

# The Red Priest of Haifa

Rafiq Farah (1921–2020)

Randa Farah

## Abstract

Rafiq Farah, archdeacon of the Anglican Church and the author's father, chaired the Society for the Defense of Arab Minority Rights in Israel from 1951 to 1965. This article draws on oral history recorded by the author, on personal documents, and on archival material to chronicle the events that led to the Society's formation, and to examine more closely the effects of the 1948 Nakba on the Palestinian Arab community in Haifa. In August 1949, Rafiq Farah wrote a letter published in the Israeli Communist Party newspaper *al-Ittihad* in which he proposed the formation of a league for the defense of universal human rights. Martin Buber, a Jewish philosopher, wrote a letter to Farah supporting the idea. The *al-Ittihad* article acted as a catalyst that provoked debate among Arabs and Jews and that in turn led to the Society's formation. After its establishment and until 1966, during a period of a "reign of terror" imposed on Palestinian Arabs, the Society waged a courageous legal battle against Israel's Emergency Regulations, which included fighting against Israeli confiscation of Arab lands and properties; it was no small feat, and their struggles were not always in vain.

## Key words

Rev. Rafiq Farah; Haifa; Society for the Defense of Arab Minority Rights in Israel; Shafa 'Amr; British Mandate; Emergency Regulations; Martin Buber; settler-colonialism; oral history.

Ordinary people's recollections in the form of oral life histories and narratives, autobiographies, and diaries are rich sources that serve diverse academic purposes and community projects. This is especially the case in Palestinian studies, where the Zionist colonial state has been systematically destroying all that attests to the history and culture of Arab Palestine and its indigenous inhabitants. Targets of erasure and destruction include archival materials, artefacts, and sites of Palestinian memory. Thus, oral accounts, diaries, letters, photos, memoirs, artefacts, and all that attest to the reproduction of history/memory by ordinary Palestinians are all the more critical to counter the unrelenting processes of erasure, and to reconstruct the memory of places, times, and events of Arab Palestine.

Some scholars approach oral life-histories, or personal and family diaries of "ordinary people" for empirical data to fill gaps or rectify and revise an error, or adopt a phenomenological approach to examine what the narratives tell us about how and why individuals or societies "remember" and what they forget or silence. Others use life-histories and diaries as maps that help them trace social and cultural transformations over time.<sup>1</sup> The non-elite accounts of the past are often referred to as "popular memory" to distinguish it from hegemonic master narratives that pervade public space. A main contention in this piece is that these different genres or spaces where the past is reproduced are not mutually exclusive, as the interweaving of an individual account may variously converge and diverge from hegemonic narratives or professional written texts.

In this piece, I draw on the oral narratives of my father, Rafiq Farah,<sup>2</sup> archdeacon of the Anglican Church, who chaired the Society for the Defense of Arab Minority Rights in Israel (henceforth the Society), to trace changes and occurrences in Palestine focusing on the late 1940s and 1950s. In addition to filling a gap in the existing literature on the Society, this article traces larger social and political processes that radically transformed individual and collective Palestinian life.<sup>3</sup>

I recorded my late father's oral history intermittently over several years, and inherited historical documents mostly from the 1940s up to the mid-1960s. Focusing on the oral narrative here,<sup>4</sup> I conclude that the Israeli reign of terror under the Defence (Emergency) Regulations<sup>5</sup> imposed exclusively on the Palestinian Arabs, rendered the legal struggle waged by the Society a significant attempt to restrain the Israeli state, even if it did not halt the process of repression and colonial expansion. The Society's activities also helped raise political awareness among the Palestinian Arabs regarding their rights in the law, and buoyed up resilience against the newly formed colonial state. Indeed, the legal struggle was one of the few venues and perhaps the only one left to resist in those early years; hence it formed a focal point for bringing together Palestinians from a broad political and social spectrum.

Although my father was at the advanced age of ninety-eight when he passed away on 11 May 2020, his memory and mental faculty had remained exceptionally sharp. I always smiled when he would call me to remind me of my or his appointment with a doctor or another urgent task that needed attention. Moreover, perhaps due to his life-time interest in "truth" and in "objective" history that he had learned in classes

at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in the 1940s, he avoided exaggeration in almost anything he did in life, and certainly in talking about the past, lending more credibility and validity to his account.

My family was among the 150,000–200,000 Palestinian Arabs “inside” – the term used at the time for the survivors of the Nakba who remained in what became Israel in 1948. We were besieged from within by the Defence (Emergency) Regulations, which tightened the noose around us, and from without, by the closure of borders to the Arab world. I still have crystal clear recollections of the environment of terror that touched us all, even as a child growing up during that period.

Indeed, the Israeli reign of terror under the Emergency Regulations meant that the most elementary human rights were annulled, including property rights, citizenship rights, and free movement. In the meantime, Israel’s clamorous noise about its “democracy” was being amplified in media outlets around the world. Nothing seems to have changed. Although military rule and the Emergency Regulations ended in 1966, Israel continued its colonization of Palestine and its discrimination against the indigenous population. Adalah’s list of over sixty-five laws that discriminate against Palestinian citizens in Israel and/or Palestinian residents in the occupied Palestinian territories today confirm this view.<sup>6</sup>

In the last few years of his life, my father was very clear in his political views: he was against the Oslo agreements, was dissatisfied with the performance of the Palestinian Authority, supported the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) initiative, and advocated for the rights of the Palestinian refugees to return. He believed in a one-state solution as the only moral and durable solution. When I asked him about his work in the 1950s and the use of Israeli laws and courts, or his close relationship with members of the Israeli Communist Party, he would always answer that in order to judge the period, we need to understand the context under which struggle is waged. I hope the reader will do the same.

## **Childhood and Youth: Shafa ‘Amr**

Rafiq Amin Farah was born on 16 June 1921, the second of eight children of Amin Farah and Salma Habibi, in Shafa ‘Amr, Palestine, then under British colonial rule. The population – Palestinian Arab Christian, Muslim, and Druze – did not exceed three thousand residents. When reflecting on years past, he described his childhood as a simple life. He lived in a house consisting of two rooms and a kitchen, with no running water, no electricity, and little in terms of furniture. A lower room was for storage, especially olive oil and kerosene. He spoke fondly of the times when the narrow streets of Shafa ‘Amr and the surrounding fields were his playground. Even in his nineties, he would laugh when he recalled how he returned home with “dirty feet and a mouth tainted in green due to the herbs and plants I used to pick and eat.”

There were also stories about climbing blackberry or fig trees. Figs remained his favorite fruit to the last days of his life. He also recalled long hours of play: marbles, games with sticks and pieces of broken flat stones, and hide-and-seek. Town criers

were also a part of his recollections: these men circulated from one neighborhood to the next to publicize government announcements. The town crier would begin with: “O people of the town, according to such and such order ... and ended with “you should take notice of it.” He loved going to his paternal aunt’s house Maddul Hayik, where he would ride on their horse as it turned stone wheels round and round, threshing and winnowing the grains.

His parents and the extended family were devout Christians, the kind of parents who made sure the children said their prayers before bedtime. The Episcopal Church for the Anglican Congregation was the center of their lives and my father explained the reason thus: “There were no cinemas, theaters, football, or any other sports, and no cultural events.” But Christianity with a colonial taste began to seep into his life when a Miss Nora Fisher arrived in town with coloring pencils and paper, and even more seductively, with sweets! It so happened that in later years, my father met her husband, Geoffrey Fisher, who was then the Archbishop of Canterbury. This happened during a visit he made with a delegation from the Arab Evangelical Episcopal Church Council in 1957 who travelled to England to discuss “nationalizing the church” by appointing an Arab bishop.<sup>7</sup>

The school in Shafa ‘Amr offered only a few elementary classes: my father was a victim of discipline by the math teacher who would stand behind him and place his large hands on his cheeks ready to slap if the answer was wrong. Panic ensued wrong answers and that was the end of my father’s interest in math! During the break he would run to his maternal grandmother’s house Mariam Abu Hamad, who was married to Yusif Habibi.<sup>8</sup> As soon as he arrived, she would give him “half a loaf of fresh bread (*tabun*) dipped in olive oil, and a sprinkle of salt.”

