



The ICRC and the Detention of Palestinian Civilians in Israel's 1948 POW/Labor Camps

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The internment of thousands of Palestinian civilians in Israeli-run prisoner of war camps is a relatively little known episode in the 1948 war. This article begins to piece together the story from the dual perspective of the former civilian internees and of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Aside from the day-to-day treatment of the internees, ICRC reports focused on the legal and humanitarian implications of civilian internment and on Israel's resort to forced labor to support its war effort. Most of the 5,000 or so Palestinian civilians held in four official camps were reduced to conditions described by one ICRC official as "slavery" and then expelled from the country at the end of the war. Notwithstanding their shortcoming, the ICRC records constitute an important contribution to the story of these prisoners and also expose the organization's ineffectiveness—absent a legal framework as well as enforcement mechanisms beyond moral persuasion, the ICRC could do little to intervene on behalf of the internees.

IN JUNE 1948, several weeks after the outbreak of the first Arab-Israeli war, Jacques de Reynier, the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) mission in Palestine, sent his fourth monthly report to Red Cross headquarters in Geneva. The report described the delegation's work in caring for the victims of the conflict, ensuring the protection of humanitarian institutions, coordinating the delivery of emergency assistance, and monitoring the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs). De Reynier also drew attention to an issue with which the Red Cross would struggle for the rest of the 1948–49 war, namely, the capture and internment of Palestinian civilians in POW camps. Subsequent reports indicated that the majority of these civilian internees were being used as slave labor to help support Israel's wartime economy.

Israel's capture and internment of thousands of Palestinian civilians as forced laborers is a relatively little known episode in the 1948 war. While contemporary accounts of the war usually include some reference to the detention of combatants, few make reference to the parallel and much larger phenomenon of civilian internment. Israel's use of Palestinian civilian internees to support its wartime economy, moreover, is rarely discussed in the literature on the 1948 war.¹ This article begins to piece together the story from the two perspectives of the ICRC and former civilian internees.

The ICRC and the 1948 War in Palestine: Beginnings

On 16 May 1947, the day after the UN General Assembly (UNGA) approved the establishment of a UN Special Committee on Palestine to investigate and submit proposals relating to the country's future, the ICRC announced its intention to send an exploratory mission to Palestine. The quarter century of British Mandatory rule, which had the avowed intention of establishing a "Jewish national home" in Palestine, from the outset was bitterly contested by the country's Arab majority. The resulting strife, intermittent in the first decades, steadily increased after London declared its resolve to withdraw and transfer responsibility for the country's fate to the United Nations.

The first ICRC delegation left Palestine without a firm commitment from the British authorities concerning a future role, but in December 1947, following the adoption of the UN partition plan (UNGA Res. 181) on 29 November 1947, the committee decided to send a second delegation.² By that time, full-scale war was all but certain, and already the casualties from the emerging civil conflict had caused British officials in Palestine to seek Red Cross assistance in maintaining government-run hospitals.³

In early 1948, the second ICRC delegation to Palestine, comprising de Reynier, Jean Munier, and Roland Marti, began to investigate the situation on the ground and prepare recommendations for Red Cross intervention as a neutral intermediary. Specifically, the delegation proposed setting up a mission in Palestine by 1 April 1948 that would consist of eighteen Swiss nationals (eight delegates and ten nurses).⁴ Its purpose was to ensure that international humanitarian law be applied to all victims of the conflict, to protect institutions engaged in humanitarian work, and to generate and coordinate the distribution of emergency assistance. The ICRC subsequently received both British and UN approval to operate in Palestine, enabling it to perform its traditional wartime duties from mid-April 1948⁵ until the last of the four armistice agreements between Israel and Arab states was signed in July 1949. After that date, the ICRC resumed its peacetime activities such as assisting the refugees now outside the new state as well as the so-called infiltrators attempting to cross cease-fire lines to reach their homes and fields.

Besides the desire to carry out its traditional mandate of assisting victims of war, the ICRC had another important motive in pressing for the establishment of a mission in Palestine. According to Forsythe and Rieffer-Flanagan, after World War II "there was a real question whether the ICRC would survive. The organization [thus] sought to use [the] conflict [in Palestine] . . . also to prove to the world that it was still a viable institution."⁶ Junod adds that Red Cross officials believed that the committee's neutral intervention would enable it to further develop principles and practices relating to the protection of civilians under international humanitarian law, notably in setting a precedent for ICRC intervention in situations of civil war and with regard to protecting civilian populations.⁷

As the conflict in Palestine was heating up in the wake of World War II, treaties governing the conduct of war consisted of the 1907 Hague Regulations, which prohibited deportation from occupied territory, and the 1929 Geneva Convention, which called for the repatriation of POWs following the cessation of hostilities. Neither of these adequately addressed the issue that would arise in the fighting to come: the treatment of civilian noncombatants in conquered territory. The Red Cross, as guardian of the Geneva Conventions, was well aware of the inadequacies of the existing international instruments in situations involving civilians, and it had been keen to update

the 1929 convention almost since its ratification. Indeed, a draft convention on the treatment of enemy civilians both in the territory of a belligerent and in territory occupied by a belligerent had been signed in 1934, but with the storm clouds of war already gathering in Europe, its ratification was postponed and it never entered into force.⁸

Thus, no sooner had the 1945 armistice been signed than the ICRC, which had attributed its failure to adequately protect civilians during World War II at least partly to the absence of a legal framework allowing it to intervene on their behalf, renewed its efforts to convene a new international conference aimed at extending the application of international humanitarian law to the treatment of civilians and situations of civil/internal war. The Conference of Government Experts for the Study of Conventions for the Protection of War Victims duly opened in Geneva under ICRC auspices in April 1947 (about the same time that the ICRC was exploring the possibility of a mission to Palestine). But whereas the conference participants agreed on the goals envisaged,⁹ the new conventions were not ratified until after the Palestine war was over. In such a situation, the ICRC had to face the reality that without “the formal commitment of the parties to apply [international humanitarian law to civilians] during the events in Palestine, the *principles* of the Geneva Convention of 1929 would remain a figment of the imagination [with] no practical effect.”¹⁰

The ICRC sought to make up for these lacunae in its 12 March 1948 appeal addressed to the Jewish Agency (JA) and the Arab Higher Committee (AHC), the bodies representing the two sides in the Palestine conflict. The ICRC appeal, entitled “Application in Palestine of the Principles of the Geneva Conventions” and issued in Arabic, Hebrew, and English, called on both parties “to act in obedience to the traditional rules of international law, and to apply . . . the *principles* embodied in the [two conventions¹¹] signed at Geneva on 27 July 1929.”¹² Specifically, the ICRC appeal called upon the Arab and Jewish sides to respect the “spirit” of the 1929 convention, which included “security for all non-combatants, especially, women, children and the aged.”¹³

In early April 1948, both the JA and the AHC agreed to comply with the ICRC’s appeal.¹⁴ Significantly, however, the JA tempered its agreement with a crucial proviso: the Zionist forces would protect the civilian population only “to the extent that the [1929 Geneva] Conventions appli[ed] to civilians.”¹⁵ It hardly bears mention that the JA was entirely conversant with the conventions’ inadequacies with regard to civilian protection,¹⁶ and on 3 April 1948, the very same day that the JA accepted the ICRC appeal, the Zionist paramilitary organization, the Haganah, launched Plan Dalet, the military blueprint for the conquest of Palestine through the large-scale expulsion of the civilian population. Indeed, within a week, on 9 April, the Zionist terrorist organization Irgun Zevai Leumi, backed by the “official” Haganah, carried out its infamous massacre in the Palestinian village of Dayr Yasin on the western outskirts of Jerusalem, generating the widespread panic that contributed to the mass displacement of Palestinian civilians in its wake. De Reynier visited the site himself,¹⁷ and on 13 April lodged an official protest with the JA for the “clear violation of the spirit and letter of the Geneva Conventions.”¹⁸ Despite this inauspicious start, the ICRC believed that it had obtained an effective legal framework regulating its intervention in Palestine.

