

HARBOURING PROMISE AND RESENTMENT: THE BRITISH PRESENCE IN THE PORTS OF MANDATE PALESTINE¹

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The single most significant economic investment of the British government in Palestine between the late 1910s and the late 1940s was the building of the modern deep-water port of Haifa. Together with government sponsored railway development, and the construction of the oil terminal in Haifa, the port project significantly altered the patterns of Ottoman state investment and economic intervention prevalent prior to the First World War.² The ceremony inaugurating the commencement of operations at the port in autumn 1933 was fittingly lavish. The city was dressed in white as if to match the immaculate uniforms sported by Royal Navy officers and other British representatives. The streets leading to the bay of Haifa were filled with an assortment of Arabs and Jews, old-time residents and newcomers, people of rank and capital and groups of industrial labourers, port workers and ordinary folk.³ For a moment Palestine's transformation during British rule — usually gauged from a longer historical perspective — was intensely felt by individuals and communities alike, by residents and foreigners, by local elites and interested countries outside. It was perhaps at this juncture that the Ottoman model of a relatively low key state presence in the ports of Palestine, in its foreign trade, and in the milieu of local merchants, gave way to a more interventionist model. The decline of the port of Acre, which had been underway since the latter half of the nineteenth century, and had been greatly aided by the pro-Haifa British from the early 1920s, was complete and reflected this new phase well.⁴

¹ I am grateful to Yaron Avidan for assisting in researching the topic. Hebrew sources are marked (H).

² Ian W. Gaskin, "Palestine 1939-1945: A Study of Economic Colonial Policy" (Unpublished D. Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1992), 19-22.

³ *Opening of Haifa Harbour, 31st October 1933* (Jerusalem, 1933).

⁴ Barbara J. Smith, *The Roots of Separatism in Palestine, British Economic Policy, 1920-1929* (Syracuse, 1993), chapters 2 and 7; Jacob Metzger, *The Divided Economy of Mandatory Palestine* (Cambridge, 1998), ch. 5.

Novel as it was, the British presence in the ports of Palestine cannot however be understood only in terms of the change in the volume of foreign trade and the extent of port-related military activity. As Ottoman historiography now acknowledges, the advance of Palestine's port economies during the nineteenth century had been quite intense. Furthermore, prior to the First World War and the demise of Ottoman rule, the pressures from armies and owners of capital and merchants in the existing harbours were comparatively less evident than after the war and the onset of the Mandate.⁵ Much more important in understanding the British presence in the ports during the Mandate is a more dynamic factor, namely, the conflict between the promise held out by British policies and the consequences of their actual and contested application.

The two different pictures that the ports in Palestine provided, on the eve of the British conquest in 1917 and on their departure in the spring of 1948, expose the inseparability of the military facet of colonial rule, regional strategic considerations, and government intervention in society. Partly designed and partly the consequence of unfolding events and local factors this inseparability marked colonial port policy in Palestine as ambivalent, dualistic, often perplexed, but, nevertheless, extremely effective. In this sense, and as the literature survey set out below demonstrates, the ports should be considered as part of a larger contextual tension which the British presence in Palestine's landscape, infrastructure and civil society aroused. On the one hand, there was the wish of the colonial power to realize imperial-strategic interests by promising development, social responsibility and care for the civilian population, in an effort to quell potential unrest and create a favourable political climate for British rule. On the other hand, these same features provoked resentment that in the final analysis contributed to anti-colonial sentiment in Palestine. As sites of development, employment and control — three areas that are briefly discussed below — the ports seem to be a prime example of this tension and ambivalence in the colonial presence, and thus an appropriate prism through which we can view the material underpinning of the history of Palestine and its conflict.⁶

⁵Iris Agmon, *Family and Court: Legal Culture and Modernity in Late Ottoman Palestine* (Syracuse, 2006), 14–21; for background see Mahmud Yazbak, *Haifa in the Late Ottoman Period, 1864–1914: A Muslim Town in Transition* (Leiden, 1998).

⁶Compare with the useful "Gatekeeper State" concept introduced by Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge, 2002), and the discussion of labour policy in David De Vries, "British Rule and Arab-Jewish Coalescence of Interest: The 1946 Civil Servants' Strike in Palestine", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 36 (2004), 613–638.

Development and Hierarchy

Any discussion of this tension must take into consideration the characteristic colonial language of development. Palestine was, to a large extent, a part of a wider imperial and Middle Eastern system where the British pursued their imperial and strategic goals, in part through their activities in the ports. This language was often couched in developmental terminology, with the policy towards the ports of Palestine thoroughly examined in the context of both other coastal locations and Middle Eastern ports and the modernization of the region. This is best exemplified by the prominent role allocated to ports in the region in the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreements and in the importance of ports in the demarcation of the boundaries between Arabs and Jews in the 1937 report of the Peel commission on the partition of Palestine. It is reflected even more clearly in the coordination evident in British military use of the ports in the north and south of the country during World War II and other regional ports.⁷

Shaped years before the British occupied Palestine, this systemic perspective had benefited from earlier developments. Evidently expanding port cities and the rise of import/export merchants were among the most visible indices of capitalist transformation of the region in the period preceding the British Mandate. However, the Ottoman presence in the ports of Palestine, in particular during the great economic changes in the latter part of the nineteenth century, was partly reflected in the slow, almost unchanging balance in the hierarchy and importance of the ports.⁸ Before the advent of the British Mandate, the port of Jaffa had been the focal point of citrus exports from Palestine and immigration into the country. In the early twentieth century, Haifa surpassed Acre as the main northern port and this had a considerable impact on the town's

⁷Arnon Sofer, "The Location of Industries in the Haifa Bay Area: A Geographic Perspective" (*Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation*, Hebrew University Jerusalem, 1971, H); Shimon Stern, "The Development of the Urban Pattern of Haifa in the years 1918–1947" (*Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation*, Hebrew University Jerusalem 1974, H); Gilbert Herbert, "Crossroads: Imperial Priorities and Regional Perspectives in the Planning of Haifa, 1918–1939", *Planning Perspectives*, 4, 3 (1989), 313–331. The 1936 Royal Commission on the future of Palestine headed by Lord Peel called for the termination of the Mandate and its replacement by a Treaty System. The treaty envisioned a partition of Palestine, with Jerusalem and Bethlehem reaching to the port at Jaffa retained under a separate Mandate, while the rest of the Palestinian part was to be united to Transjordan.

