughters: Palestinian Women's Stories*, (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 8.
[81] Gorkin, Michael, and Rafiqa Othman, "Umm Mahmud," in *Three Mothers, Three Daughters: Palestinian Women's Stories*, (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 16; Gorkin, Michael, and Rafiqa Othman, "Umm Khaled," in *Three Mothers, Three Daughters: Palestinian Women's Stories*, (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 163.
[82] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 17; Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 163.
[83] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 19; Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 163.
[84] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 22; Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 171.
[85] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 15.
[86] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 168.

they do explicitly state their perspective at times, some of the perspectives that I describe and discuss in this section are based on my own analysis of their oral histories.

Umm Mahmud's story details the use of traditional healing medicine. When Umm Mahmud was thirteen-years-old she developed a strange illness, which resulted in a fever and the apparent inability to coherently respond to others.[87] Her parents first took her to a doctor, but his advice did not help and shortly afterward her mother was persuaded by a neighbor to seek an herbal cure.[88] They went to an older woman in the area who gave them a "mixture of herbs and 'sabbath eggs.'"[89] After drinking this herbal cure, Umm Mahmud's illness went away and as a result Umm Mahmud continued to believe in traditional healing practices, stating that "some of their prescriptions do work like magic."[90] Umm Mahmud stated that she gave this same cure to her own son after he went into shock as a result of the death of an uncle. Rather than take him to a Western doctor or healthcare facility, she cooked up the same herbs and found that it also cured her son.[91] While the British government pushed for modern medical practices, experiences that Palestinian women had with traditional herbal remedies caused some to reject new Western ideas and cling to what they already knew would work. Most families did not entirely reject Western doctors — Umm Mahmud's parents did take her to see one first — but instead had the ability to choose between the traditional and modern and often made different decisions about different health concerns. Despite finding the doctor unhelpful and turning to herbal medicine to cure

[87] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 20.
[88] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 21.
[89] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 21.
[90] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 21.
[91] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 21.

Umm Mahmud's illness, they later insisted that she give birth to her first child in a hospital, evidently believing doctors to be reliable for childbirths.[92]

In contrast, Umm Khaled had a negative experience with traditional medicine that prevented her from having the same adherence to non-Western practices. She developed asthma at the age of seven or eight, and with the hope of curing it, her parents "once took me to this woman in Jerusalem who treated me by burning my throat on the outside with a hot fork."[93] This cure did not work for her, and neither did herbal remedies or medicines, the latter of which likely came from a doctor.[94] As with Umm Mahmud, Umm Khaled's parents turned to a variety of different health practices, both traditional and modern, in an attempt to help their daughter. They did not reject Western medicine in favor of tradition, but neither did they clearly prefer modern methods. As both options were available to them and they were having little success, they tried both, hopeful that something would work. In spite of the fact that both the traditional healers and doctors were unsuccessful in treating the asthma, Umm Khaled seemed to develop a preference for modern medicine and medical practitioners, choosing to go to a hospital for the birth of most of her children.[95]

In addition to utilizing traditional healing methods, families made decisions about whether it was better to give birth in a hospital or at home with a midwife, illustrating how the availability of both Western and traditional practices sometimes created disagreements between families and how changing values about childbirth caused tensions between tradition and modernity. Umm Khaled had her first childbirth at a British hospital and continued to go to the

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[92] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 28.
[93] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 172.
[94] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 172.
[95] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 171.

hospital when she could,[96] in total giving birth to sixteen children over the course of her life.[97] She does not discuss having considered other options for childbirth, leaving it unclear whether giving birth at home was even an alternative she and her husband's family thought about. There is also no mention of seeing a midwife during her pregnancies; however, she does mention seeing a doctor and that "in the beginning" he told her she shouldn't have too many children because of her asthma, indicating that she utilized Western medical professionals and services during her pregnancies and for childbirths.[98] In response to the doctor's recommendation that Umm Khaled have a small number of children and that she should "wait four years between pregnancies," her mother-in-law scoffed at the doctor and threatened to have her son take another wife if Umm Khaled could not have enough children.[99] Having a large family with many sons was very important to many Palestinians, particularly those who lived in rural villages. While Umm Khaled's mother-in-law may have felt that a doctor was the better option for ensuring her health during pregnancy and childbirth, she rejected a suggestion made by the doctor that threatened traditional values, using traditional religious beliefs that allegedly allowed men to take four wives to ensure Umm Khaled continued to have her son's children.[100] This example of the tension between new Western practices and traditional beliefs and ways of life shows how the adoption of British values was not always whole or consistent. Palestinian women could accept certain aspects of Westernization, including health practices that showed a preference for hospital births and seeing a male doctor, while simultaneously using traditional values to reject the recommendations of that doctor.