My father did not know his paternal grandparents very well: Elias Francis Farah died when my father was three years of age, so Elias must have passed away in 1924. My father’s paternal grandmother was Marta Haddad. The story told in the family is that our last name was originally Nsair,<sup>9</sup> not Farah. My father searched for Elias’s birth certificate at the Catholic church in Shafa ‘Amr, but did not find a document. He explained that perhaps the name Francis was connected to Napoleon Bonaparte’s campaign in Palestine, when a unit stationed itself in Shafa ‘Amr during the siege of Akka (Acre) in 1789. Salah al-Din had also made it a center for his military operations when fighting the Crusaders in 1191. Many of the Palestinian Arab Christians who came to live in Shafa ‘Amr and the Galilee, my father explained, did so during Dahr al-Omar’s period in the eighteenth century because “he did not discriminate against the Palestinian Arab Christians.” Al-Omar had built a castle in the town known to this day as al-Saraya and made Shafa ‘Amr the capital of his emirate in 1761.

Amin Elias Farah, my paternal grandfather, was a trusted figure in Shafa ‘Amr, so much so that Bedouin chiefs in the area kept their money with him for safekeeping, “as if he was their bank.” Having completed only grade 4, he decided to teach himself and acquired many skills and trades. He studied the Qur’an and the Bible and memorized much of these texts. So well-versed was he in the two holy books that he debated Muslim scholars on religious matters, quoting extensively from both. I remember him

as a gentle stoic with a great deal of charisma, and he certainly was a great storyteller. He married twice, the first time when he was perhaps only sixteen to Nazira Marshi from Nazareth who died after giving birth to her first son. Salma Habibi was his second wife.

Amin Elias Farah was also known as a nationalist, although he was never attached to a political party. During the Great Revolt in the late 1930s, rebels would come to him to repair their guns. Among his documents was a copy of a letter written and signed by a number of leading figures in Shafa ‘Amr on 25 March 1925. The signatures included those of my grandfather, Amin Farah, and his brother Salim Farah in support of the “Executive Committee in Jerusalem.” The letter refers to a protest against the deteriorating situation in Palestine resulting from the Balfour Declaration. It describes how the people in Shafa ‘Amr sang patriotic songs, raised black banners, and expressed their readiness to use all means possible to “fight colonialist plans” and save the homeland from the dangers that loomed on the horizon. The letter concluded with a note: “Telegraphs have been sent to the High Commissioner, to Balfour, and Egyptian newspapers” expressing Shafa ‘Amr’s protests and remonstrations. Interestingly, signatures inform us how Shafa ‘Amr society was classified: signatories were positioned according to socioeconomic status or function: landowners, merchants, craftsmen/artisans, farmers, and students. Amin Farah signed under artisan or “industrialist,” while his brother Salim Farah signed under the category of merchant!

My father recounted an anecdote of his father’s:

**Rafiq Farah:** One time, he [Amin Farah] had a talk with Bishop Graham Brown (1891–1942), the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, and during the conversation, my father told the bishop: “If God is British, I will not obey him,” to which the bishop responded: “I was born in China.”

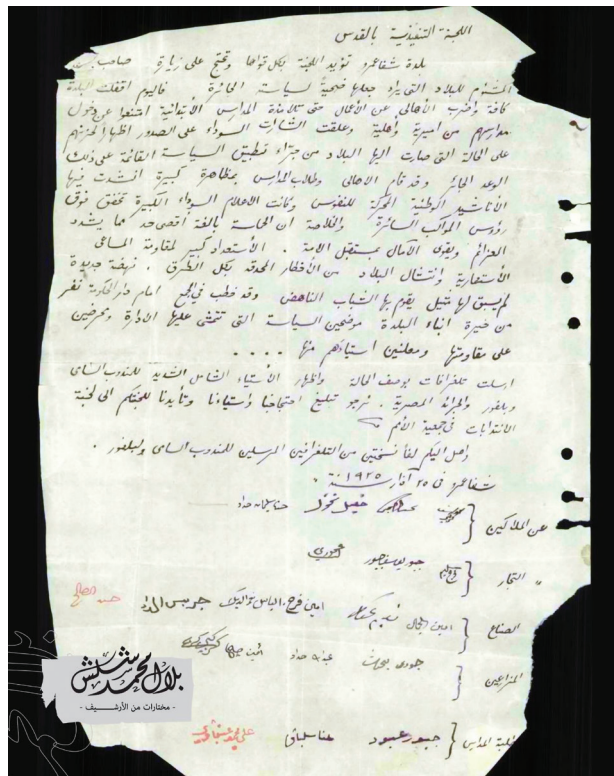


Figure 1. Letter to the Executive Committee in Jerusalem from Shafa ‘Amr Community Leaders, March 1925. Farah family archives.

Like most young men in Bilad al-Sham (Greater Syria)

during the Ottoman period, my grandfather was ordered to the Safar Barlik, the term used for Ottoman conscription of young men to fight in the Balkan wars and on various fronts during WWI. He was sent to Suez, but after a few years managed to leave by convincing a German doctor that he could not carry a gun due to a bad infection in his thumb. He then walked back all the way, from Suez to Shafa ‘Amr.

My father had vivid recollections of the Mandate era in Shafa ‘Amr, and described a raid that he personally witnessed as a young boy:

**Rafiq Farah:** The Mandatory government of Palestine issued [successive] emergency regulations<sup>10</sup> which imposed severe punishment on Palestinian Arabs for any small act such as: possessing a long knife, or a pistol, or cutting telephone lines, or for belonging to a rebel group fighting British centers of government or Jewish settlements. Palestinian collaborators were recruited .... One day when I was 14 years-old, a British army unit came to Shafa ‘Amr and ordered all men 14 years of age and above ... to gather in an area outside the town under the olive trees some kilometers to the west of Shafa ‘Amr. While the men gathered, another army unit was dispatched to their houses to search for anything they defined as “weapons” including long knives. In the process, they threw out home belongings and foodstuffs. Moreover, each of the men gathered had to walk in front of a hooded collaborator, whose face was hidden by a sack with two small holes to look through and identify Palestinian rebels. I remember we remained squatting there for more than three hours. This, I witnessed personally, as I was there among the men of the village under the olive trees .... The Emergency Regulations meant that a person can be brought to a military tribunal with no possibility of him appealing to a civil court; the Military Tribunal could order the demolition of a house, detain someone for any length of time and so on; those regulations were adopted by Israel in 1948.

## **Bishop Gobat School (Madrasat Sayhun)**

My father completed elementary school at the age of 13 in the summer of 1934 in Shafa ‘Amr and along with other boys from the town he was encouraged to attend Bishop Gobat School in Jerusalem. The school had been built by Bishop Samuel Gobat, the second Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem (1846–79) on what is called Jabal Sayhun (Mount Zion), hence the reference to it as Madrasat Sayhun, or Zion School. He was admitted to the seventh grade; he remembered the school gave him an identification number – “53” – which his mother sewed on all his clothing. He was told he was in the “Lions Group,” and there was also an “Eagles Group” and so on, for playing games and gym classes. He also recalled: “When I enrolled at Bishop Gobat School, I remember that in 1936 there was a strike and there was a schism between the Husayni and Nashashibi families. The Nashashibis studied at Bishop Gobat School, while the Husaynis attended St George’s.”