⁸Gideon Biger, "The Urban Hierarchy in Palestine during the Mandate", *Studies in the Geography of Israel*, 12 (1986, H), 87–98.

demography and industry.⁹ Most of these changes were, however, the result of investments by international and private commercial capital, and by companies that could exploit imperial interest in the region. Although the Ottoman rulers contributed indirectly to Acre's decline via the development of jetties, piers, storage facilities, and commercial ties in Jaffa and Haifa, they were not responsible for what would later be a clearly British legacy, namely a state-inspired restructuring of Palestine's port system.¹⁰

Britain's commercial interest in Palestine's small ports stemmed from the contribution of the ports of Acre and Jaffa, and of Haifa in particular, to the region's economic growth.¹¹ In the late nineteenth century Haifa grew in importance as a seaport, assuming a key role in ocean-going shipping and commerce. In the last third of the century its population increased and gradually became more cosmopolitan. Many came to view Haifa as the "city of the future" and the economic capital of the northern part of Palestine. More significantly, since 1906, the British War Office had come to view Haifa as the gateway to Syria as well as the best landing port to protect Egypt from a Turkish threat.¹²

During the First World War, the bay of Haifa became even more attractive for the British because of its military value as a launching pad for an amphibian attack against the German-Turkish axis, and, with an eye on the future, its potential as an *entrepot* for goods and passengers in peacetime. Geographic advantages and accessibility to the Hejaz

railway enabled the British to cut the Turkish and German supply lines and also allowed for a land link between the eastern basin of the Mediterranean, with its an outlet in Haifa, and the Iraqi and Indian economic hinterland. This was the logic behind the British posture in the Sykes-Picot agreements of May 1916, which included in the British sphere, southern Iraq, eastern Trans-Jordan and the bay of Haifa in Palestine, together with sole British control over the Haifa-Daraa railway line. In addition it served to counter the Italian maritime presence in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean. Despite the fact that Jaffa was Palestine's principal port in the first decade of the Mandate, and for long a major Arab commercial centre in the region, it lacked a deep water basin and, as a consequence, ships had to be unloaded from the open roadstead by lighters. It was a slow and costly system, particularly in the winter when it resulted in long delays. Thus, in finally deciding to develop a modern deep water port in Haifa the British had in mind Haifa's position both in local terms and vis-à-vis the vast hinterland of the Middle East.¹³

The building of the port was carefully prepared and it was clear from the start that Britain was even willing to invest its own money in it. After a long period of planning the British Parliament enacted the 1926 Palestine and East Africa Loan Act to finance the project. In 1928 a Harbour Board was established by the government in order to ensure implementation of its policies and a year later a newly created Haifa Harbour Works Department was entrusted with the direct supervision of the project. The building of the port between the spring of 1929 and October 1933 was carried out by a British contracting firm and cost the government one and a half million pounds sterling, an unprecedented sum by Palestine standards.¹⁴

The impact of the new port was immense and projected a dynamic and positive image of the British presence in Palestine. A transformed Haifa proceeded to overtake Jaffa as the main port of entry for immigrants and began to attract new industries that would eventually also turn it

⁹Daniel Panzac, "Commerce et Commentaires des Ports du Liban Sud et De Palestine (1756-1787)", *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* (1990), 55-56; Thomas Philipp, "The Trade of Acre in the 18th Century: French Merchants and Local Rulers in the World Economy", Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, Eds., *Trading Cultures: The World of Western Merchants* (Turnhout, 2001), 87-110.

¹⁰Amnon Cohen, "Ottoman Rule and the Re-emergence of the Coast of Palestine", *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 39 (1985), 163-175; Alex Carmel, *The History of Haifa under the Turks* (Jerusalem, 1969, H. German edition 1975); Alexander Schöblich, "The Economic Development of Palestine, 1856-1882", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, X, No. 3 (1981), 35-38.

¹¹Shmuel Avitzur, *The Port of Jaffa - Its Growth and Decline* (Tel Aviv, 1972, H); Iris Agmon, "The Development of Palestine's Foreign Trade, 1870-1914: Economic and Social Aspects", (*Unpublished MA Dissertation*, University of Haifa, 1984, H), 105-109; Ruth Kark, "The Change in the Position of the Coastal Town in the 19th Century", in Benjamin Z. Kedari, et. al., Eds., *Commerce in Palestine Throughout the Ages* (Jerusalem, 1990, H), 324-337; Ruth Kark, *Jaffa - A City in Evolution, 1799-1917* (Jerusalem, 1990), 204-211.

¹²Nafthal Wyzdra, "The Start of the Port of Haifa", *Sapnau*, 15, 1-2 (Winter 1987/Spring 1988), 73-74; Yossi Ben-Artzi, "Unrealized Development Plans for Haifa at the End of the 19th Century", *Cathadra*, 73 (1994, H), 62-82; May Seikaly, *Haifa: Transformation of Arab Society, 1918-1939* (London, 1995), 72-73.

¹³Robert R. Nathan, Oscar Cass, Daniel Creamer, *Palestine: Problem and Promise: An Economic Study* (Washington, 1946), 259-262; Jonathan Fine, "British Policy toward the Development of Haifa Harbour, 1906-1924: Strategic Considerations", *Cathadra*, 98 (1998, H), 127-154.

¹⁴Morton B. Stratton, "British Railways and Motor Roads in the Middle East, 1930-1940", *Economic Geography*, XX, 3, (1944), 189-203; Nachum Gross, *The Economic Policy of the Mandatory Government in Palestine* (Discussion Paper 81.06, Falk Institute for Economic Research, Jerusalem, 1981), 21-23; Fine, *British*, 127-154.

into an industrial port city. The port was equipped with high quality installations and a commercial centre was built on reclaimed land. The architecture of the inner core of Haifa changed and its labour market drew thousands of workers not only from all of Palestine but also from neighbouring countries. The variety of nationalities represented amongst the port workers in the 1930s and amongst the troops stationed there in the 1940s made the town more cosmopolitan. The structures of the local Arab and Jewish elites were altered too, as dozens of merchants, officials, clerks and port-associated professionals were drawn into the port economy and associated activities. During the Second World War, the port of Haifa proved invaluable as a major naval base in the eastern Mediterranean and as a leading centre of maritime trade for the entire Middle East. Individual entrepreneurs and foreign and British companies reaped considerable rewards as a result of British military and civilian expenditure.¹⁵

The port of Haifa transformed Palestine's maritime economy. The port could accommodate vessels of up to 30,000 D.W.T. alongside, obviating lightering except in busy periods. Storage facilities in Haifa were now twice as large as those at the under-developed port of Jaffa. When the terminus of the Kirkuk-Haifa oil pipe-line was completed in 1934 the port's importance increased even further. The British had insisted that the pipe-line exit at the port of Haifa so as not to be dependent for oil on Syrian ports. The building of the port and the presence of engineers in Haifa were of considerable assistance to the project of the pipe-line and the Haifa-Baghdad Railway. The terminal for the proposed railway was built right on the quays of the new port and provision was made in the port to permit the British navy and merchant marine to refuel from the future pipe-line. By 1937 the port of Haifa was handling 76% of all cargo entering or leaving Palestine. When the consolidated refinery was completed in 1939 the regional significance of the port became even clearer. In enhancing the town's economic and administrative unity the port had created a distinct regional focus for the entire country and integrated Palestine even further into the British imperial system. Just as dramatically, the opening of the modern port of Haifa also re-arranged

the hierarchical structure of Palestine's ports. In comparison, Acre's small harbour and the port of Jaffa now seemed like throwbacks to the world of the nineteenth century. In this reshuffling of the hierarchy of ports the British upset many in Palestine, provoking unrest amongst local merchants, workers, and the urban trading and industrial elites who now felt their port about to be neglected and who were unconvinced that Haifa would serve their local interests well.¹⁶