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[96] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 171.
[97] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 159.
[98] Gorkin and Othman, Umm Khaled," 172.
[99] Gorkin and Othman, Umm Khaled," 172.
[100] Gorkin and Othman, Umm Khaled," 172.

Umm Mahmud's story reflects some tension between her parents and her husband's parents about whether it was better to give birth at home or in a hospital, as well as tension between traditional practices and Western health concerns. For her first pregnancy, Umm Mahmud's parents insisted that she have the child at the hospital.[101] Umm Mahmud indicated that she herself did not have a real preference, as a result of being fifteen and having known of women who gave birth at home and women who gave birth at the hospital.[102] Her first child, however, was stillborn and her mother-in-law used this to insist that all other child births occurred at home.[103] Umm Mahmud's next child, therefore, was born in the house with the help of her mother-in-law and a midwife.[104] Having experienced childbirth in the hospital and at home, Umm Mahmud noted that she preferred having the midwife, as it was "more comfortable that way."[105] Despite not having any "book learning," the older midwife that Umm Mahmud had attend the birth "knew what she was doing"[106] and taught Umm Mahmud valuable skills for how to both give birth and take care of her child once he was born.[107] In this story, Umm Mahmud indicated both that she did not believe Western education was necessary for childbirth or childcare practices, and that despite a general devaluation of midwives among Palestinian society at the time, some still recognized the skills that midwives possessed and preferred them to Western medical practitioners. Notably, Umm Mahmud stated that she had her final few children at the hospital, but does not provide an exact explanation as to why she made this change.[108] As

[101] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 28.
[102] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 28.
[103] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 28.
[104] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 28.
[105] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 28.
[106] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 28.
[107] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 29.
[108] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 29.

the midwife she had been going to was described as being older,[109] it is possible she passed away and Umm Mahmud either did not want to or was unable to find a new midwife or found that giving birth at the hospital would be more convenient. As her last few children were born after 1948 and Umm Mahmud had remained in East Jerusalem,[110] it is possible that hospitals in the city became more prevalent. Either way, Umm Mahmud's discussion of her experiences illuminates disagreements between families about childbirth practices and why midwives continued to maintain some prestige during this period.

Tension between traditional practices, including early marriage, and Western health concerns is also evident in Umm Mahmud's story. After giving birth to her stillborn son in the hospital, Umm Mahmud remembered the doctors saying to her father, "How did you marry her off so young? Was it so important for you to see her in a wedding dress?"[111] This indicates that the doctors believed Umm Mahmud's young age was responsible for the stillbirth of her child and that they felt that if she had not been required to marry and begin having children so young that this would not have occurred. Umm Mahmud stated that her father cried after doctor said this to him, indicating that he did not reject the doctor's judgment, valuing the doctor's Western medical knowledge, and also blamed himself for the stillbirth of Umm Mahmud's first child. The Mandatory Government was against child marriage, due to the aforementioned health concerns as well as more modern concerns about child welfare, and both Umm Mahmud and Umm Khaled represent women whose families rejected these new Western values and chose to adhere to traditional marriage norms and practices. Their oral histories are useful for illustrating some of the ambivalence toward modern policies and practices, as well as resistance to these changes.

[109] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 28.
[110] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 30.
[111] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 28.

Child marriage was officially criminalized in 1936 through the Criminal Code Ordinance of that year.[112] Both men and women were required to be eighteen at the time of marriage, although marriage could occur at the age of fifteen with parental consent and a doctor's assessment of the sexual maturity of those who were to be married.[113] The code stipulated six months in prison if parents were found guilty of violating this law.[114] Palestinian families, however, found ways around this law, rejecting modern ideas about marriage. While getting the marriage agreement for Umm Mahmud signed, the sheikh asked her father how old she was and he answered honestly, stating that she was fourteen.[115] This also prevented the marriage from occurring as the sheikh then refused to write the marriage agreement because she was not the "legal age," but her father's relatives all insisted that Umm Mahmud was actually nineteen and her father had been mistaken, convincing the sheikh to write the agreement despite his initial hesitations.[116] In this example, Umm Mahmud's family simply lied about her age in order for the marriage to occur. British attempts at enforcing Western marriage practices were hindered by a lack of identification documents that could confirm a person's age, as well as the ability of Muslim religious officials to perform marriages, taking control away from British authorities. It is likely that the families of many other women simply lied about their daughter's age in order for them to get married before the age of fifteen, continuing a traditional practice that was essential to relations between families.