My father was “modernized” at school through a discipline that segmented time and place. It was strict: the boys had to get up at 6 a.m. and began classes at 8 a.m. At 3 p.m. they went to the school’s football field, which was then in the Greek Colony area of Jerusalem. Upon their return, they washed, had supper and immediately went to a study period that ended at 8:30 p.m. for younger students, and 9:00 p.m. for boys in higher classes.

The boys were also disciplined “spiritually.” They had to alternate attending the Arabic-speaking Anglican St. Paul Church one Sunday and the English-speaking Anglican Christ Church near Jaffa Gate on the next. My father remembered that he and the students did not understand or enjoy the service. However, they were utterly amused by Scottish soldiers who had colorful skirts, drums, and bagpipes as they lined up to enter the church.

Amin Elias Farah could only afford to give his son one shilling for the whole term, which he had to share with his two younger brothers. He remembered how the three brothers envied other boys who had food sent from home stored in a school cupboard. As for the less fortunate, they enjoyed the piece of bread the school gave them during recess.

About the time closer to his graduation, he recalled:

**Rafiq Farah:** In the last year, or fourth secondary, Hanna Mudawwar and myself had a room for the two of us ... then the American Friends (Quakers) who ran a school in Ramallah started a training course for high school students who in the summer holidays would teach boys and girls in their villages .... I ran such a program in Shafa ‘Amr for about three weeks, and about fifty boys came.

Upon his graduation in the summer of 1939, the principal gave him a letter recommending him as an honors student to attend the Near East School of Theology (NEST) and the American University of Beirut (AUB). In that year, Britain declared war on Nazi Germany, and its colonial forces in Palestine brutally crushed the Great Revolt.

## **Near East School of Theology (NEST) and the American University of Beirut (AUB)**

About his years in Beirut at AUB during the war, my father recounted:

**Rafiq Farah:** I was born in 1921 and the British Mandate in Palestine officially began in 1922. At the time there was no governmental department to register births. Instead, this was done by each mukhtar or representative of a religious community. Yusif ‘Asfur was the mukhtar of the Protestant Church – as it was called – he gave me a birth certificate ....

I graduated from Bishop Gobat School in 1939 and when I left to Beirut, I took a taxi from Shafa ‘Amr to Haifa, then to ‘Akka, Sur, Sayda, and then



Figure 2. Rafiq Farah’s Palestinian passport and visa to Lebanon from 1946.

Beirut .... I went to Beirut in 1940 and had to sit for the AUB sophomore class exam. In Lebanon the Vichy government was in control ... Once in 1944 I was called by the Vichy security intelligence to explain why my philosophy book had all kinds of drawings .... When Vichy was overthrown by the British, a French government was then established under General de Gaulle whom I used to see from afar on Sundays entering the Roman Catholic cathedral. At the university, I registered for different subjects ... philosophy I liked best. Dr. Charles Malik was head of the Philosophy Department and I enrolled in his course on Plato’s Republic. I wrote a small thesis on Plato’s theory of ideas for which he gave me an A .... In my class were the Orthodox Patriarch Hazim, Ghassan Tweini of *al-Nahar* newspaper, and Majid Fakhry who wrote some books on Aristotle .... World War II ended the summer of 1945 ... and I returned home, sad to leave university and quite vague as to the next phase of my life.

## Ordination: The Last Empty Train to Haifa

**Rafiq Farah:** Upon graduation I returned home to Shafa ‘Amr and after about two months I was asked to go to Jerusalem to prepare for my ordination ... the principal of Bishop Gobat school allowed me to live



in a room occupied by two teachers: Paul Demerjian, a sports teacher, and Kamal Nasser, the Arabic teacher. Paul lives now in Holland. As for Kamal Nasser, he joined the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and lived in Beirut where he was murdered by the Israelis in 1973 ....

After I was ordained, I served in Shafa 'Amr for a year, then was sent to Nablus ... (1946–47). I added two more classes to the elementary school there. ... Violent clashes between Jews and Arabs increased in 1946–47 .... There was a call by some of Haifa's residents to declare Haifa an open city

to save it from armed Zionist attacks .... However, Zionist terrorist groups were determined to pursue their plans to seize more land .... Violence escalated following the 1947 Partition Plan. In Haifa, armed Jews pushed barrels of explosives down from Hadar HaCarmel to Wadi al-Nisnas and areas [Arab areas] which were lower than the Hadar quarters. This caused death and destruction for Palestinian Arabs. Jewish gangs also placed a bomb in the vegetable market in the Arab quarter which killed more than one hundred Palestinians, among them Jiryis Farah, my father's cousin. At the Haifa Refinery, Jewish workers killed Palestinian Arabs who were lining up at the main gate to apply for work. When news spread, the Arab workers retaliated killing Jews there. My brother Sami and the late Sadiq Abbud, who was also a member of St. John's Church in Haifa, escaped the massacre. The British police came and took workers in buses and sent them home. The British were helping the Zionists .... As Britain was preparing to withdraw, General Stockwell agreed to hand their bases in Haifa over to the Jewish militias.

It so happened that in January or February 1948, Reverend Farid Odeh, the pastor of St. John's Church ... left Haifa. The Standing Committee (Executive) of the Church Council of the Evangelical Episcopal community acted quickly .... All other priests found justifications not to go to Haifa, so I was ordained hurriedly and sent there, because I was



Figure 3. Rafiq Farah, top right, at AUB graduation, 1945. Farah family archives.

unmarried and young . . . . I was ordained on Thursday, 4 March 1948, in Nablus since the situation prevented my ordination in St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem. Before I left to Haifa, with only a small bag containing essential clothing, an elderly lady from the Taqtaq family handed me a piece of paper upon which was written Psalm 91, and she said "God will keep you and no danger will harm you."

I took the last empty train to Haifa on 9 March 1948. I did not see anyone on it ... there was no train after that ... When the train arrived at the Haifa station, there was fighting in some quarters of the town ....

The next morning, I contacted the secretary of St. John's Church (Mar Yuhanna), Mr. Dawud Yusif, who ... introduced me to some of the families who remained in the city .... I found most of the church members worried and afraid .... I decided to go about wearing my black cassock so as to identify myself as a priest as a form of protection. But it did not work ... One day, when I went to visit a Palestinian family in the German colony, I heard someone shouting ... "Jasus! Jasus!" (spy). When I entered the house, two Jewish terrorists, I think from the Irgun, entered the house and one pointed a pistol to my forehead, and the other to the back of my head. I did not know any Hebrew then, but fortunately one person there managed to convince those two Jewish terrorists that I am a priest .... On another occasion while I was walking down Share' al-Jabal, or Mountain Road, a bullet from a Jewish sniper whizzed by about two centimeters from my right ear.

## The British Prepare to Leave

**Rafiq Farah:** One morning in early April, I had a telephone call from the British District Commissioner to go see him. When I arrived he said he wanted to give the keys of the Social Welfare food stores belonging to the Mandatory government in Haifa to three persons: Mrs. Clautile Khayyat, the wife of Victor Khayyat, Sami Jaraysi, a social worker in Haifa who became one of our best friends ... and I was the third. Mrs. Khayyat drove a van to take Sami and myself to churches, monasteries, and to the Haifa coast to distribute bread and tins of sardines to people who had fled the fighting ....