The understandings embodied in the first Red Cross appeal, however, were rendered obsolete by the outbreak of the “international conflict” on 15 May 1948, when the regular armies of the surrounding Arab countries, acting on behalf of the Palestinian Arab population, entered

Palestine, mainly the areas that the UN had designated for the future Arab state. Compelled to adapt its legal framework as a result, the ICRC launched a second appeal on 24 May 1948 calling on the belligerents to comply with the key principles of the [1929] Geneva Conventions relevant to situations of international conflict.¹⁹ Besides the treatment of sick and wounded combatants, these conventions also addressed the treatment of POWs. The League of Arab States and the newly established State of Israel both responded positively to the ICRC appeal, on 26 and 27 May respectively.²⁰ While few of the belligerents had ratified the 1929 convention,²¹ by 1948 they had achieved the status of customary law and were thus binding on all belligerents.²²

A BRIEF NOTE ON SOURCES

The most important source of information for this study is approximately five hundred pages of ICRC files covering the 1948 war in Palestine.²³ These files became accessible only in 1996, when the ICRC adopted new access rules in response to the “exceptional public interest” in the organization’s century-old role in conflicts around the world.²⁴ The pages reviewed by the authors, copied in 1999 and by no means complete, were generally selected to trace correspondence relating to POWs and violations of the 1929 Geneva Conventions. They include field visit reports, correspondence with third parties (e.g., local authorities), and monthly reports from the ICRC Palestine delegation, mainly those of mission chief Jacques de Reynier to the Geneva headquarters. A typical monthly report includes (1) the general situation, (2) activities of the delegates, (3) POWs, (4) civilians, (5) medical issues, (6) relations with the authorities, (7) needed supplies, and (8) conclusions. The field reports, by contrast, cover such items as the registration of POWs, preparation of POW lists, the receipt of letters and parcels, the health of detainees, their treatment, the quality of food and shelter, camp discipline, and work. The ICRC delegates visited Israel’s four official POW camps on a regular basis, but there is no comprehensive information on the number of visits to each.²⁵ The documents are primarily in French.²⁶

This article also draws on interviews with twenty-one former Palestinian civilian detainees: nine interviews conducted by the authors in 2002 and twelve additional interviews conducted by others. Such testimonies are essential for providing the kind of detail about day-to-day conditions and treatment in the official POW labor camps rarely visible to the ICRC delegates, whose visits were prearranged. These firsthand accounts, which also afford a window on the horrific unofficial camps to which the ICRC had no access, are thus invaluable for filling out the story and give the ICRC reports a human face.

The Capture and Internment of Palestinian Civilians

The establishment of the ICRC’s mission in Palestine in early April 1948 coincided almost exactly with the Haganah’s launch of Plan Dalet, the Israeli high command’s plan for the wholesale eviction of Palestinians and destruction of Palestinian villages in areas allocated by the UN partition plan to the Jewish state and beyond.²⁷ From then until Israel’s unilateral declaration of statehood on 14 May 1948, most of the major Palestinian and “mixed” towns (i.e., Haifa, Jaffa, Bisan, and Tiberias),²⁸ along with some two hundred Palestinian villages (including all those in the Jerusalem corridor west of the city), had fallen despite often fierce resistance. During this

period between April and mid-May 1948, well over two hundred thousand Palestinians had already been driven from their homes, mainly across the UN partition lines to the UN-proposed Arab state or to neighboring countries.

Prior to Israel's establishment, there were relatively few captives. As Ilan Pappé has noted, the Zionist leadership had concluded early on that forcible expulsion of the civilian population was the only way to establish a Jewish state in Palestine with a large enough Jewish majority (which Ben-Gurion estimated at "80 to 90 percent of Mandatory Palestine") to be "viable."²⁹ The focus, therefore, was on driving Palestinians out directly or on "encouraging" them to leave. A routine procedure in the defeated villages in the early period was to separate out the remaining women, children, and elderly and send them on their way while interrogating the men to extract information, after which some might be shot, others taken hostage, but most forced onto the road of exile.³⁰

Israel's policy with regard to captives changed with the end of the so-called civil war phase on 14 May 1948 and the start of the "international conflict" the following day, when the armies of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Transjordan, responding to Israel's declaration of statehood, entered Palestine with the aim of preventing those parts of the country "assigned" by partition to the Arab state from falling into Jewish hands. From then on, Israeli forces began taking prisoners, both regular Arab soldiers (for eventual exchange) and able-bodied Palestinian (noncombatant) civilians. Throughout the war, Palestinian civilian prisoners consistently outnumbered Arab military prisoners by a large margin in all four of Israel's official POW camps. On the other hand, when compared to the some 750,000 Palestinians who had been made refugees by the war's end, the number of civilian internees was insignificant: according to Red Cross statistics, their numbers (at least those held in the official camps) never far exceeded five thousand (see Table 1 below).

| TABLE 1. PALESTINIAN AND ARAB POWS (IN ALL FOUR OFFICIAL CAMPS), MAY–NOVEMBER 1948* | |
|---|----------------|
| Month | Number of POWs |
| May | 48 |
| June | 1,500–2,000 |
| July | 3,500 |
| August | 5,000 |
| September | 3,500–4,000 |
| October | 4,000–5,000 |
| November | 4,500–5,000 |

SOURCE: ICRC, *Rapport General d'Activité de la Délégation (January 1948–July 1949)* (Geneva, 1949), p. 19; Jacques de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 4: June 1948," 2 July 1948, p. 5; Jacques de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 5: July 1948," Jerusalem, 3 August 1948, p. 4; Jacques de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 6: August 1948," Beirut, 28 December 1948, p. 3; Jacques de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 7: September 1948," Beirut, 17 November 1948, p. 4; Jacques de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 9: November 1948," Beirut, 14 December 1948, p. 3. Reports 6–9 each state that only 1,000 were soldiers.

*The table documents the total number of POWs visited by the ICRC in Egypt, Transjordan, and Arab and Jewish Palestine [*sic*]. In other words, unlike other figures in the ICRC reports, this report does not distinguish between Arabs and Jews, though it seems the latter were relatively small in number.

EARLY CAPTIVES AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF POW CAMPS

The relatively small number of prisoners taken in the weeks following Israel's establishment were mostly captured in the last stages of operations launched in the first month of Plan Dalet. The late Palestinian economist, Yusif Sayigh, for example, was captured during Plan Dalet's Operation Kilshon (Pitchfork), which targeted the western Jerusalem neighborhoods vacated by the British just before the Jewish state was declared. With the Israeli forces closing in on Qatamon, the middle-class Palestinian neighborhood of western Jerusalem where he lived, the thirty-one-year-old Sayigh had sought refuge in a German hospice under ICRC protection in the nearby Baq'a neighborhood. Days after Israel's establishment, Israeli soldiers stormed the hospice, where twenty-three other men (aged fifteen to fifty-five) had also taken refuge. After several days of intensive interrogation, Sayigh and his companions were loaded into an armored, windowless bus that was part of a convoy transporting over five hundred men, likewise taken prisoner in western Jerusalem, to a temporary detention facility in a Jewish colony on the outskirts of the city and ultimately to a more permanent site.³¹

Other captives during this early period were taken during the late May 1948 "coastal clearing" of the Palestinian villages south of Haifa, which had fallen in late April. Among such coastal villages, which were all located inside the UN-assigned Jewish state, was Tantura, site of another well-known Israeli massacre.³² Marwan 'Iqab al-Yahya, then a fifteen-year-old boy, recounts that after the massacre, he was herded into a truck with other men of the village while soldiers struck any head that stood above the others with their rifle butts.

There was screaming and running blood. They took us to Zichron Ya'akov and we were led to a damp dark cellar. . . . We were about three hundred. There was standing room only. We stayed three days without food. . . . Then suddenly the door was opened. . . . We were packed in waiting trucks. Again they knocked and beat all standing heads. There was so much splashed blood. Under guard we were driven to [the village of] Umm Khalid. There we were taken to a concentration camp with barbed wire and gates and put to forced labor.³³

Sayigh's and al-Yahya's accounts both largely conform to the basic pattern described by almost all the former prisoners. The major difference between the two accounts is the relatively mild treatment of Sayigh and his middle-class companions compared with the harshness and brutality to which the Tantura villagers were subjected—the latter being the norm for the great majority of Palestinians.