Umm Mahmud and Umm Khaled's stories also illustrate perspectives about girls' education among the lower- to middle-classes, which, as with healthcare and marriage, were not

[112] Fleischmann, 152.
[113] Fleischmann, 152.
[114] Fleischmann, 152.
[115] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 23.
[116] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 23.

uniform or without ambivalence. Although education for girls was not a new initiative brought about by the British,, the British did have a significant impact on the education system in Palestine. Even the spread of Islamic girls' schools can be viewed, in part, as a response to the prevalence of government and missionary schools, as these nationalist schools were created to provide families with the option for education that was not controlled by the West.[117] Regardless of the origins of girls education in the region, however, the experiences of Umm Mahmud and Umm Khaled reflect varying perspectives among the lower- to middle-classes on education for girls, which was promoted and expanded by the Mandatory Government. The decision to not send girls to school can be seen as a form of resistance against the cultural norms the British wanted the Palestinians to accept, while the reactions of girls who were prevented from receiving an education show how the perspectives and desires of some girls aligned with those of the British Government.

Both Umm Mahmud and Umm Khaled were uneducated and express varying degrees of envy towards siblings and other children who were able to receive an education.[118] Umm Mahmud stated, "Some girls from our neighborhood were going [to an Islamic school] when I was a child. I'd seen them go off with their school bags. I was so envious. I wanted to go too."[119] She persuaded her mother to ask her father whether she could attend, but he was unwilling to send her, afraid that it would make her "strong-willed," indicating an adherence to traditional gender roles and the belief that education for girls was a challenge to these norms.[120] Umm Mahmud reflects, however, that her mother "did press him to send my sisters and they got to go,"

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[117] Greenberg, 107.
[118] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 18; Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 163.
[119] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 18.
[120] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 18.

showing that as education for girls slowly became more widespread, Umm Mahmud's father came to accept it.[121] Similarly, Umm Khaled expressed some disappointment about her lack of education, noting the disparity between her and her brothers. Umm Khaled attended school for a year before her father took her out and "bought [her] a sewing machine."[122] For her brothers, however, her father "spared no expense to educate them," ensuring they received high-quality schooling.[123] While her story implies some envy, she also stated, "How did I feel about [being taken out of school]? Well, it wasn't my fate to learn," indicating more acceptance than Umm Mahmud about being uneducated.[124] Furthermore, she suggests that it worked out better for her that she did not go to school, explaining, "I didn't know any other girls at school, so it was good to be home with my younger sisters and brothers."[125]

Through an examination of Umm Mahmud and Umm Khaled's experiences with healthcare, marriage, and education, the ways in which some Palestinian women attempted to resist British efforts to alter traditional practices become clear. An ambivalence about Westernization and modernity is ever present, with both women and their families accepting some modern values and ideas, while also continuing traditional practices and norms. As with the peasant women who participated in riots against the British due to direct experiences, the views Palestinian women like Umm Mahmud and Umm Khaled had on the merits of traditional and modern practices were shaped by personal experiences. Upper class women like Matiel Mogannam were educated and therefore possessed a more holistic view of how Western practices could improve the livelihoods of Palestinians, having knowledge of how these practices

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[121] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Mahmud," 19.
[122] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 163.
[123] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 163.
[124] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 163.
[125] Gorkin and Othman, "Umm Khaled," 163.

worked in Western nations. Lower class women, or even middle class women who were uneducated, did not have this knowledge and therefore formed opinions about British policies and values through their own experiences and the experiences of family members and neighbors.

Palestinian women's perspectives on British policies, people, and values varied greatly, often differing based on class. Most women generally disapproved of the Mandatory Government's pro-Zionist policies, to the extent that they understood them, but opinions on British people and the government's attempts at modernization and Westernization were less uniform. Urban and middle- to upper-class women and women educated in missionary schools had a greater likelihood of adopting Western ideas of progress and civilization, while rural and lower- to middle-class women expressed ambivalence about Westernization and modernity through their resistance of British policies that were aimed at altering traditional practices. As with any group, perspectives are not universal or unchanging. Palestinian women's perspectives, shaped by their understanding of the British colonial administration and their experiences under it, varied greatly, and the sources available to historians studying these women cannot provide a holistic understanding of all Palestinian women from all different backgrounds and locations. The differences and similarities that have been noted and analyzed, however, can begin to paint a picture of the ways in which Palestinian women viewed the British and the changes they brought to Palestine, adding to the body of historical work that seeks to analyze and understand this group of women.

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