On the night of 21 April, the Haganah ... carried out a major armed attack on the Arab quarters of the city. From about seven o'clock in the morning, I saw a stream of people fleeing, some carrying a suitcase, or a bundle of clothes looking for shelter. Many were coming from Wadi al-Salib .... The Haganah began to occupy Arab quarters, and Palestinians fled as the Haganah shot at them to force them out ....

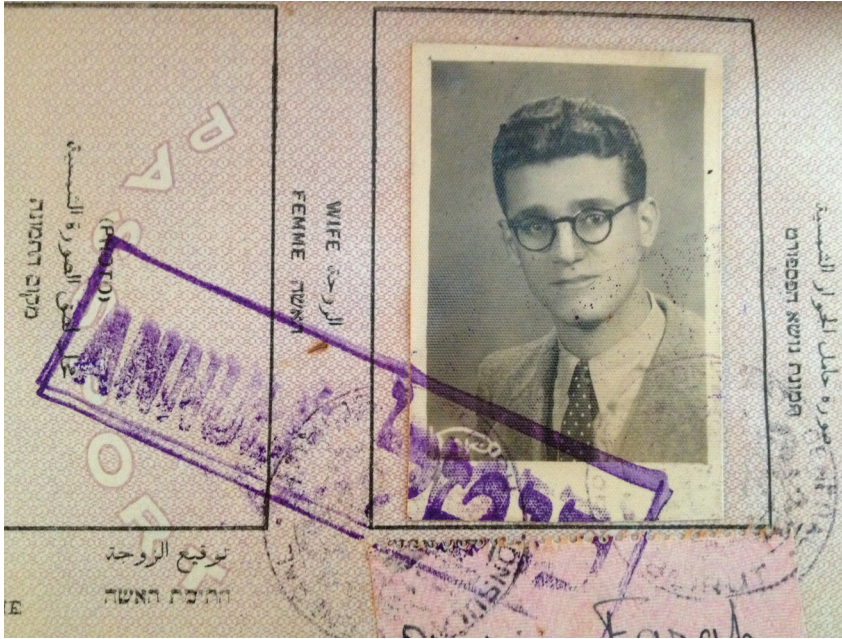


Figure 4. Rafiq Farah's British Mandate Palestinian passport stamped as "botel", the Hebrew word for annulled or voided.

People were distressed, terrified and at a loss ... the Palestinians who lived in the eastern part experienced concentrated bombing and shooting ... the Arabs were not shooting. It was the armed Jews who were attacking .... Many Palestinians came to our St. Luke's Church compound; others went to the Haifa harbor hoping to find a boat to carry them to 'Akka (Acre) or Lebanon. Others took shelter in the compounds of other churches .... Interestingly, a month or so prior to the occupation of Haifa, the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem had agreed with the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem to allow the Armenians of Haifa to take refuge in St. Luke's Church compound. After 1948, two Armenian families became permanent residents there.

Beginning on 22 April 1948, about forty people came to my house, among them Khalil Nasser, my brother-in-law, and Nakhul Nakhul .... After a few days, the British began instigating for Palestinians to leave and prepared an armored vehicle to transport them to Jordan. Among those who left was Khalil Nasser. I was told by several persons employed by the Mandatory government that the British did in fact encourage the Palestinians to leave their homeland. Slowly, people left, some went to Jordan, others took boats towards 'Akka .... I used to have breakfast at the English High School in Haifa, there was a lady called Mariam Rahhal

from Lebanon ... she was the only one who remained in the school .... Towards the end of April and the beginning of May, Palestinians were ordered to register. Lawyers and other figures such as Ilyas Kusa were contacted to communicate the registration requirements to the Palestinians. We first had to submit the British Mandatory passport for identification. Israeli officials then stamped it with the word “*botel*” meaning “annulled” and only then could we get the Israeli passport. In a propaganda campaign ... Ben Gurion came to Haifa and personally handed some leading figures in the city their passports .... Palestinians who did not have a British Mandate passport used birth certificates.

## **The Arab Committee: Nur al-Din al-Abbasi, Father Butrus Fakhuri, Bulus Farah, Rev. Rafiq Farah**

**Rafiq Farah:** Before the end of April of 1948, several of us formed a small committee under the name “The Arab Committee.” The purpose was to help Palestinians in Haifa .... The members were: Nur al-Din al-‘Abbasi, who became a good friend of ours; Father Butrus Fakhuri of the Greek Catholic Church, Bulus Farah, a prominent Communist ... and myself.

The Committee visited two internment camps for Arab detainees: one in Sarafand ... where some members from the Ramla parish were being held, and the other in ‘Atlit .... The detainees included those captured during the war, and some people who managed to return from Lebanon or Jordan ... but were captured by the Israeli army. We gave those in the internment camps some food and sweets. In the Sarafand camp, I saw Bayyuk Bayyuk and his brothers, and in ‘Atlit camp I saw my brother Tawfiq who was caught crossing back into Palestine from Lebanon, where he was studying.

In the first week following the occupation of Haifa, the Israeli authorities declared that all the Palestinian Arabs will be placed under military rule, later using the Emergency Regulations (1950). The Arabs in Haifa were ordered to abandon their homes and reside only in Wadi al-Nisnas, an impoverished neighborhood. They were also ordered not to move about the city during the first few weeks except in Wadi al-Nisnas. If we had to move, we were ordered to obtain a military permit from the police station ... which at the time was near the Carmelite square .... We were also ordered to register our names with the authorities without delay. Some of the prominent Arabs of Haifa who lived in the ‘Abbas quarter, like a few lawyers who had connections ... managed to stay in their homes ....

Soon after the occupation, I managed to get a written permit to visit



Figure 5. The Arab Committee in Haifa, from left, Rev. Rafiq Farah, Nur al-Din al-Abbasi, and Bulus Farah (Father Butrus Fakhuri is absent). Date unknown, c. 1950 to early 1960s.

Wadi al-Nisnas ... I went there, I found all the homes deserted, some of the doors were ajar with all the furniture still there, and the only living creatures I saw were some dogs and cats .... Some of the residents had fled to 'Akka, or Lebanon .... It wasn't long before the Israeli authorities established an office for what they called Custodian for Absentees' Property. Jewish settlers began to occupy the houses that belonged to Palestinian Arabs ... or, entered these houses to steal the furniture and valuables. Some Palestinians asked if I could help them get a written order issued from the Absentee Property office, which stated that no one was allowed to occupy their property or the property of one of their family members who had left the country. I was able to get a few such notices and stuck them on the house doors .... I used to spend long hours in the police station, or in the office of the Custodian for Absentee Property advocating for Palestinian Arab rights and property ....

With the beginning of the summer of 1948, I began visiting 'Akka (Acre) where ... all the Palestinian Arabs were ordered by the military governor to relocate to the Old City. But our church was outside the Old City ... so for a few months, I held services on Sunday afternoons in the home of Philip Hassun, shared also by the family of Michael (Michel) Kawar within the old city ....

I remember one day in 1948 or 1949 an English man came and asked

to interview me about the situation in Palestine. He must have been connected to the British government. I asked my friend Bulus Farah to ... be the main spokesperson .... The British visitor was not very happy with what we said, and since then both the British government and the Israelis began to brand me as the “Red Priest,” and watched me more closely .... I also found out later that the Greek Catholic Archbishop accused me of being “a communist and a trouble-maker!” ....

Bulus Farah was in the Palestine Communist Party but was upset and surprised when the Soviet Union agreed to the Partition Plan, and did not join Rakah [the Israeli Communist Party] but he remained a communist. He was a good friend of ours. After the occupation he owned a bookstore for a while .... The Mapam asked him to join their party but he refused and wanted to stay independent .... Bulus did not join the Society although he supported our work.