This anti-colonial atmosphere was perhaps one of the reasons why the port of Jaffa became the initial focus of the Arab revolt in 1936. The general strike declared in the spring by Palestine's Arab leadership was intended to protest against Jewish immigration and against the British toleration of it and of Zionist land purchases. The fact that the port of Jaffa was the locus of the strike demonstrated the degree of politicization that had resulted from Jewish settlement in the ports and along the coast of Palestine. Anti-British resentment expressed during the strike depicted the neglect of Jaffa and its port as mirroring the British order of preferences among the ports and what the Arabs perceived as British support for the Zionist efforts to achieve a demographic majority in Palestine.¹⁷

Moreover, it was the strike at the port of Jaffa that led to the British decision to authorize operations at the port of Tel Aviv. Plans to build a port in Tel Aviv had begun after the British conquest of Palestine. The plans had been drawn up by Zionist circles and the municipality of Tel Aviv, but the British had consistently rejected them because of their partiality towards Haifa, and for fear of the cost it would entail. Even the plans proposed by joint Jewish and Arab merchant pressure groups to develop further the port of Jaffa were rejected. In 1924 the Colonial Office and the government of Palestine had lent support to the idea of establishing a port in Tel Aviv, on condition that a port tax would be paid to the government and that the port would be built by Jewish financial interests and not by the British themselves: the plan was a non-starter, particularly because after 1933 the British started arguing, much to the chagrin of the Tel Aviv merchants, that Haifa was Palestine's main port and it could handle all passenger movement in and out of

¹⁵ Gross, *The Economic*, 39-40; Seikaly, *Haifa*, 72-74; Zadok Eshel, *Port of Haifa - From Manual Labor to Advanced Technology* (Tel Aviv, 1984, H); Shimon Stern, "The Port in Haifa", in Mordechai Naor, Yossi Ben-Artzi, Eds., *The Development of Haifa, 1918-1948* (Jerusalem, 1989, H), 68-78; Deborah S. Bernstein, *Constructing Boundaries: Jewish and Arab Workers in Mandatory Palestine* (Albany, 2000), ch. 2.

¹⁶ Gaikin, "Palestine", 21-22; Stratton, "British", 190-193; Seikaly, *Haifa*, 72-74; Roza LM. El-Eini, "Trade Agreements and the Continuation of Tariff Protection Policy in Mandate Palestine in the 1930s", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34, 1 (1998), 164-191.

¹⁷ Mark LeVine, *Overthrowing Geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and the Struggle for Palestine, 1880-1948* (Berkeley, 2005), ch. 4.

Palestine. The British thus channelled all their efforts and resources towards the Haifa project at the cost of all other ports. That is, until the revolt broke out.¹⁸

In the spring and summer of 1936, the municipality of Tel Aviv and merchant interests in the city stepped up the pressure on the British to build a port in Tel Aviv as an alternative to Jaffa. The authorities at the Colonial Office in London, at the office of High Commissioner Arthur Wauchoppe, and in the customs department that ran the ports of Haifa and Jaffa, objected. They claimed that they were against the idea because of both the cost involved and the negative impact such a project might have on the income of the ports of Jaffa and Haifa. In August 1936 the High Commissioner finally bowed to the pressure and authorized the building of the new port on condition that the government would not bear the costs involved and that it would control the port tax collection. In August 1937 the British extended the unloading license given to the new port to include all varieties of goods and by April 1938 passengers were allowed to land. In the meantime, the British still refused to allow the municipality of Tel Aviv to contribute towards the building expenses, arguing that the port had to be an entirely private Jewish affair, and for all intents and purposes was to remain part of the Jaffa port system. Moreover, the authorization of the port of Tel Aviv and the establishment of the Marine Trust to finance and run it were immediately coupled with plans to improve the port of Jaffa so as to prevent Tel Aviv gaining a competitive edge and to force the two ports to cooperate. Thus the government's full recognition of the port as a Jewish one serving Zionist needs was a gradual process. This was the case despite the fact that the Jews perceived the separation from Jaffa as a symbol of sovereignty. This reluctance on the part of the government was even used by the private administration of the port of Tel Aviv as a weapon when it accused workers who were planning a strike of acting against "national" interests. It was not until a few years later, in 1941, that the British finally relented and agreed to allow the port of Tel Aviv a measure of administrative independence from Jaffa, albeit under British control. Although in Arab eyes the British were perceived as helping the port of Tel Aviv, while hundreds of Arab families in Jaffa were deprived of their income, it took another five

years for the Marine Trust and the port of Tel Aviv to achieve complete administrative independence from Jaffa.¹⁹

The character of the port of Tel Aviv as belonging to the Yishuv, at the same time that it was owned jointly by Zionist private and public capital was, therefore, a consequence not just of the Arab revolt and the paralyzing strike in Jaffa but also of British security considerations which, in their opinion, justified the existence of a separate port. Still they were consistent in that they viewed this separation as limited and maintained the two ports under a joint administration. The whole matter also reflected British thinking of how Palestine was to be managed and how Britain's original commitment to the Zionist movement was to be interpreted. In the meantime, those associated with the port of Tel Aviv criticized the government incessantly for its neglect of their port and its opposition to the port's development, in contrast to what was happening at Haifa, and for generally shirking its political commitments to the Jewish national home. However, it was exactly this seemingly non-interventionist policy of the Colonial Office and the government of Palestine that provided a fertile ground for highly motivated and financially-solvent entrepreneurs to act. These entrepreneurs came in handy for a colonial government that had been asked to decrease the financial burden for the running of Palestine on the British taxpayer. In this sense, Tel-Aviv and its business circles seized on the halting of operations at the port of Jaffa as an opportunity to advance the interests of the Zionist cause. At the same time, Arab activists at the port of Jaffa such as merchants, workers' contractors and representatives and others could use the port as a site of revolt exactly because British port policy was so socially and ethnically political. Any analysis of British policies towards the ports of Palestine must, therefore, take into account the perception shared by Arab and Jewish contemporaries alike that Jaffa was an Arab port, Tel Aviv a Jewish one and Haifa a British port. This perception was not lacking in foundation. It reflected both the consequences of the preferential and hierarchical logic which the British had espoused since the early stages of their rule and the perception

¹⁸Shimon Stern, "The Tel Aviv Harbour - An Episode in Yishuv History", *Cathedra* 25 (September 1982, H), 113-134; LeVine, *Overthrowing*, 112-113; Avi Battelheim, *The Merchants: The Story of Trade in Palestine* (Tel Aviv, 1990, H), 104-105.