Toward the end of June 1948, Sayigh's entire group was moved to Israel's first (and at the time only) POW camp at Ijlil, in accordance with the 1929 Geneva Convention on POWs. Ijlil was established after the start, in mid-May, of the war's international phase. The camp was about thirteen kilometers northeast of Jaffa³⁴ on the site of the destroyed Palestinian village Ijlil al-Qibliyya, which had been emptied of its inhabitants in early April. Indeed, the ICRC's first report on the camp noted that some prisoners were housed in the village's remaining mud houses.³⁵ Mostly, however, Ijlil was made up of tents. An October 1948 report in the *New York Times* described it as "a tent camp hastily thrown up on the sand and scrub of a little valley beside [the village of Ijlil]."³⁶ This description was corroborated by Sayigh's account of his arrival at the camp, where, he noted, there were "already hundreds and hundreds of other POWs."

Trucks brought tents for us to put up. We had no experience in putting up tents, so every tent fell two or three times before we managed to get it up. There were big tents in the officer's [*sic*] quarters where I was. Our tent had six to eight people in it. There were bigger tents for things like kitchens, where many had to be together. . . . This camp had a barbed wire fence around it, as well as watchtowers, a gate and guards.³⁷

Meanwhile, as Israel pressed forward with its conquest of the areas allocated to the Arab state, the number of prisoners continued to rise (Ijlil camp's population had tripled by July). As a result, three more POW camps were established for a total of four "official" camps, which were numbered sequentially by date of establishment starting with Ijlil (no. 791). All four camps were either on or adjacent to military installations set up by the British during the Mandate. These had been used during World War II for the internment of German, Italian, and other POWs. Two of the camps—Atlit (no. 792), established in July about twenty kilometers south of Haifa, and Sarafand (no. 793), established in September near the depopulated village of Sarafand al-'Amar in central Palestine—had been used in the 1930s and 1940s to detain illegal Jewish immigrants.³⁸ Atlit, like the other camps, was divided into sections surrounded by high barbed-wire fences and observation towers. It could hold up to 2,900 prisoners,³⁹ making it the second largest camp after Ijlil (which was eventually expanded to hold some 4,200 POWs on sixty dunams).⁴⁰ Sarafand was built to house 800–1,200 internees with a maximum capacity of 1,800.⁴¹ The smallest of the four official camps was Tel Letwinsky (later Tel Hashomer, no. 794), which had been built to hold 500–1,000 internees but which generally held more.⁴² Tel Letwinsky, located near Tel Aviv, opened in September (like Sarafand). All four camps were administered by former British officers who had defected when British forces withdrew from Palestine in mid-May 1948. From various prisoner accounts, including Sayigh's, it would appear that many of the camps' guards and administrative staff were former members of the Irgun and the Stern Gang who had been integrated into the Israeli army. At the height of the war, the four official POW camps combined were staffed by a total of 973 enlisted soldiers.⁴³ The official camps all benefited from regular Red Cross visits.

A fifth camp, Umm Khalid, at the site of a depopulated village of the same name east of the Jewish settlement of Netanya, had a recognized presence and was even assigned a number (no. 795) but never attained "official" status. Initially under the command of and administered by Ijlil camp, twenty-five kilometers to its south, Umm Khalid appears to have been the first labor camp established exclusively for that purpose. According to Klein, POWs and civilians interned at Ijlil were sent there to work for several weeks at a time,⁴⁴ sleeping in the mosque and village houses. At the end of 1948, plans were made to expand the camp's capacity to hold 1,500 POWs.⁴⁵ Though it eventually became autonomous, Umm Khalid was the first of the "recognized" camps to be shut down, with POWs and civilian internees moved to other camps by the end of 1948.

In addition to these five "recognized" POW camps, there were also "unrecognized" sites, whose number remains unknown and which are mostly unmentioned in official sources. Captured POWs and civilians were held in these camps on a temporary basis either before being assigned to an official camp or while employed on various work projects. Prisoner testimonies point to the existence of at least seventeen such sites, many of them apparently improvised and often consisting of no more than

a police station, a school, or the house of a village notable. Although these camps were not visited by the ICRC, several Red Cross reports reviewed for this article refer to them in passing: a report from early May (1948) notes a small transit camp (“Hahuza”) in Haifa, comprising “a single permanent building” where as many as 170 internees were held for up to two days,⁴⁶ while a June report mentions several “transit” camps in the same area.⁴⁷ The “unofficial” or “unrecognized” camps will be dealt with in the section on forced labor below.

It should be emphasized that Israel situated its five recognized camps within the borders of the UN-proposed Jewish state. This was undoubtedly to avoid problems with the international community, since the territory seized by Israel after 15 May was widely regarded as “occupied,” even though the UN partition plan was only a “recommendation” and therefore not legally binding. It was from these occupied areas that the overwhelming majority of the prisoners, both military and civilian, were captured. Almost all the unrecognized transit or labor camps were also located inside the UN partition lines of the Jewish state, although at least four—Beersheba, Julis, Bayt Daras, and Bayt Nabala—were in the UN-assigned Arab state and one was inside the Jerusalem “corpus separatum.”

The establishment of the POW camps highlighted a problem that was to preoccupy the ICRC throughout the war—namely, Israel’s failure to distinguish between the bona fide POWs, or soldiers in regular armies, and the Palestinian civilian noncombatant detainees. Already within weeks of the start of the international phase of the war, that is, 15 May 1948, the latter far exceeded the former in number. In his June 1948 monthly report, ICRC mission chief Jacques de Reynier noted that the situation of civilian internees was “absolutely confused” with that of POWs, and that the Jewish authorities “treated all Arabs between the ages of sixteen and fifty-five as combatants and locked them up as prisoners of war.”⁴⁸ Similar observations by other Red Cross delegates will be discussed in a later section.

THE INTERNEES AND THE PRINCIPAL “WAVES” OF CIVILIAN INTERNMENT

Even in the absence of a study dedicated to 1948 Palestinian prisoners, a general picture of their composition and circumstances emerges from ICRC and other reports, as well as histories of the 1948 war and prisoner testimonies. Farmers, taken prisoner by Israeli forces when their villages fell, made up the great majority of the captives, although there was also a small number of middle-class urban dwellers. Most of the Palestinian prisoners were men of fighting age, with some exceptions: in a visit to Ijlil camp in July 1948, for example, the ICRC found ninety elderly men and seventy-seven boys fifteen years old or younger among the internees.⁴⁹ A January 1949 report by ICRC delegate Emile Moeri paints a vivid picture not only of the diversity of camp inmates, but also of the conditions in which they lived:

It is painful to see these poor people, especially the old, who were snatched from their villages and put without reason in a camp, obliged to pass the winter under wet tents, away from their families; those who could not survive these conditions died. Little children (10–12 years) are equally found under these conditions. Similarly sick people, some with tuberculosis, languish in these camps under conditions which, while fine for healthy individuals, will certainly lead to their death if we do not find a solution to this problem. For a long time we have demanded

that the Jewish authorities release those civilians who are sick and need treatment to the care of their families or to an Arab hospital, but we have not received a response.⁵⁰

Moeri, who visited the camps frequently, provides other details about living conditions. After a visit to Ijlil in November 1948, he notes that “[m]any [of the] tents are torn,” the camp was “not ready for winter,” the latrines were not covered, and the canteen was not working for two weeks. Referring to an apparently ongoing situation, he adds, “The fruits are still defective, the meat is of poor quality, [and] the vegetables are in short supply.” Moeri also reported having seen for himself “the wounds left by the abuse” of the previous week, when the guards had fired on the prisoners, wounding one, and had beaten another.⁵¹ Visiting Atlit in the company of another ICRC delegate that same month, he commented that the camp was “well-organized” and that “everything was clean,” but that the POWs’ “clothes were in tatters [and most POWs] live for months with the same clothes and underwear.”⁵²

In his final report about the ICRC mission in Palestine, de Reynier points out that “at the beginning many hostages [were taken] who were either traded or executed—in official language, [they] died of a heart attack.”⁵³ As for the reasons behind the capture of large numbers of civilians, almost all those captured were interrogated as potential sources of intelligence. The high number of able-bodied men of fighting age could also suggest that capture was a “preventive” measure to keep them off the battlefield. It seems clear, however, that the main reason was Israel’s need for manpower.