## Establishing the Society for Arab Minority Rights in Israel

**Rafiq Farah:** On 21 August 1949, I wrote an article in the Communist Arabic newspaper *al-Ittihad*<sup>11</sup> ... suggesting the formation of a “League for the Defense of Human Rights” open to all Arabs and Jews .... The article created a lot of interest ... in Arab and Jewish circles, mainly from supporters of the Ehud party whose founder was Judah Magnes .... Martin Buber, an Ehud supporter and a Jewish philosopher wrote me a letter dated 8 September 1949,<sup>12</sup> supporting ... the idea of forming a League. The Communist Party also started to contact me .... Rakah was known to manipulate opportunities to appear as the initiator of ideas or activities to gain popularity.... But originally, the Society came about because of the article I published in *al-Ittihad* ....

**Randa Farah:** Do you remember who contacted you?

**Rafiq Farah:** I think it was Hanna Naqqara .... Hanna was a member of the Israeli Communist Party .... We had a meeting in Haifa ... and decided to form the Society for the Defence of Arab Minority Rights .... I was chosen as Chairman of the Society whose membership included Arabs and Jews ... representing different areas of the country, labour unions, and professions. After a while, the Israeli government started to pressure the members of this Society to leave. Among those being pressured were members of government parties, and others unable to withstand the pressure. Those who remained with me in the Society included Nur al-Din al-‘Abbasi, Arab members from Rakah, and the leftists .... I continued to serve in the Society as its chairman until we left Haifa in 1965. The Society became less active after 1963.

## اميركا تحاف من صلح اورورا 1

واشنطن - سوت جيمس جابل اميريكسي هذا الاسبوع على تحفيص ساسة الصلح الاميريكاني لاوروبا حتى ١٩٦٠ مليون دولار لان هذه سوتبولدول (الي محتمل ان تصف) ووافق اجاب على ايقاع هذه المساعدة تأمياً في ٣٠ مارس القادم. وقد عنى الرافيق فلانو ان هذه الصلح قد يترجم لبيع السلع الاميريكاني التي اعدت لثروان وقد اقرها اميريكاني سوت والبالغ ١٥٠٠ مليون دولار.

الاعلان ان الايساط الاميريكاني في اميركا وقد دخل ايها جانب كان شيك واقتات عبرة اسية في الصلح. وقد سبق باع. انما لاقع بعلوفا الحزبة في اورورا ائجاب يفسن ونبودت فشي صباري. انما حراماً من قوتى الصلح الاميريكاني في اورورا الغربية وتزيف من ارجابها الاقتصادية. انما تحاف من ان تستغل ثوبت اورورا هذه الصلح ضد رديتها الحكمة والسياسة الاميريكاني ان تستغل الصلح الحزبية في حربها التهورية القارية.



## الطبقة العاملة الفنلندية تحوّل معركتها

سلكي - بدأ العمال الفنلنديون ماربوا تانياً مابان المظفر ان جليل الجند بامرنا هذه اعنت كانه تهربان من حربها الاميريكاني في اثنان ايام فاعلموا

وقد اشدت طبقة الطبقة العاملة في فنلندا وبنوا وتبنا التهورية في ايامها الجارية. وقد اعتراف لبياب العمل في رومانيا ليدوا وروندا في اوقات الحزبية

هبطت في البورصة البريطانية

الاند - بعد الاثارة البريطانية هذه وقد بلغ سعر الاسعار الاميريكاني التي يواجه اربعة خرافة اربعة في المئة في حوزها في جاب الهنداكة ورونداك. والبريطانيون والاسرائيليين. عند الاثارة في حوزها في جاب الهنداكة ورونداك. والبريطانيون والاسرائيليين.

عند الاثارة في حوزها في جاب الهنداكة ورونداك. والبريطانيون والاسرائيليين.

عند الاثارة في حوزها في جاب الهنداكة ورونداك. والبريطانيون والاسرائيليين.

## المطالعون بعدم عودة اللاجئين يقرن الى لجنة التوفيق طلبين قديمين شهداءهم

١- باله با عيسى... ٢- اشرح با عيسى...

## التنافس الاجنلو اميريكاني في اسرائيل ايضا

حول معامل تكرير وجمعية صداقة

في ايام في اسرائيل الاجنلو المصطفى اندكسرتت عضاة اتحاد العمل في صان في تكسرتت التورون في حيفا. النقيب من اتحادات النقبان الاجنلو اميريكاني في اسرائيل.

في الوقت التي اثنان في حيفا. النقيب من اتحادات النقبان الاجنلو اميريكاني في اسرائيل.

في الوقت التي اثنان في حيفا. النقيب من اتحادات النقبان الاجنلو اميريكاني في اسرائيل.

## اهتمام صربيا فيها هدوس لكل بلد

الحكم ثابت من يخدم على فترة ثمانية وشعب وهه - هر هذه فترة ثمانية

في امعات صربيا الاميريكاني. في الانتخابات المتسخرية المتكررة في صربيا في عدم الاستقرار التام في الحكم التام في صربيا. هدوس لكل بلد.

في امعات صربيا الاميريكاني. في الانتخابات المتسخرية المتكررة في صربيا في عدم الاستقرار التام في الحكم التام في صربيا. هدوس لكل بلد.

## كان الفيتكان دائما ضد حركة التحور

تصعب التوفيق. لم دامع توفيق. لان الشعب الاطرافي في تحوود من الفيتكان حراما تركت الفيتكان التي كانت تظهر في ايطاليا في وقت وآخر.

تصعب التوفيق. لم دامع توفيق. لان الشعب الاطرافي في تحوود من الفيتكان حراما تركت الفيتكان التي كانت تظهر في ايطاليا في وقت وآخر.

## حل اقتراح تأليف حزب عربي في اسرائيل

فلنهدم الحواجز المتصرفة والقومية حتى يسكن البشر على وجه الارض

عاطلة على وجه الارض واحدة في الاخوة البشرية

فلنهدم الحواجز المتصرفة والقومية حتى يسكن البشر على وجه الارض عاطلة على وجه الارض واحدة في الاخوة البشرية

## ماذا وراء الاضطراب العسكري الجديد ومقتل الزعيم في سوريا?

بدا انقلاب عسكري جديد في سوريا اودى بحياة الزعيم وحزبه البربري

بدا انقلاب عسكري جديد في سوريا اودى بحياة الزعيم وحزبه البربري

## مطاف وراه الاضطراب العسكري الجديد ومقتل الزعيم في سوريا?

بدا انقلاب عسكري جديد في سوريا اودى بحياة الزعيم وحزبه البربري

بدا انقلاب عسكري جديد في سوريا اودى بحياة الزعيم وحزبه البربري

## تحتو الخطان يترلق الى الهلالية 1

التيا - اولادهم يترلق بالانقلابات الحكومية المتكسرة الويلية

التيا - اولادهم يترلق بالانقلابات الحكومية المتكسرة الويلية

## مطالعة على اوضاع اسرائيل في عام ١٩٥٩

بدا انقلاب عسكري جديد في سوريا اودى بحياة الزعيم وحزبه البربري

بدا انقلاب عسكري جديد في سوريا اودى بحياة الزعيم وحزبه البربري

## الفرق بين اسرائيل وفرنسا

بدا انقلاب عسكري جديد في سوريا اودى بحياة الزعيم وحزبه البربري

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Figure 6. Rafiq Farah's article in *al-Ittihad*, "Hawla iqtirah ta'lif hizb 'Arabi fi Israyim" [Regarding the proposal to establish an Arab party in Israel], 21 August 1949.