¹⁹Stern, "The Tel Aviv", 113-134; LeVine, *Overthrowing*, 173-175; High Commissioner to the Marine Trust, 2 August 1937, Central Zionist Archive in Jerusalem (hereafter CZA), L51/1627; Report by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Palestine and Trans-Jordan for the year 1936 (London, 1936); "Passengers, Goods and More Facilities: A New Chapter of Tel Aviv Port History", *Palestine Post*, 22 May 1939; see also the correspondence in the Labour Movement Archive in Tel Aviv, V-343-7.

of the two communities that the British were supporting their adversaries.²⁰

This was the background for increased Arab resentment. The opening of the port of Tel Aviv and the fact that the port of Haifa did not strike during the revolt strengthened Arab criticism of the British authorities for their neglect of the port of Jaffa. In Haifa the Arabs were less vociferous and it is possible that they refrained from shutting down the port of Haifa during the revolt both because of the mixed nature of the population of Haifa and the importance of the port as a source of employment.²¹

The hierarchy that British rule was creating among the ports not only provoked Arab resentment against what was perceived as the neglect of Jaffa and the support for Zionism, but also led to complaints from Jewish circles in Tel Aviv. Even before the port of Tel Aviv had come fully into operation, various groups associated with trade, migration, arms and tourism in Tel Aviv had started pressing the government to consider the new port as second in importance to Haifa and a serious candidate to become Palestine's second deep-water port. The economic boom in Palestine's Jewish community in the early 1930s had exposed the congestion at the port of Jaffa and had shown the harbour to be insufficiently equipped to handle large cargoes. Congestion caused ships to be routed to the port of Haifa and the Tel Aviv Chamber of Commerce started to apply pressure on the government. Ideas to extend the port of Jaffa in Tel Aviv's direction and thus create a joint Arab-Jewish port had for long been rejected. With the port of Tel Aviv gradually replacing the paralyzed port in Jaffa the pressure for a second deep water port at the former mounted. The British government opposed the idea from the start and many officials in the government did not consider the operating license given to the harbour of Tel Aviv as sanctioning a port in the first place. Wishing to maintain Haifa's ascendancy, the British rejected the association made in Tel Aviv between the idea of a deep water port and the city's expansion and development.²²

²⁰ LeVine, *Overthrowing*, 85-93; Joachim Schlor, *Tel Aviv - From Dream to City* (London, 1999), ch. 2.

²¹ LeVine, *Overthrowing*, 109-116; Bernstein, *Constructing*, 166-168.

²² *Palestine Post*, 5 February 1933; Shmuel Tokowsky, "The Tel Aviv Port and the Citrus Industry", *Palestine Post*, 19 May 1937; B. K. Zipper, "Port Changes in Palestine", *Palestine Economic Review*, 3, 3 (March 1947), 66-67; Bittelheim, *The Merchants*, 104-105; Stern, "The Tel Aviv", 127-132; Sabi Shaylan, "Analysis of the Labour Conquest: Attempts in the Port of Jaffa 1920-1936" (*Unpublished MA Dissertation*, Tel Aviv University 1998, H).

The growing competition between the port of Haifa and that of Tel Aviv in the late 1930s testified to the impact which the state-created port hierarchy resulting from British development policies was having on the Jewish community. Municipal politicians and leading merchants in Tel Aviv pressed the British to allow the expansion of their port, to authorize its conversion into a second deep-water port and to transfer to it some of the business carried out at Haifa. Haifa resisted this pressure with the backing of the British, the port's most important users. This internal rift in the Yishuv demonstrated the extent to which the ports and British policies relating to them could galvanize local interests and lead to fierce economic and urban competition despite the overarching Zionist consensus. The British presence in one port and not the other simultaneously meant satisfaction and resentment according to which port one supported, with the British making out that the rift was none of their concern.²³

After the Second World War, the agitation from Zionists and Jewish commercial interests for a deep water port in Tel Aviv gained momentum. The argument focused on Haifa's limitations, its original purpose as an oil terminal and naval port, and its limited growth potential. The possibility to extend the area of the port in Haifa was indeed limited, and it was known that the British were afraid that the mechanization of port operations might threaten the livelihood of hundreds of Arab port workers. The second argument in favour of Tel Aviv was the great commercial and agricultural potential of the area. Nevertheless, the British were unmoved and with the militarization of the ports in 1947-1948 and the growing need for controlling the ports their opposition hardened.²⁴ This opposition, in fact, remained until the British finally withdrew from Palestine, bequeathing to posterity the hierarchy they were responsible for shaping. The resentment felt by various sectors in Palestine against the government testified to the impact which the British presence in the ports had had. Promise and

²³ See the 1938 correspondence, CZA, S25/9567; Report by Naftali Wydra, 1940, CZA, S53/616/1; Siegfried van Vriesland (General Manager of the Marine Trust) to the Jewish Agency, 21 November 1939, CZA, S53/616/1; On the conflict between the two ports see Siegfried van Vriesland to Eliezer Kaplan (Jewish Agency financial department), 23 November 1939, CZA, S53/616/1.

²⁴ John I.W. de Vries, *Preliminary Project of a Deep-Water Harbour in Tel-Aviv* (Tel Aviv, 1937); "The Port Situation in Palestine: Prospect for a Deep Sea Harbour", *Palestine Economic Review*, 1, 7 (November 1945), 10; *Davar*, 15 May 1947; "Deeds and Prospects", *Yam* (H), October 1947 and April 1948.

resentment went hand in hand and reflected the contradictions of colonial rule and the unevenness in the impact of its presence. The nature of employment in the ports of Palestine provides further testimony of this heritage.

Employment and Labour Politics

It was largely due to the Ottoman rulers of Palestine and to the economic activities of foreign merchant companies that the ports of Palestine had already become attractive for those seeking work in the nineteenth century. However, the onset of British rule in Palestine and its central role in port construction and the operation of a port economy introduced significant changes in the intensity and patterns of the port labour market and in the nature of port employment itself. Here too we encounter the ambivalence of promise and resentment, albeit much more acutely.

As a market for labour and a workplace the ports of Palestine exemplified the division of Palestine into the three economic sectors previously mentioned. In the Arab sector, employers in agriculture and manufacturing employed only Arab workers, while in the Yishuv, the area or areas of Jewish settlement, a mixture of Jewish and Arab workers was employed and it is here that we encounter the struggle of Jewish workers and the Socialist-Zionist labour movement against Jewish employers opposing the employment of "cheap" Arab labour. The third sector was the state sector, alongside of which there also operated a segment of international capital which was greatly favoured by the government of Palestine. In this sector Arab workers were preferred over Jewish ones and the impact of the "Jewish labour" campaign conducted by Zionist organizations, labour and otherwise, was very limited.