There was never any question about the civilian status of the internees. De Reynier observes in an early report that the men captured “had undoubtedly never been in a regular army.”⁵⁴ The Israelis were equally aware of this, and indeed their own reports explicitly distinguished “combatants” from “noncombatants.” Moreover, prisoners classed as noncombatants who came under suspicion of having been fighters were routinely shot on the pretense that they had been attempting to escape. Yusif Sayigh and others make mention of this.⁵⁵

As indicated, the wide-scale capture and internment of Palestinian civilians took place mainly after 15 May 1948 and largely coincided with Israel’s military campaigns. The first major roundup occurred during and following Operation Dani (July 1948), when sixty to seventy thousand Palestinian civilians were expelled from the central Palestinian towns of Lydda and Ramla. According to Kamen, by early 1949 between a fifth and a quarter of the male population over the age of fifteen from the two towns were held in Israel’s POW camps.⁵⁶ This group also included Palestinians from Jaffa and from the scores of villages captured during the July operation.⁵⁷ Tawfiq Ahmad Jum’a Ghanim, for example, was captured when his village of Hatta, about thirty kilometers northeast of Gaza, fell to Israeli forces. Ghanim recalled being taken to the nearby Palestinian village of Jusayr to identify persons “of interest” to the Israeli military. “I said I did not know. They put a knife to my throat. Then they put me against a wall and shot at me. An officer intervened.”⁵⁸ The young man, who was in his early twenties at the time, was subsequently taken to the Jewish settlements of Beer Tuvia and Rehovoth for interrogation and then sent to the POW camp in Ijlil.

By far the largest group of civilian detainees came from villages of the central Galilee, which were captured before and during Operation Hiram in late October through early November 1948. In advance of the operation, during which large swaths of territory designated for the Arab state were conquered, Israel’s Foreign Ministry instructed its military forces to make sure “that no Arab

inhabitants remain in the Galilee and certainly that no refugees from other places remain there.”⁵⁹ An estimated three quarters of the area's sixty thousand Arab Palestinian inhabitants were displaced during Operation Hiram, with hundreds of men and boys rounded up and taken to POW camps. In the Palestinian village of al-Bi'na alone, with an estimated population of around nine hundred, some two hundred men were captured and sent to camps.⁶⁰ Nadim Musa, from the village of Abu Sinan northeast of Acre and in his late twenties when captured, describes how the Haganah rounded up and detained the male inhabitants of the Galilee villages, even though they were not combatants and did not carry weapons.

They took us from all villages around us: al-Bi'na, Dayr al-Asad, Nahaf, al-Rama and 'Aylabun. They took four young men and shot them dead. . . . They drove us on foot. It was hot. We were not allowed to drink. They took us to al-Maghar [a Palestinian Druze village], then to Nahalal [a Jewish settlement], then to Atlit.⁶¹

Musa's account is corroborated in a 16 November 1948 report filed by UN observers, who noted that when Jewish forces occupied the villages of al-Bi'na (“al-Bani”), 'Arrabat al-Batuf, Dayr al-Asad, 'Aylabun, and Kafr Annan at the end of October 1948, some five hundred Palestinian men “were taken by forced march and vehicle to a Jewish concentration camp at Nahalal.”⁶² On 10 November 1948, barely a week after Operation Hiram ended, ICRC delegates Emile Moeri and Roland Troyon visited Acre, Shafa 'Amr, Tamra, and Iblin, all of which were occupied by Israeli forces. The delegates described the situation there as “very critical” and noted that “[a]ll able-bodied men [had been] arrested and taken to labor camps,” with women, children, and the elderly left to fend for themselves.⁶³

Even after the military operations slacked off, the capture of the able-bodied continued, albeit less often in combat situations than within the context of preventing “infiltrators” (i.e., refugees) from returning to their homes and fields. That was the aim of Operation Megrafa, which lasted from December 1948 to July 1949, after the armistice agreements were signed. In some cases, villagers unaware of the location of the armistice lines were captured while harvesting their crops or tending their livestock. Twenty-year-old Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir Abu Sayf from the village of Zikrin, for example, was grazing his cows near Khirbat 'Atir when Israeli soldiers seized him and two other farmers, appropriated their camels and a horse, and took them to a military camp in the mountains.⁶⁴ Similarly, in January 1949, UN truce observers reported that Israeli forces had captured two villagers, Ahmad 'Abd Abu Zaydi and Yusuf Hamid al-Fustuk, while they were working their land near their village of Tubas.⁶⁵ In his monthly report for April 1949, de Reynier complained that “[f]or various reasons, the Israeli authorities continue to arrest healthy men of arms-bearing age and put them in camps without any form of due process.”⁶⁶

NUMBER OF CIVILIAN INTERNEES

There are no precise figures on the total number of Palestinian civilians held by Israel during the 1948–49 war. The ICRC provided estimates only for the four official POW camps; it neither visited nor had data on internees held in the many unofficial facilities scattered around the country. Moreover, even the estimates for the official camps are approximate at best. The ICRC frequently complained that POW lists were unreliable and incomplete. The frequent movement of POWs

from one camp to another without notification—a practice that “failed to conform to the [Geneva] Conventions,” according to the ICRC⁶⁷—further complicated attempts to count internees. The Israeli authorities often held Arab prisoners for months on end without notifying the ICRC. In May 1949, for example, as the POW exchanges were taking place in connection with the armistice agreements, the Red Cross discovered over two hundred Arab POWs whose names had not been handed in to the organization even though Israel had been holding them at least since October 1948.⁶⁸ In another example, Yusif Sayigh and his companions captured in western Jerusalem in May 1948 were held for weeks before the Red Cross was notified. According to Sayigh,

It was thanks to the nuns that [the Red Cross] got our names. They went to some minister or the other, and said, We know that you have these people. They [the Israelis] denied our existence. The nuns didn't show our names at first. They told the minister, You have a number of prisoners of war. We want to know their location, their numbers, their names, everything. They said, No, we don't have any prisoners of war. When squeezed, they said, We have some saboteurs. The nuns said, No, you took them from the German Hospice, which is under the Red Cross protection. In the end, the Israelis had to admit our existence and our numbers.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, figures do exist. According to Israeli records, in 1949, toward the end of the war, the POW camps held 4,850 noncombatant prisoners of conscription age (fourteen to seventy) and 1,100 combatants, including 900 Arab soldiers and 200 Palestinian “irregulars” who were defending their villages. In other words, civilians comprised the vast majority (82 percent) of the 5,950 listed as internees in the “official” POW camps, with Palestinians alone (both civilian and military) accounting for 85 percent of the internee population.⁷⁰

Table 1, based on information compiled from various ICRC monthly reports, shows the rising number of internees, both Palestinians and Arab soldiers, in the official POW camps. Table 2, derived from information compiled by ICRC delegate Emile Moeri, shows the number of Palestinian and Arab POWs for January 1949. Though Table 2 concerns one month only, the overwhelming preponderance of Palestinian prisoners was consistent throughout the war.

Israeli documents and the testimonies of former civilian internees suggest that the total number of POWs and civilian internees may have been significantly greater than indicated by ICRC reports.

| TABLE 2. PALESTINIAN, ARAB, AND OTHER POWS, OFFICIAL CAMPS, AS OF JANUARY 1949 | | | | | |
|--|--------------|-------------|--------|------------|----------------|
| Camp | Palestinians | Other Arabs | Others | Total POWs | % Palestinians |
| Ijlil - Camp 791 | 1,234 | 754 | 3 | 1,991 | 62 |
| Atlit - Camp 792 | 1,310 | 322 | 8 | 1,640 | 80 |
| Sarafand - Camp 793 | 1,317 | 39 | 4 | 1,360 | 97 |
| Tel Litwinsky - Camp 794 | 1,117 | 193 | - | 1,310 | 85 |
| Hospital | 35 | 24 | - | 59 | 59 |
| TOTAL | 5,013 | 1,332 | 15 | 6,360 | 79 |

SOURCE: The table is derived from information in ICRC, Emile Moeri, “Report on the Situation of POWs in Jewish Hands,” Tel Aviv, 6 February 1949, ICRC archives, G59/I/GC, GS/82.