## Working against the Israeli Reign of Terror (1948–66)

**Rafiq Farah:** We fought against the Emergency Regulations, land expropriation, deportations, the nationality law, the law of return, and so on ... the Emergency Regulations were very restrictive .... We sent many letters of protest, held conferences, developed legal documents, published pamphlets, and articles ... we spent many hours in police stations, court hearings, etc. .... We were reacting to the immediate repressive measures.

To give the reader a sense of what some of the Society's documents portray, one, dated 12 December 1955, from Shafiq Dib, the head of the city council of the town of al-Ramah, to the Israeli army's chief of staff, protests against declaring large swathes of the town's land as closed areas, including an area of 6,000 dunums, arguing there were no other agricultural or pasture land areas for the town. Another document details the terrible conditions of many who were ordered into exile within historic Palestine, such as Sulayman Zurayk from 'Ilabun who was late returning to Jaffa (his place of exile) because he was ill. The Military Government ordered his imprisonment for four months, although two doctors testified to his illness.

This heartless Israeli repression was unleashed at a time when the Palestinian Arabs were still traumatized by the massive 1948 uprooting and expulsion: they were leaderless, and many were still mourning the death or exile of loved ones. Most had abruptly lost their sources of livelihood, and others were internally displaced. The latter were given an Orwellian term – the “Present Absentees” – although physically present, they were “absent” in the Israeli legal edifice and prohibited from returning to their homes.

Although the Palestinian survivors remained on their ancestral homeland, the political nexus around them shifted so radically that they were transformed overnight into the undesirable, inferior, and punishable outsiders. Moreover, there was no mass revolutionary movement they could join, no effective political leaders, or any meaningful support from the Arab world. It was in this suffocating environment that my father suggested creating a “League for the Defense of Human Rights,” emphasizing the “human” as the essential subject of rights. He argued against limiting the league to the defense of *Arab* human rights, not only because human rights were universal by definition, but to avoid the Israeli state repression should their activities be seen as limited to Arabs.

It is also important to bear in mind that the proposal to establish a league to defend human rights occurred in August 1949, less than a year following the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (10 December 1948). This indicates that the Palestinians were becoming familiar with the new world order that followed WWII, including the Universal Declaration, which was considered a revolution in international law. My father was appealing to this new principle, which was premised on the idea that individuals could henceforth obtain protection *from* the



P.O. B 451

Prof. M. Buber,  
Talbieh,  
Jerusalem.

September 8th, 1949.

*recd.  
Sept. 14th.*

The Rev. Tewfeeq Farah,  
St. Luke's Church,  
Wadi Nisnas,  
Haifa.

Dear Mr. Farah,

I read with great interest your article advocating the establishment of a "League for the rights of Man" in Israel, which was kindly translated to me by Mr. G. Stern. My friends and I wholeheartedly agree with you in that all men of good will, Arabs, Jews and others, regardless of their religious and political convictions, should join forces in the defence of justice and equality for all.

As to the very serious problem of equal rights and opportunities for our Arab co-citizens, we look upon it not as a question of those immediately concerned, but as a problem of the State of Israel as a whole. Indeed, we see in it a Jewish question, since we are deeply convinced that one of the pillars of our very existence as Jews, is the establishment of just and peaceful relations with our neighbours.

I understand that joint efforts are now being made at Haifa for a revival of the "League for the Rights of Man". You may rest assured that my friends and I will gladly partake of any steps that will be undertaken in that direction.

Sincerely yours

*Martin Buber*  
M. Buber

Figure 7. Martin Buber's letter of 8 September 1949, reacting to Rev. Farah's article.

state. During our conversations, my father explained that for Palestinians both their human rights and their collective rights to self-determination had been and remain violated.

When I asked my father about Buber, he said that although he was ultimately a liberal Zionist, in the context of the time, a critical Jewish voice such as his added weight in supporting Palestinian demands. Indeed, the judicial arena is sometimes one of the few avenues to resist a settler-colonial state. We see this with indigenous struggles across the world where land claims and other rights are being demanded in courts. This does not preclude other forms of resistance, but during certain historical periods, it looms as more critical than others. The Society, through its lawyers, appealed

to Israel's own laws and its (false) public declarations and claims to democracy to oppose the Emergency Laws and their ruinous effects on Palestinian society.

My father, however, was also a universalist, which was another reason that he called for "human rights" and did not specify a national or religious group. For him, one needed a moral and ethical code upon which to build a durable political and social order, and that meant universal principles. In this sense, he was a Palestinian renaissance man. Over the years, he became less religious and more spiritual, more of a Sufi and a mystic than a priest. He abhorred fundamentalism or any worldview that closed the path to questioning. He called for breaking down barriers and borders, without compromising on collective struggles for liberation, justice, and freedom. It is thus not surprising that alongside my mother, their lifetime commitment was to work for social justice and from within the churches fought against Christian Zionism, which they viewed as poisonous propaganda to facilitate Zionist colonization in Palestine.

## The Society's Activities and Achievements

The Society was formed in 1951, and in 1953 its members were: Rev. Rafiq Farah, president/chairman; Jamil Khoury, lawyer; Hanna Naqqara, lawyer and secretary of the Society representing Rakah; Nur al-Din al-Abbasi, treasurer; Kurt Gruneman (a dentist); Yanni Yanni, Palestinian Arab mayor of Kufr Yasif; Eliazar Beiri, editor of *al-Mirsad* newspaper; Rustum Bastoni, Knesset member; Tsella Erem, Haifa Municipality member; Salim Jubran, Israeli Labor Union member; Samuel Cohen, secretary of the Committee for the Defense of the Human Being and the Citizen; Muhammad Abdel Qader Yunes, lawyer; Gabriel Stern, journalist, *Al Hamishmar*; Salim al-Qassem, secretary for the executive committee, Labor Union in Nazareth; Hanna Moeis, Orthodox Church Council, al-Rameh; Abdel Majid al-Zu'bi, member, executive committee, Israeli Labor Union; 'Uthman Abu Ras, representative of the workers and farmers in al-Tayba.

**Randa Farah:** How successful was the Society?

**Rafiq Farah:** We did not win most cases, but at least we restrained the state a little.

**Randa Farah:** What about al-'Ard movement (Land Movement)?

**Rafiq Farah:** It had not yet been established as a movement; it was founded later by Habib Qahwaji. At the time, in that early phase, we were focused on how to deal with military rule ... how to protect the land.

One of the letters I include here (fig. 8), signed by my father and the two lawyers Hanna Naqqara and Jamil Khoury, calls for equal rights between Arabs and Jews. But it also specifically speaks against *national oppression*, and *racial* discrimination revealing that the Society was uncompromising on the Palestinian national question, even if this was not always declared so clearly and publicly.

SOCIETY FOR THE DEFENCE OF ARAB MINORITY RIGHTS

IN ISRAEL .

P.O.B. 1866 , Haifa.

Haifa 20/ 9/ 1953.

Dear Friend,

Our Society was established a year and a half ago for the purpose of defending the rights of the Arab minority in Israel and insuring their equality with their Jewish brethren through lawful activities.

Our Society was constituted <sup>on</sup> a non party basis by Jews and Arabs who firmly believe in Jewish Arab understanding and friendship without reservation or condition.

Our Society largely contributed to the defence of Arab minority rights . It strove to amend the racial Israel citizenship law which deprived a considerable number of Arab citizens of their citizenship . It aroused public opinion against Land Expropriation Law which robs Arab land owners and fellahin of their best holdings reaching into thousands of dunums . Consequently it organised delegations, public meetings and work-stoppage in protest against these government arbitrary measures . Moreover it demanded the abrogation of poll tax and agitated for municipal and local council election in town and villages populated by Arab citizens . It was furthermore issued manifestos and convened press conferences . Naturally it hopes to consistently and persistently continue these activities until the national oppression policies and racial discrimination is ended . . .

military rule, the revocation

Now at a time when the government is accelerating its pressure and adding severity in the dealings with Arab citizens at a time when the wave of national oppression is gaining momentum, expressing itself in banishing tens of Arab villagers to distant places ; demolishing their homes; rendering them destitute; aggressively barricading their villages and terrorisingly searching them , a policy leading to pulling down Arab Society .