In this tripartite set-up, the port of Haifa was located in the state sector, while the port of Tel Aviv was in the Jewish one. The port of Jaffa, albeit managed by the British, was considered to be in the Arab sector. In Haifa and Jaffa, the structure of employment was complicated by the widespread system of contracting and subcontracting in which a variety of workers' groupings operated. These groups were based on ethnic affiliation, although a minority were joint Arab-Jewish. As a rule, the ability of individual Jewish workers and groups to secure entry into the ports of Jaffa and Haifa was extremely limited and would often depend on artificial attempts by labour and non-labour

politicians in the Histadrut and other Zionist institutions to bring about a change.²⁵

The growth in immigration and foreign trade deriving partly from the political and economic presence of the British in Palestine intensified the activity in the ports and attracted hundreds of new workers. The construction of the port of Haifa itself drew many workers from Haifa, from other towns in Palestine and from as far away as the Hawran, in southern Syria. The British contribution to the growth of Palestine's foreign trade via the importation of materials for the construction of road, rail and port facilities, and an increasingly sophisticated government administration, transformed the quantity and nature of employment there. Increased military activity in the ports during the Second World War brought about a further expansion of the workforce. Both the Arab and Jewish societies responded quickly to these new opportunities. Many Arab rural workers searching for jobs drifted to the ports to load oranges and unload raw materials while many Jewish kibbutz workers saw temporary port work as a useful stopgap while the agricultural economy of their communities was getting on its feet. Though by far a minority, Jewish urban dwellers in Jaffa and Haifa also attempted to get in on the act.

By and large, therefore, the British made a change, both as a direct employer and as an indirect factor in the expansion of port employment, but the British civilian and military administrations were also a key factor in the introduction of advanced work techniques in the running of the ports in general but particularly in the management of customs, taxation, accounting and immigration. Moreover, the development of the dockyards, particularly during the war, added military and economic roles to the migration and trade functions of the ports. The full activation of the port of Haifa in the latter half of the 1930s and the high level of state and army employment during the Second World War brought these state contributions to port employment to a peak. It is worthwhile noting that all these elements were closely associated with the cultural ambience noted earlier in creating an atmosphere of transformation in the ports.²⁶

²⁵ Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley, 1996), 217-225; David De Vries, "Nationalism and the Making of Dock Labour in British-Ruled Palestine", in: Sam Davies et al., Eds., *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Labour History, 1790-1970* (Aldershot, 2000), 231-249.

²⁶ Smith, *The Roots*, 155-159; Bernstein, *Constructing*, ch. 5.

It was, however, the presence of the British in the ports of Palestine as a direct employer or indirectly through contractors and subcontracting that best reflects the changes that they were introducing and how variegated was their "gate-keeping" role. In practical terms, they were involved in the ports as places of work in three senses. The first was in the construction of the ports and, in particular, their involvement in the recruitment and allocation of workers for this task. This applied mainly to the port of Haifa where the authorities were deeply involved in shaping the ethnic structure of the workforce building the port. The second was involvement in the management of the ports, in its daily administration, and in its functions as a control site. This naturally applied to Haifa and Jaffa but also to the Jewish harbour at Tel Aviv where the British had permitted a Jewish administrative body called the Marine Trust to run the port while themselves retaining a supervisory role. As Jaffa was Palestine's main trade and passenger port until 1933 the British were bureaucratically present there as well, with a British manager and a customs department running the daily affairs of this Arab-dominated port. As a consequence, the British port and customs officials created an atmosphere that allowed Arab merchants and local Jewish elites to feel part of a larger imperial culture while at the same time allowing them the space to vent their economic and political grievances. The third form of involvement by the British was in the daily employment of port contractors and dock workers, stevedores and lighter-men. Here again the British had an effect on the ethnic composition of the port workforce, but were much more involved in relations between the groups and material conditions of the workers. It was in these areas that the contributions of the British Mandate to the expansion of the ports and to the growth in the demand for port workers, was offset by policies and actions that engendered an atmosphere of resentment and resistance.²⁷

The role of the British in shaping the ethnic structure of the labour force of the ports was apparent from the early 1920s. Almost the entire workforce in the port of Jaffa was Arab, not only because of the social structure of the town and the long-standing tradition of Arab port work, but also because the government consistently sought cheaper labour which was non-unionised and lacked experience in struggling for improvements in working conditions. During this decade, Jewish workers

backed by the Histadrut-affiliated Tel Aviv Labour Council attempted to make headway at the port of Jaffa fully aware that the authorities would not assist them, although neither did they oppose them. The authorities were, in the main, indifferent to this kind of ethnic contention, and they relied on competition to keep wages down. In abstaining from active intervention in these labour market struggles the British sent two signals: on the one hand, that their support of the Zionist cause would not detract from their attempts to economise, but, on the other hand, that Arab dockworkers were not to expect government protection. As competition between Arabs and Jews in Palestine's labour market was such an important aspect part of the national conflict the absence of state authority played into the hands of those who wished to politicize tensions at the port workplace.²⁸

An even clearer expression of the government's role in the ethnic composition of port life was evident during the building of the port of Haifa in 1929–1933. Here again low cost labour, consisting mostly of Arabs, long working hours, and weakly organized workers, emerged as the main hallmarks of the project. Even the refusal to accept the Sabbath as the weekly day of rest for Jews on the docks was a result of the British preference for low cost workers, although they may have also been interested in easing unemployment among Arabs. When the Jews, backed by both the Labour Movement and other Zionist institutions, pressed for extended Jewish quotas in the building workforce their only success was in the government agreeing to an increase in the number of Jewish skilled workers. When the port of Haifa started operations in 1933, it seemed that the Jews would remain a minority with only the customs department willing to employ Jews in "customs portering" owing to the large share of trading activity held by Jewish merchant companies, particularly those exporting citrus products. That the number of Jews employed in this sector could increase, as it did in the 1930s, was only possible because of a contracting system which enabled the Histadrut to expand its operation in the port through its ties with Jewish companies and its own elaborate system of piece-work-based labour recruiting groups. These characteristic Yishuv employment arrangements could be applied in the port and

²⁸ David De Vries, *Idealism and Bureaucracy in 1920s Palestine: The Origins of "Red Haifa"* (Tel Aviv, 1999, H), chapters 1 and 4; LeVine, *Overthrowing*, 217–225; on the government and ethnicity in fishing see Naor Ben-Yehoyada, "The Men Who Knew Too Much: Jaffa Fishermen and the Zionist Project, 1936–2004" (Unpublished MA Dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 2005, H), ch. 2.