Taking into account the 750–1,500 POWs who were released at various periods throughout the war, Klein notes that an estimated 7,100–7,850 Palestinians and other Arabs were interned at one point or another in one of Israel's official POW camps.⁷¹ In a diary entry dated 17 November 1948, David Ben-Gurion mentions the existence of 9,000 POWs in Israeli-run camps.⁷² This is roughly double the number of POWs mentioned in ICRC reports for the same period and it begins to reflect the total capacity of the four camps. It is not known whether Ben-Gurion included in his count civilians interned in the various unofficial camps excluded from Red Cross reports.

Forced Labor

With tens of thousands of Jewish men and women called up for military service, Palestinian internees constituted an important supplement to the Jewish labor employed in maintaining the Israeli economy under emergency legislation. According to a November 1948 report, civilians were being interned for what appeared to be the express purpose of aiding the Israeli economy. Thus, the report goes on, Atlit was “essentially a camp for workers. The intention of the Jewish authorities is to give them satisfactory material conditions in order to get maximum work to aid the economy of the State.”⁷³

Even before the establishment of the official POW labor camps, captured civilians were put to work. Reporting on a visit to Acre on 30 May 1948, ICRC delegate de Meuron stated that the men, “whether soldiers or not,” were being “employed under the orders of the Haganah for public work, drying of wetlands, and military work.”⁷⁴ Visiting the same town a few weeks later, he concluded that the primary reason for detaining “the entire male population of villages or houses occupied [was] the need for labor.”⁷⁵ By autumn, as Israeli forces were pushing deeper into the Galilee, de Reynier estimated that around four to five thousand men, of whom only one thousand were soldiers, had been “reduced to slavery. These masses of men are employed as cheap labor.”⁷⁶

Forced labor did not necessarily entail hard labor and it was not always centered in work camps. In his end-of-mission general report, de Reynier writes, “The Jews used POWs as workers or domestic servants for several months without announcing their names [to the ICRC] or allowing them any contact with the outside world.” The captured civilians were “without defense, guidance or legal status. They were demoralized and physically destitute.”⁷⁷

The employment of POWs was strictly regulated under the 1929 Geneva Conventions, but was not illegal per se. (The fact that the Palestinian civilian internees comprised the overwhelming majority of the camp inmates and did not qualify for POW status under the 1929 Conventions will be addressed in the next section.) Indeed, putting captives to work was standard procedure. When almost the entire population of Beersheba was loaded onto buses and expelled to Gaza following the town's capture in late October 1948, Ben-Gurion noted in his war diary that the one hundred men held captive by the Israeli forces had “been put to work and then transported to a prisoners' camp.”⁷⁸ Similarly, Ben-Gurion noted with regard to occupied Beersheba in January 1949 that “the Custodian for Absentee Property has prepared lists of Arab labor he will put to work.”⁷⁹

The Office of the Custodian for Absentee Property was established in 1948 (and later codified under the Absentees' Property Law of 1950) to take possession of (and register) Palestinian

property—homes, lands, and businesses, as well as gold, jewelry, cars, and other assets—seized by Israel from their “absent” Arab owners (often not even absent from the country but merely driven from their lands) and subsequently transferred either to the Jewish National Fund or the Israel Land Authority for exclusive Jewish use. Civilian internees were “put to work” by the Custodian in various capacities, such as collecting and transporting looted refugee property. Muhammad Batrawi from Isdud village (Gaza district) was part of a work gang whose job, he recounted, “was to collect valuable things taken from homes in the Palestinian towns and villages,” among which were books from Ramla that he “helped load for transport to the Hebrew University.”⁸⁰ Nineteen-year-old ‘Adel Muhammad Amuri from Tantura was part of a group supplied as cheap labor to a Jewish contractor employed by the Custodian to pick the fruits from expropriated Palestinian orchards,⁸¹ to which the actual Palestinian owners were barred access. Many other captives, including Marwan ‘Iqab al-Yahya and a large group of his fellow prisoners, were “put immediately to forced labor which consisted of moving stones from Arab demolished houses.”⁸² While the physical destruction and erasure of entire villages aimed mainly to prevent the return of the refugees, the building materials in many cases were also used for Jewish construction.

Among the work projects carried out by Palestinian captives was paving a road from Mitzpe Ramon, a rocky area south of Beersheba, to Umm Rashrash, now Eilat, some 150 kilometers away.⁸³ Idrawish Abu Sbayh from al-Bat (Beersheba district) was detained for six months “with hundreds of others” to work on the road.⁸⁴ Muhammad al-‘Ajil, also from al-Bat, worked on it for two months but was released when a boulder crushed his leg. He was not taken to a hospital and later died of his wounds. Another young man from al-Bat, Salman al-‘Ubayd, worked as a baker in the makeshift camp where they were held.⁸⁵

While the 1929 Convention allowed POWs to work, it stipulated that the work performed could have “no direct connection with the operations of the war.”⁸⁶ It is true that the distinction between military and other work can be ambiguous in wartime,⁸⁷ but the ICRC’s Palestine mission never doubted that the 1929 Convention’s prohibition on war-related work was regularly breached. This is clear in ICRC delegate de Meuron’s matter-of-fact remark quoted above that prisoners were employed for “military work.” In its direct dealings with the authorities, however, the ICRC was often circumspect. For example, an ICRC delegation meeting with Israeli foreign minister Moshe Shertok in June 1948 raised concerns about POWs being assigned “unconventional” work. The minutes of the meeting, which do not define “unconventional,” quote Shertok as promising to investigate the claim and to make sure that if the allegation proved to be correct, the practice would be ended.⁸⁸ Given the many references in prisoner testimonies to being forced to transport munitions and material for combat units—explicitly outlawed under the 1929 Convention⁸⁹—there seems little doubt that “unconventional” referred to work directly supporting Israel’s war effort.

If the ICRC could be reticent about war-related work for diplomatic considerations, other sources had no such constraints. Barely two months into the international phase of the war, for example, the New York representative of the Arab Higher Committee sent a memorandum to the UN secretary-general complaining, *inter alia*, of Israel’s “maltreatment and humiliation of prisoners,” including forcing civilians to dig trenches, carry water from Arab cisterns to supply Jewish neighborhoods, work as servants for Jewish families, and give blood for Jews wounded in the fighting.⁹⁰

The best source of information about forced labor is the prisoners themselves. Salim Zaydan 'Umar, sixteen at the time of his capture from Tantura, states that the "stronger" prisoners were used in "carrying building materials, digging military trenches and fortifications, and burying the dead. We dug the graves of the fallen Iraqi soldiers at Qaqun village."⁹¹ Yusif Sayigh, who supervised a fifty-person-strong work team outside Ijlil camp in his capacity as the *homme de confiance* elected by his fellow prisoners to represent them, recalls that during the first truce in June 1948 "work gangs were used to make trenches and fortifications."⁹² Tawfiq Ahmad Jum'a Ghanim was put to work making military camouflage nets at Ijlil, and later was part of a work gang of four hundred men at Tel Litwinsky that was taken by bus daily to dig trenches for underground cables. He was later moved to an unofficial camp at Bayt Nabala near Lydda, where he and other civilian internees and POWs "transported ammunition and carried heavy steel and timber and again worked on camouflaged nets for aeroplanes and tanks."⁹³

Almost all prisoners were moved from camp to camp, often in keeping with the new state's need for manpower. Twenty-two-year-old Habib Muhammad 'Ali Jarada from Beersheba, who was interned both at Ijlil and Tel Litwinsky, notes that "these [official] camps served as distribution centers for forced labor."⁹⁴ Many prisoner accounts reflect the back-and-forth traffic between the official camps and the unofficial or unrecognized camps, which were entirely lacking in oversight. Indeed, besides being used as temporary holding facilities, the unofficial camps were almost always associated with forced labor. Some testimonies also seem to suggest that men were sometimes captured with the express purpose of putting them to work.