In view of this danger our Society more than any time in the past , strongly feels responsible to preserve the Arab minority in Israel which forms a bridge head of arab jewish friendship in the Middle East .

In order to carry out its tasks on a wider scale our Society needs your moral and materiel support . We appeal to you to send your gracious financial contributions at your earliest .

The future moves in our direction - the direction of Jewish Arab friendship .

SECRETARY

SECRETARY CHAIRMAN

H.D. Nalshara, J. Khoury, Rafiq Farah

Treasurer , Society for the Defence of Arab Minority Rights, P.O.B. 1866 Haifa.

Dear Sir,

In response to your appeal for financial aid in support of your Society , I send herewith a sum of ..... and undertake to pay a monthly contribution of .....

Address

Yours faithfully

Figure 8. Letter distributed on behalf of the Society signed by Rev. Rafiq Farah, Hanna Naqqara, and Jamil Khoury calling for support.

Cooptation of Palestinians was another Israeli state strategy to quell resistance. My father recounted how a member<sup>13</sup> in the Anglican Congregation had planned to convince the church council to agree to the idea of “transfer.”<sup>14</sup> However, the plan was divulged and in a 17 January 1951 meeting at St. John’s Church, my father and those who found out about it exposed the person and the plot to the local church committee. My father remembered how “all of us church members were extremely distressed and angry.” The plan was to transfer the community to Brazil, and the incentive was to financially compensate the church and each individual member. In an angry response, the church members wrote to the executive committee of the church council rejecting the plan and to permanently close this subject. Thus, the transfer plan of the Palestinian Anglican community to Brazil was foiled. My father was also active in advancing education for Palestinian Arabs.

## **St. John’s School, Haifa**

**Rafiq Farah:** In 1950, I decided to re-open St. John’s school that was closed in 1947 because of the dangerous situation in Palestine. I developed it because the Palestinian Arabs needed a supportive Arab environment. In the Israeli schools, students were discriminated against and taught to be pro-Israeli .... I contacted Mrs. Theodora Zarifa and asked her to act as headmistress. On 20 September 1950, the school was opened with twenty-one children. I formed a school committee and we added more classes. By 1965, the school went up to grade seven and had about 250 boys and girls. We used student fees to help improve the school – the building belonged to the church. Classes began in small rooms, then I built more classrooms above the pharmacy .... Among those I hired was Wajih ‘Awad, ‘Izzat ‘Awayyid from Nazareth, and Edward Khamis for sports. I sent both Wajih and Edward to the UK for a year for more training.

As expected, the Israeli government was not happy with what I did and with the school. I brought schoolbooks from Lebanon .... Ben Orr used to come and examine the school and he did not like the fact that we didn’t teach pro-Israeli curricula. One day he threatened me: “The Israeli Security warns you, because you are against Israel ....” I was the head of the school, until we left Haifa (1965). Sulayman Qatran established the Orthodox school in Haifa. Hanna Abu Hanna, your aunt’s husband, was its principal for a number of years. When students completed St. John’s school which went up to grade seven, we used to send them to the Orthodox school.



Figure 9. My father with St. John's teachers on a picnic, early 1960s. (On left) Rafiq Farah and Edward Khamis; of others identified, Hanan As'ad and 'Izzat 'Awayyid (on right).

## *Al-Ra'ed* Journal

**Rafiq Farah:** In 1951, we began publishing the church magazine, which we named *Akhbar al-Kanasiyya* or Church News. However, I wanted to expand its readership and include articles not related to the church. Your mother and I then established a journal called *al-Ra'ed*, meaning "The Pioneer." *Al-Ra'ed* became popular, Bulus Farah wrote a monthly article in it.

**Randa Farah:** Where did you print it?

**Rafiq Farah:** We used to print it at the Rakah office. I managed to get paper from Norway. In addition, there was a British academic who helped finance it. If I am not mistaken, her name was Ms. Henry ... she was interested in the Sufi movement. Every now and then she would send us money from England.

In 1953, I published an article in *al-Ra'ed* by Dr. Simon Shereshevsky, in which he criticized a new Israeli law which allowed the state to expropriate Arab-owned land. In his article, he used the story in the Old Testament about King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, who seized a piece of land belonging to a poor farmer called Nabut, and then killed him (Kings, ch. 21 ). The story, as Shereshevsky wrote, applied to what the Israeli government was doing to its Arab citizens. His article had a huge impact.

## Israel's Murder of Three Palestinian Teenagers, 1961

On 17 September 1961, three youths from Haifa, Raymun Yusif Marun, aged 17, George Salim Shama, aged 17, and Jiryis Badin, aged 16, were killed by Israeli security guards while they were attempting to cross the border into Egypt and their bodies were mutilated.

Bulus Farah and my father wrote a pamphlet protesting the murder which they distributed among the Arab population. Also a petition was circulated and signed by hundreds of people from Haifa. My father noted that, "Rakah, typically, was not very happy that we took the initiative before they did." A wave of anger and sorrow swept over the Palestinian Arabs and some Jewish supporters, calling for a judicial commission of inquiry into the circumstances and the punishment of those who unjustly murdered youths who had no weapons on them.

My father, who headed the funeral march alongside Nur al-Din al-Abbasi, recalled:

**Rafiq Farah:** I headed the Committee for Haifa's Victims (*Lajnat dahaya Hayfa*) dealing with this horrible crime. Nur al-Din al-'Abbasi and myself were called to the police station and warned that no "trouble" is allowed during the funeral .... I was at the head of the funeral procession and with me was Nur al-Din.

Aba Hushi (a Polish Jew whose original name was Abba Schneller) was from Mapai, Ben Gurion's party .... As Nur al-Din and I led the protest to church, Aba Hushi came and brought an armed unit with him. He sat on a chair to watch us ... a line of helmeted police were standing at the side of the road leading to Mar Elias Greek Catholic Church, where the funeral of the three youths took place. One of the mothers of the murdered youth wanted me to see the body .... The situation was very tragic ... the three young men were from Haifa, one Muslim and two Christians .... We walked from the house in Wadi al-Nisnas down Share' al-Jabal to the Catholic church at the end of the street .... there were many people in the march.

On this occasion, the *Jerusalem Post* (17 September 1961) published an article noting that the Committee of 13 included Antoine Marun, one of the victim's brothers, Hanna Naqqara, Ilyas Kusa, and my father, the chairman, who, according to the *Jerusalem Post* "occasionally sends appeals to international and foreign bodies on local Arab matters." The article (see fig. 10) noted that the Arabs are calling for an "Enquiry Commission" and for a "legal way open to them" to ask the coroner to open an investigation. This points out how important legal arguments were to the Palestinian Arabs. Even when they did not bring the results they sought, it became a means to raise political and legal awareness in the Arab community and beyond.

## Conclusions

One day, not long before his death, my father said, “I became truly ‘aware’ just in the last few years of my life,” referring to the theological and worldly questions that led him to free himself from old rigid traditions and ideas. Over time, he changed his views about religion, politics, and society. In some way, he did become the “red” priest he was accused of being, by those who sought to silence his political activism in the early years. But this change was largely due to fact that the world around him was changing too, and radically so in Palestine. Poignantly, Zionism used the Bible he was preaching to justify colonial dispossession and displacement. This was sufficient motivation for him to reject its literal interpretation and shun biblical Zionism and fundamentalism; instead, he sought liberation theology focusing on ending human suffering in this world, more so than in an imagined other. This, expectedly, resulted in many “traditionalists” and the Church establishment to view him as a rebel of sorts.