²⁷ Bernstein, *Constructing*, 141–148; Lockman, *Comrades*, 217–219.

elsewhere only because they were unhampered by the government of Palestine, although, all in all, they only had a moderate effect on the number of Jews employed by the government.²⁹

The Arab revolt and the paralysis of the port of Jaffa during 1936 not only resulted in the British consenting to the commencement of operations in the harbour of Tel Aviv but also provided a justification for the Hebrew labour campaign and led to an increase in the size of the Jewish contingent in the port's workforce. In Haifa as well, the number of dock workers employed by the customs department increased. This did not mean a change in official economic policy, which always preferred "cheap" Arab labour, but simply a means of cooperating with Jewish port operators when relations between the authorities and the Arabs were deteriorating and the latter were considered as the main source of the country's political unrest. During the Second World War, reasons of economy once again overshadowed this intermittent expansion in the number of Jews in the ports, and while many Jewish workers found a way in, and in the process contributed towards making the ethnic structure at the port more balanced, the Arab supremacy in the ports of Haifa and Jaffa persisted.³⁰

Associated with these policies and partly a direct outcome of them was the lack of sensitivity on the part of the British officials in the ports to the workers' conditions of employment. For practical purposes the direct employers in the ports were the contractors and sub-contractors. Originating in the Ottoman period and largely untouched by the British, this form of employment distanced the state from the workers and subjected the workers to the employment arrangements established by the contractors. Casual work, long working hours, rejection of representation, and a paternalism which bordered on exploitation, were

²⁹ Moshe Beilinson, "The Jewish Worker and the Port of Haifa", 14 October 1928, in Bracha Havas, Editor, *On the Way to Independence: The Writings of Moshe Beilinson*, Volume 2 (Tel Aviv, 1949, H), 52-55; Smith, *The Roots*, 155-159; Eshel, *Port*, 25-26; Bernstein, *Constructing*, ch. 5; Deborah S. Bernstein, "Porters and Stevedores: The Entry of Jewish Workers to Work at the Port of Haifa", in Yossi Ben-Artzi, Ed., *Haifa: Local History* (Haifa, 1998), 115-145; Deborah S. Bernstein, "The Histadrut and the Government Sector: Strategies for the Employment of Jewish Labor and Their Limitations", in Avi Bareli, Nahum Karinsky, Eds., *Economy and Society in Mandatory Palestine, 1918-1948* (Sede Boqer, 2003, H), 79-106.

³⁰ *Palnetus*, XIV, 31/32, August 1945; Shai Srugo, "From the Port of Thessaloniki to the Port of Haifa: The Immigration of Jewish Stevedores between the Two World Wars" (*Unpublished MA Dissertation*, University of Haifa, 2003, H), 70-81, 118-138; Lockman, *Comrades*, 194-199.

the usual features of these arrangements. They persisted because they were often based on family and village structures still prevailing in Palestine and the neighbouring countries from where many of the unskilled workers were drawn. When Jewish workers attempted to prise their way into the docks they were organized, often by the Histadrut, into recruiting and contracting groups because this was the dominant form of employment in the ports and because it fitted in with the Histadrut's conception of "vanguard forces" cooperating in the "conquest of labour". Direct employment, on the other hand, featured more prominently in highly skilled jobs such as planning and engineering, and in white-collar jobs, particularly in the customs department. In these areas working conditions were incomparably better.³¹

Labour legislation was hardly applied in the ports. In this climate of lack of government protection the ports were much more internally unstable than previously thought, with the British leaving groups to fight it out over turf they laid a claim to. This British reliance on the contractors at the port of Jaffa and the consequent distancing of Arab stevedores from more direct Government involvement in their working conditions harboured a wider colonial message. Old forms of employment relations among Arab port workers persisted and, as a consequence, cemented the traditional social structure. The gap in material living conditions between the majority of the workers and the thin stratum of better-off employees widened, and the contrast between the impact of the British authorities on the ethnic structure of the workforce and their neglect of the material pressures that this workforce was subject to was growing. Thus the port of Jaffa, that old-established and economically central factor in Palestine's migratory and economic history, was only superficially inspected from above. As long as taxes and tariffs were levied, permits issued and immigration controls applied than the authorities hardly intervened. The port was practically left to its own devices and its militarization during World War II brought hardly any changes.³²

The resentment these problems provoked was more varied and fiercer than the reactions against British port development policies. In Jaffa,

³¹ Bernstein, *Constructing*, ch. 5; De Vries, "Nationalism"; Lockman, *Comrades*, 225-229; Rachelle L. Taqqu, "Arab Labour in Mandatory Palestine, 1920-1948" (*Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation*, Columbia University, 1977), 95-98.

³² "The Port of Haifa", in Shlomo Kodesh, Ed., *Deeds: The Histadrut in Haifa 1945-1953* (Haifa, 1953, H), 513-526; Dov Luiski, Ed., *The Port of Tel Aviv - 25th Anniversary 1936-1961b* (Tel Aviv, 1961, H).

Arabs protested against British indifference regarding Zionist attempts to "conquer" the port and their lack of concern about the poverty of the Arab unemployed. Jews in Tel Aviv, on the other hand, complained that the British discriminated against Jewish employment in Jaffa's port. During the construction of the port of Haifa, the Zionist labour movement conducted an organized campaign to enlarge the Jewish proportion of the workforce and when the campaign failed the government was accused of bowing to Arab political pressure. The increase in the number of port workers from the Hawran only provoked more reaction. Jewish port workers who originated in Salonica protested against the customs department, their employer in Haifa, over low pay and for not facilitating the observance of the Sabbath. The British authorities were accused by Arabs of upholding the repressive contracting system and when the authorities finally agreed, in the mid-1930s, to establish a committee of enquiry on the issue its passivity only provoked further resentment.³³

In overall terms, therefore, it is clear that British introduced unprecedented changes in the nature of the workplace at the ports. Their policies of ethnic preference and segregation, albeit qualified by economic considerations, provoked widespread and cross-communal anger. As a consequence, the British had a considerable influence on the politicization of labour issues which characterized the rifts between the Arab and Jewish communities. Although they presented their port policies as non-political, the employment arrangements they helped shape turned out to be an integral part of labour politics in port towns. This explosive mixture of ethnicity, employment and politics came to a head in 1948 when the Jewish component of the port workforce became a majority under the aegis of the nascent State of Israel, a process which had already gotten under way during the more deeply political phase of the British presence in the ports, namely, the Second World War and its attendant regimentation.

Defence and Regimentation

While the advantages accruing to Palestine as a result of British activity in the ports, in the shape of enhanced foreign trade, more jobs, military

consumption, administrative sophistication, and so on, were considerably offset by the social criticism over hierarchy and neglect the British policies of regimentation at the ports during the war and immediately after it had consequences which were much more lop-sided and dramatic. That the ports were turned into sites of control and discipline during the Mandate is not surprising as Palestine was conquered by force, fulfilled British strategic and military functions, and as a result of the internal security situation, was swarming with military and police personnel. From a historical perspective it is, in any event, difficult to imagine Palestine's littoral and harbours as anything other than loci of military and paramilitary activity. The fortifications of Jaffa and Haifa had existed for hundreds of years before the coming of the British to Palestine, with foreign armies, pirates and all sorts of intruders causing Palestine's rulers to establish some form of coastal defence. The British were equally aware of the strategic importance of the harbours, but as was the case in the previous two aspects here too their presence brought novelty and ambivalence.³⁴

Three areas of change can be discerned. The first was the establishment in Palestine of an unprecedented coastal defence capability, particularly in the ports. This was evident, first and foremost, in the large numbers of military and naval personnel stationed in Palestine. The Abyssinian crisis in the mid-1930s and, even more so, the eruption of the Second World War into the Middle East in the early 1940s further expanded this military and naval presence. How important was this presence was subsequently made clear in 1948 when the end of the Mandate resulted in the littoral sliding back to the condition of exposure and defencelessness which had characterised it in the period prior to the First World War.³⁵ It must also be noted that during the Second World War, the ports were also the location where the first Jewish naval forces — soon a key factor in the Arab-Jewish conflict — were trained by the British.