The terrible conditions of the makeshift facilities outside Red Cross scrutiny are evident in many prisoner accounts. Habib Muhammad 'Ali Jarada, for example, describes his early captivity before being transported to Ijlil: "At gunpoint, I was made to work all day. At night, we slept in tents. In winter, water was seeping below our bedding, which was dry leaves, cartons and wooden pieces."⁹⁵ Concerning his internment at Umm Khalid, also not subject to Red Cross visits, Marwan 'Iqab al-Yahya says, "We had to cut and carry stones all day [in a quarry]. Our daily food was only one potato in the morning and half a dried fish at night. They beat anyone who disobeyed orders."⁹⁶ Of another camp, al-Yahya comments, "There was little food. We drank water from barrels used to transport gypsum."⁹⁷ Humiliation was also routine. Al-Yahya tells of being "lined up and ordered to strip naked as a punishment for the escape of two prisoners at night. [Jewish] adults and children came from nearby kibbutz to watch us line up naked and laugh. To us this was most degrading."⁹⁸

The testimony of Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir Abu Sayf, one of the villagers taken prisoner after the spring 1949 armistice agreements during Operation Megrafa, is a good example both of what seems to be an opportunistic capture and of the improvised nature of many of these camps. Captured while tending his livestock, he describes being

led to a military camp in the mountain which had caves. Because cars could not climb the mountain road, they made us carry ammunition and weapons to the caves. After five days they took us to [the destroyed village of] Julis where we dug sanitary pits. They would not let us drink water except from a hot tap like a car radiator. They threw crumbs of food to us. Then they took us to Qatra police station. They converted the *mukhtar's* house into a prison. We were twenty-five to thirty

people in a four by five meter room. The room has a sandy floor to absorb blood and pus. We were tortured; many had broken teeth, hands and legs. Food consisted of one loaf for every fifteen people and one piece of vegetable floating in a big pot. In the early morning we were taken to work. They hit us on our heads to move. If one fell, they hit him with their boots. . . . Torture sometimes continued at night. More people came. They were picked up like us, in pastures or in lonely places.⁹⁹

Though conditions at the unmonitored sites were undoubtedly the worst, those at the official camps were not always much better. Prisoners told of remaining without food for several days and of being given only dried bread.¹⁰⁰ According to Nadim Musa, Atlit camp was “divided into cages, each cage held five hundred prisoners. Our tents had no flooring. We had to clear the ground from thorny weeds before we could sleep.”¹⁰¹ Kamal Ghattas similarly recalled being captured and herded into a “cage,” specifying, “We were about 450 in one cage. They hit us with sticks and fired machine guns at us.”¹⁰² Al-Yahya, describing Ijlil, recounted how “each group was put in a cage. The camp was divided into ten cages. Mine was cage number three,” which he later identified as the “Tantura cage.”¹⁰³

A number of testimonies recount random acts of violence at the job sites. ‘Adel Muhammad Amuri of Tantura, who was part of a work crew harvesting fruit from Palestinian orchards, recalled that “one day, buses loaded with prisoners stopped for the laborers to drink from a single tap. They rushed to drink. The soldiers shot at them randomly. I saw tens fall before my eyes. The ground was soaked with blood and water. I later [learned] they were from Lydda and Ramla.”¹⁰⁴ Marwan ‘Iqab al-Yahya also spoke of the “many civil internees” from the two towns, noting that they were “were put in a camp a half kilometer away from us. They slept in the open without bedding. They drank from rain water gathered in small ponds. One day two of the Lydda and Ramla people were shot because some of them out of despair tried to rush to the gate and escape.”¹⁰⁵

Indeed, escape attempts—whether real or merely claimed—apparently constituted cause for being shot immediately. Kamal Ghattas, in telling of being beaten with his comrades by guards, adds almost casually, “They killed one I knew, Muhammad al-Hurani from Farradiyya, accusing him of trying to escape.”¹⁰⁶ Tawfiq Ahmad Jum‘a Ghanim recounted that at Tel Litwinsky, “Anyone who refused to work was shot. They said [the person] tried to escape. Those of us who thought [we] were going to be killed walked backward facing the guards.” Ghanim added that he himself was lucky because he had been given a number inscribed on a steel band, which meant that it was not possible to shoot him “without anyone knowing.”¹⁰⁷ An exception to the rule of shooting escaping prisoners outright was when the escape involved large numbers of men. In such cases, the escapees might merely be punished so as not to waste valuable manpower. Thus, for example, when twenty Tantura captives who escaped from Ijlil were recaptured, they were not killed but locked in a cage, with oil poured on their clothing and their blankets taken away.¹⁰⁸

There is no question that the more educated among the prisoners were treated far better than other internees, partly because they knew their rights and had the confidence to argue with and stand up to their captors. Yusif Sayigh, who had the added advantage of automatic access to Ijlil’s senior officers in his capacity as the camp’s *homme de confiance*, is a case in point. His fascinating

memoir shows in passing many of the benefits of education and status, such as in an incident where he tried to intervene after receiving clear information that a young man in his work crew had been shot in cold blood by guards on the false pretense of attempted escape.

I went up to see the [supervisor in charge]. I wanted to tell the Red Cross about [the death]. But he wouldn't let me get in touch with the Red Cross. I said, It's my right under the [Geneva] Conventions. He said, I'm not going to let you use the telephone.

The following day I went up again and saw the commander of the camp, a decent man, a book-seller—when he realized that I'd read many English novels, he used to come and chat for hours with me in the camp. . . . He allowed me to use his telephone. I talked to the Red Cross. They came [and] I complained about this young man's death.¹⁰⁹

Strong ideological commitments and affiliations, especially left-leaning ones, empowered internees in their dealings with their Israeli jailers in a similar manner. Nadim Musa, a prominent member of the Communist-linked National Liberation League ('Usbat al-Taharrur al-Watani), commented,

Other POWs were treated badly, they were hit and cursed, but our group stood its ground. . . . They tried to put us to hard labor but we refused. We staged a hunger strike. We managed to contact our Central Committee in Haifa. They contacted Tel Aviv and made such noise that they let us go. We were the last to enter the camp and first to leave after five months. Others stayed a year or more.¹¹⁰

The account of Kamal Ghattas, a member of the same group as Musa and, like him, captured during Israel's autumn 1948 offensive in the Galilee, similarly reflects the impact of ideological affinities and the refusal to be intimidated.

We had a fight with our jailers. Four hundred of us confronted one hundred soldiers. They brought reinforcements. Three of my friends and I were taken to a cell. They threatened to shoot us. All night we sang the Communist anthem. They took the four of us to Umm Khalid camp. The Israelis were afraid of their image in Europe. Our contact with our Central Committee and Mapam [Israel's original socialist party] saved us. . . . Other prisoners were taken to do hard work. Some had had to carry steel and materials on their backs. Others had to dig fortifications. . . . I met a Russian officer and told him they took us from our homes although we were noncombatants, which was against the Geneva Conventions. When he knew I was a Communist he embraced me and said, "Comrade, I have two brothers in the Red Army. Long live Stalin. Long Live Mother Russia."¹¹¹

As a postscript to the subject of forced labor, the 1929 Geneva Convention required that POWs and civilian internees be paid for their work (ten piasters, about forty cents, a day, according to ICRC reports¹¹²) when released. The logistics of payment, however, proved problematic. In his monthly report for March 1949, de Reynier noted that "Jewish authorities had given POWs a paper stating that the ICRC would pay them the allowances due in respect to the work" performed during their

detention.¹¹³ Accordingly, the POWs began showing up at Red Cross offices asking for their wages before the committee had received a transfer of funds from Israel in order to pay the former detainees. Two months later, de Reynier reported:

The delegation is always still hampered by the many requests of POWs who want from us the wages they have earned in Israel. Israel has given each upon his release a statement saying that the ICRC would solve the issue. We have asked governments responsible to establish an authority that all these people can address or that will receive them after the authorities in Israel have established accounts and we have handed over the money for transmission to governments.¹¹⁴

The ICRC noted that it would take another few months to resolve the issue. The testimonies of former civilian internees nevertheless indicate that most were not paid at all or received only a fraction of the amount owed. All the internees, however, were apparently required to sign a receipt stating that they had received payment in full for their work.¹¹⁵

The Status of Civilian Internees: ICRC Challenges and Limitations

The ICRC's mission in Palestine was greatly hampered by the "legal and humanitarian challenge"¹¹⁶ posed by the absence of a comprehensive legal framework governing the capture and internment of civilians. The 1949 Geneva Convention on the treatment of civilians had yet to be drafted, and the 1934 unratified draft International Convention on the Condition and Protection of Civilians of Enemy Nationality, with which the ICRC delegates were well familiar, could at most provide some guidance. Thus, as Jacques de Reynier noted in his final report on the Red Cross mission in Palestine, in light of this dearth of clear legal support the ICRC "had to improvise."¹¹⁷