This is but one of the conclusions one may draw from his life history, but the narrative allows for other ideas and for further questioning. The first deals directly with the Society and here one may question to what extent and under what conditions can legal battles lead to justice in settler-colonial states, or do they merely provide false hope? What comparisons may be made between the Palestinian struggles in Israeli courts against land confiscation with indigenous land claims in North America and elsewhere? Are western legal venues useful or do they operate inseparably from the political realm to support state claims against individual and collective indigenous rights, meanwhile offering a false veneer of democracy to these states?

A second area of research deals with Palestinian Arab and Jewish relations from 1948 through the early 1950s. One question that his life history raised was the extent to which Palestinian legal battles and protests rattled the liberal senses of figures like Martin Buber, who could never completely shed his Zionism but wavered between supporting the “Jewish state” or the “Rights of Man,” as he shows in his letter to my father. In this context, my father’s *al-Ittihad* article and other documents I examined revealed two interesting points: the first shows Palestinian awareness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,<sup>15</sup> and its emphasis on the universal applicability of rights that carried with it significant moral weight against exclusivist ideas. The second is that oral narratives and documents can give us a glimpse about the genesis of Palestinian nationalism, and, uniquely, the fissures and views within as to what kind of “nation-society” is imagined for the future: is it chauvinistic or romantic nationalism based on the idea of purity (*jus sanguinis*), or a civic society underpinned by principles of cosmopolitanism, universality, and diversity?

A third area gleaned from the oral narrative pertains to rural-urban relations and socioeconomic shifts. My father’s childhood recollections, for example, are filled with images of the land, olive and fruit trees, and the rural hinterland landscapes. However, my father was born only four years after the Ottoman Empire crumbled and its traces had not vanished in Palestine. Shafa ‘Amr by then was more of a town than a typical Palestinian village, and boasted a market and trade, a diverse

population (Muslims, Christians, and Druze), small business ventures, craftsmen, and “industrialists.” The Shafa ‘Amr protest letter signed in 1925 gives us a clue about the town’s social structure: signatories were clustered under categories: landowners, merchants, industrialists, and students, who were already leaving the town to study in larger urban centers. In his oral narrative, my father compared Shafa ‘Amr to the larger cities he lived in, like Haifa and Beirut, and on that scale it appeared in his imagination as a small village.

Finally, his efforts to develop schools were part of the battles waged by Palestinians to obtain education and to learn how to maneuver to function under a state that discriminated against them in all areas of life, and suppressed the history of the land and its people. I can still see my father standing on a flimsy wooden stage built for the end of year celebrations in St. John’s school, proudly speaking about its Palestinian-Arab teachers and students, and the latest improvements made to the school and classrooms.<sup>16</sup> As children and despite the repressive political atmosphere, we relished the occasion to dance and sing on the school stage. I can still hear his calming voice in a turbulent world.

*Randa Farah is an anthropologist and associate professor at Western University in Canada. She is also an adjunct faculty member at the Centre for Global Studies, Huron University College.*

#### Endnotes

- 1 See, for example Salim Tamari, *Year of the Locust: A Soldier’s Diary and the Erasure of Palestine’s Ottoman Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). Also, Salim Tamari, Issam Nassar, and Wasif Jawhariyah, eds., *The Storyteller of Jerusalem: The Life and Times of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1904–1948* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Olive Branch Press, 2014).
- 2 In this article, the author draws on interviews she conducted (both audio and video) over more than six years; however, the quotes used here are Rafiq Farah’s recollections in interviews conducted in December 2019, video-recorded and transcribed by the author.
- 3 In Ilan Pappé’s book titled *The Forgotten Palestinians*, I noted that he mistakenly named Bulus Farah, instead of my father, as the chairman or president of the Society. During an email exchange, Pappé noted that he may have used documents that confused my father with Bulus because, although they are not related, they share the same family name.
- 4 The author plans a more comprehensive article that will analyze the struggles and transformations in Haifa at the time, based on Rafiq Farah’s documents dating from the early 1940s to the 1960s in Haifa.
- 5 According to John Reynolds (Adalah’s newsletter, vol.104, May 2013), the 1945 British Mandate Defence (Emergency) Regulations granted broad emergency powers to the executive and military authorities. Although opposed by Palestinian Arabs and a few Jewish-Israeli judges, legal experts, and religious figures, the British regulations were incorporated into the Israeli legal system and became the legal basis for control of Palestinian Arab regions within Israel, who lived under military rule until 1966; they were used against the Palestinian population of the occupied territories from 1967 onwards. Reynolds notes that the Mandatory regulations are but one element of Israel’s expansive emergency legal regime and that “Israel stands out as the exemplar of “permanent emergency.”



- 6 See online: The Discriminatory Laws Database compiled by The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel (Adalah), online at [www.adalah.org/en/content/view/7771](http://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/7771) (accessed 7 March 2021).
- 7 Although the struggle to appoint an Arab bishop had begun much earlier, it was not until 1958 that an Arab Bishop (Reverend Najib Cubain) was officially appointed as Bishop of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, while Bishop Campbell MaCinnes was appointed as Archbishop of the Jerusalem Diocese.
- 8 They are also Emile Habibi's grandparents, Emile was my father's first cousin.
- 9 Also written as Nseir, Nsayr, or Nusayr.
- 10 As Reynolds explains, the British Defence (Emergency) Regulations of 1945 were but the last version of the Mandatory emergency codes deployed to repress Palestinian resistance. Earlier versions included: the Palestine (Defence) Order in Council 1931; the Palestine Martial Law (Defence) Order in Council 1936; the Emergency Regulations 1936; the Palestine (Defence) Order in Council 1937; the Defence (Military Courts) Regulation 1937; the Defence (Military Commanders) Regulations 1938; and the Defence Regulations 1939. The Defence (Emergency) Regulations 1945 were a more comprehensive form. John Reynolds, "Repressive Inclusion," *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 49, no. 3 (2017): 268–93.
- 11 Rafiq Farah, "Hawla iqtirah ta'lif hizb 'Arabi fi Israyil: Falnahdem al-hawajiz al-'unsuriyya wa al-qawmiyya hatta yaskun al-bashar 'ala wajh al-'ard 'aila bashariyya wahida fi al-ukhuwwa al-bashariyya" [Regarding the proposal to establish an Arab party in Israel: Let us dismantle the racial and national barriers so that people may live as one family and in human comradeship], *al-Ittihad*, 21 August 1949, online at [www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/alittihad/1949/08/21/01/?&e=-----en-20--1--img-txIN%7ctxTI-----](http://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/alittihad/1949/08/21/01/?&e=-----en-20--1--img-txIN%7ctxTI-----) (accessed 3 January 2021).
- 12 Buber mistakenly addressed my father by his brother's first name Tawfiq, instead of Rafiq.
- 13 The author prefers to keep him unidentified here.
- 14 For more on transfer plans, see Nur Masalha's *The Politics of Denial: Israel and the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (London: Pluto Press, 2003).
- 15 Interestingly, Buber wrote about the "Rights of Man" and my father about the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," two different though related historical documents. The former is from the late eighteenth century and the French Revolution, while the latter emerged in the aftermath of World War II, when the principle of universality was more firmly established.
- 16 The Israeli state provided very limited financial support for Palestinian educational institutions, or for any other institutions, and continues to deny assistance to develop Arab villages or neighborhoods within Israel.