The second and associated change was the turning of the port infrastructure into a modern servicing site for military and naval forces. The volume of merchandise handled for the military, the provision of

³³ Lockman, 217-218, 227-229, 402-404; Mahmoud Yazbak, "From Poverty to Revolt: Economic Factors in the Outbreak of the 1936 Rebellion in Palestine", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 36, 3 (2000), 93-113; LeVine, *Overthrowing*, 101-104; Srugo, "From the Port", 99-101.

³⁴ Amnon Cohen, "Ottoman Rule and the Re-Emergence of the Coast of Palestine", *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 39 (1985), 163-175; Neil Asher Silberman, "That Miserable Fort", *The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, 3, 2 (1991), 62-73.

³⁵ Ninian Stewart, *The Royal Navy and the Palestine Patrol* (London, 2002), chapters 2-3; Anat Kidron, "The Israeli Navy, Year of Establishment" (*Unpublished MA Dissertation*, Haifa University, 2000, H).

extensive facilities and repair yards, and the increase in manpower in the service of Empire and later of the Empire at war, testified to the extent of this change. The presence of servicemen in wartime Tel Aviv and Haifa created a feeling of mobilization in the country, and benefited the ports and the areas around them via the consumption of food and supplies, the acquisition of a variety of services, and last but not least in supporting an informal economy of vice and prostitution which was part of the growth of the country's urban culture. The ports were, therefore, far from being only loci of civil development, and immediately after the military conquest of the country their military-colonial condition had become an accepted feature of life in Palestine under British rule.³⁶

Last but not least, we have to note the increasingly sophisticated population control mechanisms in the ports and the areas adjacent to them. An entirely new infrastructure of immigration, customs and quarantine management was set up in the port of Jaffa in the 1920s and in the port of Haifa in the 1930s and the 1940s, and this made the ports the loci not just of soldiers but also of state bureaucrats. Furthermore, this activity was technically linked to the Yishuv's infrastructure of immigrant absorption, a core value of the Zionist cause. In this sense, therefore, port development in Mandate Palestine under the British was inextricably intertwined with the migration and population changes which so deeply effected the country's communal and ethnic relations.³⁷

A thin line separated these military and civilian uses of the port by the British authorities on the one hand, and the disciplinary and anger-provoking nature of their presence in the ports. During the 1920s the port of Jaffa came to represent not just the coastal entry point to Palestine but also the focus point of control. In the early 1930s, illegal Jewish immigration met with stricter British control at sea and in the ports. During the Arab revolt, regimentation was expressed partly in the shape not only of more rigorous coast-watching but also, as in Jaffa, in punitive actions. The 1936 strike that paralyzed the port and resulted in the opening of the Tel Aviv harbour was the background to redoubled

policing activity by the British. This culminated in Operation Anchor in which the British used large amounts of explosives to carve out passages through the built-up areas in order to achieve total control over the town and to better manage the striking port. In Arab eyes the area surrounding the port of Jaffa became a site of repression and urban re-planning. A similar atmosphere was created in the port of Haifa in May 1936 when the British police implemented the High Commissioner's orders to expel the Hawrani port workers who were considered potential trouble-makers back to Syria.³⁸

Despite the British contribution to the country's economic boom during the Second World War, the latter also resulted in even more stringent disciplinary measures being introduced. From the summer of 1940, the British naval authorities forbade the anchoring of ships in the open sea and, as a result, the ports of Jaffa and Tel Aviv were practically paralyzed. The authorities assumed total control over shipping, cargo allocation between the ports and cargo space on board the ships. The importers were no longer free to choose their ports of destination and had to comply or lose their cargo. The Royal Navy even transferred some of the equipment from the ports of Palestine to small ports in North Africa so as to provide for the needs of the Allied army in the desert. Many of the port workers were mobilized and ordinary civilian operations at the ports ceased. The militarization of the ports, which was understandable in view of the war, nevertheless led to much anger amongst both merchants and unemployed veteran port workers.³⁹

Growing Jewish illegal immigration and arms smuggling and the approaching political changes in the country further strengthened the processes of militarization during 1947 and the early months of 1948, and were accompanied by the occasional curfews imposed on the ports. New orders regulating the movement of vessels between the ports were issued by the government which allowed total control on the materials unloaded from the ships. The order eased the burden on Haifa, the main British site for the withdrawal from Palestine, and gradually mobilized the port of Jaffa for British use as well. Reluctant merchants in Haifa were accordingly forced by British orders to unload in Jaffa

³⁶ Government of Palestine, *A Survey of Palestine. Prepared for the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry* (Jerusalem, 1946), II, ch. 22; Bernstein, *Constructing*, 117–119; Stewart, *The Royal Navy*, chapters 6, 7 and 9.

³⁷ For the pre-Mandate period see Gur Alroey, "Journey to Early 20th Century Palestine as a Jewish Immigrant Experience", *Jewish Social Studies*, 9, 2 (2003), 28–64; for the 1930s see Aviva Halanish, "Immigration and Absorption Policy of the Zionist Organization 1931–1937" (*Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation*, Tel Aviv University, 1995, H), chapters 6–7.

³⁸ Stewart, *The Royal Navy*, ch. 2; for Operation Anchor see Sharon Rotbard, *White City, Black City* (Tel Aviv, 2005, H); for the anti-Hawrani policy see Arthur Waanchope's

Memorandum, 2 May 1936, and H. Hall to District Commissioner of the Southern District, 2 May 1936, both at Israel State Archive in Jerusalem, M223/1/578/36.

³⁹ Tel Aviv Harbour, 1936–1946 (Tel Aviv, 1946, H).

which by winter 1947 was practically taken over by the British forces. In Tel Aviv, merchant interests and Zionist municipal activists felt that the continued British refusal to allow a second deep water port was motivated now by the need to control the port. American ships were not permitted to unload in Tel Aviv, apparently for fear that arms might be smuggled from the United States to the Yishuv. Many have come to believe that these restrictive measures were so damaging that they eventually led to the decline of the port of Tel Aviv a few years later. The processes culminated in late 1947 with the establishment of a government ports' committee which was accountable to the High Commissioner and occasionally saw the involvement of the military. The committee ensured the coordinated port policy and maritime control that the British needed for their final withdrawal.⁴⁰

For all intents and purposes, the port of Haifa became a military port and the British placed even more obstacles for entry into Palestine. Confrontations at the port of Haifa between illegal immigrants and British forces multiplied. The best known example was in July 1947 when the ship *Exodus* sailed with some 4,500 passengers from a port outside Marseille with the British Royal Navy trailing the ship from very early in its voyage. Some forty kilometres from Haifa, and as a consequence well outside British jurisdiction, the ship was boarded. Meeting resistance from the passengers, the British soldiers used force, and then sailed the ship into the port of Haifa, where its passengers were forcefully removed to three other ships for deportation.⁴¹

Conditions in Palestine in 1947-1948, in particular the growing tension between the British and the Jewish right-wing underground organizations, provoked the British into demonstrating through their ports policies their ability to take on a pro-Arab stance. This was the interpretation given for the closure of the port of Tel Aviv until military conditions permitted. Simultaneously, additional funds were made available to assist the expansion of the port of Jaffa. Rumours circulated that the British were about to close the port of Haifa to private trade so as to prevent arms smuggling. Perceptions of the British using the ports to contain Zionist advantages were therefore instrumental in

⁴⁰ Stewart, *The Royal Navy*, chapters 6-7; CZA, S71/714/2; *Haboker*, 12 March 1947 (H); *Da'ar*, 15 May 1947 (H); *Haaretz*, 5, 28 and 29 January 1948 (H); *Fifty Years from the Establishment of the Port of Tel Aviv, 1936-1985* (Tel Aviv, 1986, H).