Perhaps the most basic legal challenge concerned the status of civilian internees under international humanitarian law. In his first monthly field report on the situation in Palestine, de Reynier observed that while the ICRC was "not opposed to [the detention of civilians] for the time being," the practice was nevertheless "questionable in law."¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, as Israel seized more and more of the territory that had been allotted to the Arab state under the UN partition plan, and as the number of Palestinian civilians captured (almost all from the "occupied areas" outside the boundaries of the plan's Jewish state) continued to grow, ICRC concerns only increased. In October 1948, in the context of Operation Hiram, de Reynier observed that

on the Jewish side, the big question [for the ICRC] is to know at what point do the authorities have the right in the *occupied country* to take civilian internees of all able-bodied men without distinction and consider them POWs. . . . We have a duty to take a position on the question: Should the conventions authorize Jews to treat these people as POWs or not?¹¹⁹

It was not until his January 1949 report, when the war was drawing to a close, that de Reynier was able to state conclusively that the internment of civilians "from the areas occupied by Israel fail to conform to the conventions."¹²⁰ Even had he reached this conclusion earlier, an ICRC finding on the legality of the practice would have had no practical impact: the willingness of the belligerents to comply with international conventions on war depended not only on their material capacity to

do so, but also on what Mackenzie, in his comparative study of the treatment of POWs during World War II, describes as the “prevailing moral code or politico-cultural belief system.”¹²¹ In such a situation, the prospects of Israel applying the “spirit” of the conventions were not bright.

Nevertheless, the ICRC repeatedly called for the release of the civilian captives throughout the fighting. Faced with Israel's noncompliance, Red Cross officials eventually opted for a pragmatic, or humanitarian, approach to civilian internment and decided to treat the civilian captives as de facto POWs. Indeed, as early as August 1948, the ICRC itself began to characterize the Palestinian civilians as such. From that time forward, civilian internment was covered in monthly ICRC reports under the section dealing with POWs rather than, as previously, in a separate section on civilian internees.

In his final Palestine mission report, de Reynier articulated the ICRC's position on the status of the civilian captives:

[The ICRC] protested on numerous occasions affirming the right of these civilians to enjoy their freedom unless found guilty and judged by a court. But we have tacitly accepted their POW status because in this way they would enjoy the rights conferred upon them by the convention. Otherwise, if they were not in the camps they would be expelled [to an Arab country] and in one way or another, they would lead, without resources, the miserable life of refugees.¹²²

For the ICRC, giving the Palestinian civilian internees a minimum set of rights, establishing an unambiguous legal framework for intervening on their behalf, and doing whatever possible to enable them to return to their homes when the war ended, were all considerations that trumped the question of their strict legal status.

Another dilemma facing the ICRC was whether its efforts to protect the civilian population might in fact be helping Israel empty the country of its Palestinian inhabitants. In May 1948, the United Nations created the position of UN mediator for Palestine to which it appointed Count Folke Bernadotte, internationally recognized for his work as head of the Swedish Red Cross during World War II. In his first formal proposal, dated 28 June 1948, Bernadotte called on the parties to recognize “the right of residents of Palestine who, because of conditions created by the conflict there, have left their normal places of abode, to return to their homes without restriction and to regain possession of their property.”¹²³ By that time, the number of Palestinian refugees neared a half million, and although the UN mediator's suggestions were confidential, de Reynier was undoubtedly privy to them: their influence can be seen in his July 1948 monthly report, which expressed concern that the “the evacuation of [their] encircled villages [by Israeli military forces] . . . perhaps made easier by the desire of Jews to see all Arabs leave . . . might indeed contradict the policy of the United Nations which wants the refugees to remain and/or return to their homes.”¹²⁴ Almost a year later, in his April 1949 monthly report, de Reynier lamented that

[Israeli] authorities are [still] forcing some Arab villages to evacuate and move to another region in Israel. . . . Legally, this situation is grossly unfair from many points of view, but practically [for] these poor people, the situation is hopeless. This movement is becoming more and more extensive and we do not know how to fight against this nefarious process.¹²⁵

By that time, the extent of ICRC powerlessness to stand in the way of larger Israeli aims was clear to all concerned, not least the ICRC. These larger aims included the issue of repatriation, which came to the fore with the POW exchanges that were already on the table as of autumn 1948.

In early November 1948, de Reynier reported that “far-reaching deals [are] underway, especially [under the auspices of] the United Nations, but discreetly monitored by the ICRC, to exchange all prisoners of war.”¹²⁶ Such “deals” did not include civilian internees, however. In the same report, de Reynier observed that whereas everyone wanted to secure a release of the POWs, “nobody is calling for a release of the 5,000 [Palestinian civilian] prisoners of war in Jewish hands, and the problem as a whole remains insoluble.”¹²⁷ In February 1949, the first major release and repatriation of POWs took place between Transjordan and Israel. Further releases continued through March and April 1949 under Israeli agreements with Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria.¹²⁸

As could be expected, the issue of the Palestinian civilian internees was treated separately. Throughout 1948–49, the ICRC worked on a piecemeal basis to secure the release of detained Palestinians, but its greatest success was at the beginning of the war. This involved 1,068 women and children survivors of the Tantura massacre. After the Israeli army’s conquest of their village in the “coastal clearing” operation of villages south of Haifa in late May 1948, the captives were herded to al-Furaydis, another conquered village under Israeli control, and from there to the Kfar Yuna prison. With the new Israeli state not wanting to bear the cost of their upkeep, the ICRC facilitated a deal under which they were released in exchange for Jewish prisoners captured by the Transjordanian Arab Legion: eighty-nine female soldiers and the head of the Jewish community in Jerusalem’s Old City, A. M. Weingarten. The exchange, which de Reynier described as “the most beautiful and most spectacular” facilitated by the Red Cross during the war, “required the opening of special lines, the requisition of over 150 trucks and buses and the assistance of a host of civilian and military authorities from the two sides and organizations such as the Red Cross and Red Shield [the Salvation Army]”¹²⁹ to transport them to Tulkarm, which was under Arab control.¹³⁰ Two months later, in late July, the ICRC secured the release of some two hundred elderly men and young boys from Ijlil camp,¹³¹ and a similar deal was arranged in December 1948.¹³²

It would appear, however, that ICRC involvement in the release of Palestinian prisoners was limited to small-scale, narrowly focused, and specific cases such as those mentioned above. Israel refused to address the situation of civilian Palestinian POWs in the context of the release of Arab POWs, who were returned to their home countries under exchanges between Israel and the relevant Arab states. Besides the broader issue of who could represent the Palestinian captives, their return to their places of origin, for the most part inside what had become Israel, was out of the question. Ultimately, their release took the form of expulsion, as they were trucked to the borders of the new state and dropped off, largely in an arbitrary and ad hoc manner.

Indeed, only a very small number of internees managed to remain inside the de facto borders of the State of Israel. In most cases, civilian internees, especially the unknown number held in the unofficial camps, were expelled across the armistice lines without food, supplies, or shelter. Ibrahim ‘Abd al-Qadir Abu Sayf, for example, who spent twenty-six days in a horrific prison work camp, was blindfolded along with some 250 of his fellow prisoners and driven to Wadi ‘Araba. Once there,

[t]hey removed the blindfold and lined us up. An officer called Moshe told us in Arabic, "You see the moon? Follow it. It will take you to [King] Abdullah [of Jordan]. I'll count to three, then you run. I'll shoot anyone who looks back." We were hungry and weak. We went round and round, could not find our way. We stayed four days in wilderness. Then we found a camp. It turned out to be Jewish. We were put to work again but we had some food. . . . We were moved from one camp to another. . . . I cannot ever forget the experience. I was a young man and I became an old man in that year.¹³³

Four days later, Abu Sayf was recaptured and again put to work by Israeli authorities before being dropped off near Gaza, eventually making his way to the West Bank town of Hebron.

Conclusion

This article has focused on ICRC efforts and actions relating to the Palestinian civilian internees held by Israel during the 1948–49 war. With regard to its regular wartime activities, there is little doubt that the ICRC succeeded in improving the circumstances and alleviating the misery of countless Palestinian war victims, including POWs, rendering innumerable services large and small. However, when it came to the capture and internment of Palestinian civilians and, more specifically, to countering Israel's use of them as forced labor in contravention of the spirit of the 1929 Geneva Conventions, the ICRC was largely ineffective.