⁴¹ Chaim Kozienicki, "Refugees to Palestine on the 'Chaim Arlosoroff'", *Yalkut Moreshet*, 65 (1998, H), 145-154; Aviva Halamish, *The Exodus Affair: Holocaust Survivors and the Struggle for Palestine* (London, 1998).

turning the ports and the entire coastal region into emergency zones. The British were clearly enhancing their administrative control of the ports in order to safeguard their withdrawal from the country. This enhanced presence not only brought to the fore the original purposes of the British policies regarding the ports, but also left, as many colonial and imperial powers do, deep marks on their character as complex civil-military locations.⁴²

The regimentation aspects of the British port presence thus extended far beyond the known policing and quarantine nature of inter-war ports in Europe and elsewhere. The presence of the army, the fight against illegal emigrants and the atmosphere of the port as a centre of vice and arms smuggling contributed to a feeling of claustrophobia. From here it was but a short road to the port turning into an even more dramatic location, as reflected in the departure scenes of the British from Palestine at the port of Haifa at the end of the Mandate, or more starkly when thousands of Palestinians were expelled through the ports to Acre, Gaza and Beirut. Furthermore, the departure of the British from Palestine was felt in the ports in terms of a vacuum of authority, an authority previously expressed in the presence of the British policeman or soldier standing at the gates of the ports. The descriptions of the change from the presence of such authority to its absence defined the sense of freedom from colonial rule. In a sense the British presence was deeply felt in the ports, and their departure left the ports deserted in one sense and impregnated with new tensions on the other.⁴³

In the final analysis, the British not only changed the historical pattern of the presence of the state in the ports of Palestine but also prepared the ground for the intervention in the ports by the future sovereign

⁴² Shlomo Prati'i, "The Ports in the Economy of Palestine", *Hameshek Hashivuf*, 31 (March 1947, H); see also the correspondence and press on 1947 in CZA, S71/714/2.

⁴³ P. Azai, "Shipping Lines in Tel Aviv Harbour", *Yam*, April 1948, 10-11 (H). In the November 1947 UN Partition the ports of Haifa and Jaffa were designated as Jewish territory. However, due to the large Arab majority in Jaffa it was designated instead as an Arab enclave in the Jewish state. After the proclamation of provisional government and the British withdrawal in May 1948, the UN sent Count Folke Bernadotte, a Swedish diplomat to mediate. In September (not long before his assassination) he recommended that the port of Haifa, including the oil refineries and terminals, and without prejudice to their inclusion in the sovereign territory of the Jewish State or the administration of the city of Haifa, should be declared a free port, with assurances of free access for interested Arab countries and an undertaking on their part to place no obstacle in the way of oil deliveries by pipeline to the Haifa refineries. See correspondence in CZA, S25/9567.

power, namely the State of Israel. The "Zionization" of the ports that followed the 1948 war, namely, the establishment of complete Jewish control and labour hegemony in the ports, would also precipitate further reaction. The Palestinians, turned now into a minority in Palestine, were largely excluded from the ports — less so in Jaffa but very clearly so in Haifa — and from their employment structures. Resentment amongst the defeated could be nothing but subdued. More vocal were the Jewish port workers, who multiplied in number because of large scale Jewish immigration in the early 1950s. They soon became one of the most powerfully unionized groups in Israeli society, readily employing collective action against the state, their employer, and radically transforming the organizational weakness that had characterized port workers during the Mandate.⁴⁴

What the British did in the ports was therefore an essential aspect of the changes they wrought on Palestine's infrastructure, transportation and foreign trade in the first half of the twentieth century. Their presence in the ports had considerable consequences on the urban space along the country's coast and increased employment opportunities for Arabs and Jews. Above all, through the focusing on Haifa as the main point of entry and exit for immigrants, passengers and commodities into and out of Palestine, they remapped roads and routes, linked local and external points of production and distribution, and thus contributed to Palestine's economy, unity and connectivity to the rest of the world. These effects, nevertheless, also harboured centrifugal forces. The hierarchy that placed Haifa above all other ports produced pressures from below, in Jaffa and Tel Aviv, for the improvement of their ports and consideration of their neglected local needs. The failure to respond to these pressures was translated into political anger that the ethnic communities vented against each other and even more so against the colonial regime. Thus the ambivalent interventions of the British in the ports' employment structures and arrangements provoked anti-colonial resentment that mixed labour market competition with nationalism. The harshest social response was triggered by the British regimentation of the ports, their use against immigration or for deportation, their employment as naval bases against political protest, and last but not

least their turning into symbols of social segregation and political separation which deeply contrasted with the unifying consequences they had originally had.

Seen together the three Janus-faced aspects discussed in this chapter coalesce into a coherent narrative, with the laying of developmental and hierarchical foundations in 1917-1928, through the structuring of ethnic groupings in employment in 1929-1938, and ending with the climax of port regimentation and militarization in 1939-1948. This fits well with the political history of the Mandate and thus contextualizes the relations between state power and changes in the ports in larger contexts. Secondly, when these dimensions are looked at as a whole they stress how the British authorities could manipulate local politics in order to attend to their imperial interests without clarifying the duality of their political commitments to the two conflicting communities. Perhaps this was the deeper origin of the resentment that the British presence in the ports was provoking. Thirdly, as multi-faceted areas of development and contention the port hierarchy, the ethnic structure of the port labour force, and the evolution of the ports into loci of governance, shed light on the deep change that the British brought about in the historical relations between state and port in Palestine — the growing incapacity of the colonial power to disentangle the strategic role of the ports from intervention in civil society. The stronger the veering from one to another the more invigorated the resentment. In this sense the unravelling of the British presence in Palestine's ports was relevant not only for the history of the ports but for the history of Palestine as a whole, and as future research may demonstrate, for the unfolding national conflict between Arabs and Jews.

⁴⁴ *Haifa Port Development, 1948-1956* (Haifa, 1957, H); Dror Osnat, "Of Tailors and Shoemakers we built here a Port: Labour, Nationalism and Ethnicity among Ashdod Port Workers, 1961-1967" (*Unpublished Dissertation*, Ben Gurion University, Beer Sheva 2004, H)