As this article has argued, an underlying reason for the organization's inability to intervene effectively was the absence of an established, agreed-upon international legal framework regulating the treatment of civilian noncombatants in wartime—a framework which did not come into existence until the Fourth Geneva Convention was signed in August 1949. But the ICRC's cautious approach also derived from its lack of enforcement power beyond moral persuasion, and from the fact that in Palestine, as in other conflicts, it had to weigh its interventions concerning the application of the Geneva Conventions against the broader imperative of protecting its role as a neutral intermediary.

Well aware of the constraints, the organization intervened forcefully with the Israelis only in very specific cases which, while involving undeniable violations of international law, at the same time—and this is the crucial point—in no way touched any of Israel's core interests or long-term objectives. In such cases, Israel was willing to accommodate ICRC concerns, especially where it could be shown that they could be traced to individual wrongdoing rather than systematic practice.

An incident recounted by Yusif Sayigh provides an excellent example of such a case and shows how ICRC persistence could pay off in such conditions. Reference has already been made to Sayigh's success in alerting the Red Cross that a young man in his work crew had been shot dead in cold blood by the Israeli prison guards, who claimed that the young man had been trying to escape. Sayigh continues:

Eventually [the story] got to Ben Gurion himself, and the Red Cross got authorization to dig up the body to see how he was shot. Instead of having been shot in the back from a distance of 40 or 50 meters—which would have been the case if he was running away—it was found that he was shot in the chest from the front. According to what this doctor told me later on, after I was

released (Moour,¹³⁴ I think his name was, the acting head of the Red Cross), he had said to Ben Gurion, If you don't let us dig him up, I will suggest to headquarters in Switzerland that we pull out our mission and announce the reason. So they gave in. Of course, the camp authorities gave the Red Cross assurances that this would not be repeated, and the Stern officer [who had refused to let Sayigh inform the Red Cross] was removed six weeks later.¹³⁵

The reports reviewed for this article show that the ICRC never wavered in its sense of what was right and just, to the point that the generally dry and bureaucratic (even clinical) language favored by the Red Cross delegates sometimes gave way to expressions of indignation at Israel's actions against the Palestinian civilian population and its treatment of the internees.¹³⁶ But in the last analysis, Israel was able to ignore with impunity ICRC complaints (even concerning egregious violations of the existing laws of war) thanks to the diplomatic cover of major Western powers. In January 1949, for example, an ICRC delegation visiting Gaza detailed six separate incidents of intensive Israeli aerial and artillery bombing on Gaza's city center and the refugee camps of Khan Yunis, Brayj, Rafah, and Dayr al-Balah. Some 190 persons were killed and over 400 were wounded in the attacks, which took place within the space of six days (2–7 January) and which the delegation head called "acts of cruelty without military objectives which only increase the misery of so many unhappy refugees."¹³⁷

More broadly, the organization failed to have any impact whatsoever either on preventing the mass deportation of Palestinian civilians from their homes or, later, protecting the right of Palestinian civilian internees to be released from the POW camps to their homes or lands. Indeed, by helping besieged villagers to escape their villages under fire (and in so doing assuring their safety), the ICRC could be said to have indirectly assisted Israel in its goal of ethnic cleansing. Still, the records it kept and carefully preserved constitute an important contribution to the story. Much more remains to be told.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Charles Kamen's 1987 study on the situation of Palestinians inside Israel in the years following the 1948 war includes a brief discussion of civilian detainees based on files from Israel's former Ministry of Minority Affairs. Charles Kamen, "After the Catastrophe I: The Arabs in Israel 1948–51," *Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 4 (1987), pp. 453–95. The most extensive account to date is found in Aharon Klein's study of Arab POWs from the 1948 war based on Israeli military archives, Ben-Gurion's war diaries, and press reports from the period. Aharon Klein, "Arab Prisoners of

- War during the War of Independence" [in Hebrew] (MA Thesis, Hebrew University, 2001). (Klein's work also provides a comprehensive review of Israeli archival sources.) The issue of civilian internment is also addressed in Ilan Pappé's seminal study, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006). The most comprehensive study of ICRC involvement in Palestine during the 1948 war, Dominique-Déborá Junod's *The Imperiled Red Cross and the Palestine-Eretz-Yisrael Conflict 1945–1952* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996), is largely silent on the issue of civilian internment and forced labor.
- 2 Kuhne, ICRC Geneva, to ICRC Cairo, 9 December 1947, ICRC archives, G59//GC, cited in Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, p. 90. The ICRC dates its official involvement in the conflict to this period. ICRC, "Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge en Palestine," *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge et Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 30, no. 353 (1948), p. 329.
 - 3 Frederic Biéri (ICRC delegate in London) to ICRC Geneva, 8 January 1948, ICRC archives, G59//GC, cited in Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, p. 91. Most of the patients admitted to government-run hospitals were Arab Palestinians. Jewish patients were largely taken care of in Jewish-run hospitals, part of the social infrastructure that the Jewish Agency had built up in order to create a Jewish state in Palestine. See also ICRC, "Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge en Palestine," pp. 329–40.
 - 4 Report by Roland Marti, Jacques de Reynier, and Jean Munier, Palestine Mission, Jerusalem, 15 February 1948, ICRC archives, G59//GC, cited in Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, p. 109. The ICRC plan of action is also reprinted in ICRC, "Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge en Palestine," pp. 332–33.
 - 5 Except for de Reynier, who was stationed in Palestine as of January 1948, ICRC staff arrived in Palestine between 14 April and 13 May 1948.
 - 6 David Forsythe and Barbara Ann Rieffer-Flanagan, *The International Committee of the Red Cross: A Neutral Humanitarian Actor* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 17.
 - 7 Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, pp. 50–74.
 - 8 Draft International Convention on the Condition and Protection of Civilians of Enemy Nationality Who Are on Territory Belonging to or Occupied by a Belligerent, Tokyo, 1934, ICRC web site, <http://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/320?OpenDocument>.
 - 9 ICRC, *Report on the Work of the Conference of Government Experts for the Study of the Conventions for the Protection of War Victims, April 14–26, 1947* (Geneva: ICRC, 1947), pp. 8, 103, and 272, cited in Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, p. 35. Specifically, the participants agreed that the revised conventions would include provisions making them applicable "in case of civil war, in any part of the home or colonial territory of a Contracting Party" on condition of reciprocity.
 - 10 ICRC, "Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge en Palestine," p. 333. Emphasis added.
 - 11 "Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field" and "Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War."
 - 12 "Application in Palestine of the Principles of the Geneva Conventions, Appeal by the ICRC in Geneva," Geneva, 12 March 1948, ICRC archives, CP 312, cited in Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, p. 117. The appeal is reprinted in ICRC, "Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge en Palestine," p. 334. Emphasis added.
 - 13 Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, pp. 118–9. In drafting the appeal, the Red Cross also drew upon a number of precedents from the committee's interventions in previous conflicts. In the 1930s, for example, the ICRC had called upon and obtained the agreement of all sides in the Spanish Civil War "to respect the Geneva Convention, despite the absence of any draft convention or provision." During World War II, moreover, the ICRC had managed to secure agreement among belligerents to apply, on condition of reciprocity, draft provisions for the protection of enemy civilians under their jurisdiction. It was unable, however, to secure similar agreement for the protection of enemy civilians in occupied territory. Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, p. 34.
 - 14 See Hussein Fakhri Khalidi (AHC Jerusalem) to ICRC in Palestine, 3 April 1948, ICRC archives, G59//GC; and Golda Myerson and Itzhak Ben Zevie [sic], Tel Aviv, to ICRC in Palestine, Jerusalem, 4 April 1948,

- ICRC archives, G59/I/GC, cited in Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, p. 123. The brief text of each statement is reprinted in ICRC, "Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge en Palestine," p. 335.
- 15 Myerson and Ben Zevie [*sic*] to ICRC in Palestine.
 - 16 See Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, p. 123.
 - 17 See chapter on de Reynier's visit to Dayr Yasin excerpted from his memoir, *A Jerusalem un drapeau flottait sur la ligne de feu* (1960), reprinted in Walid Khalidi, ed., *From Haven to Conquest* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1971), pp. 761–66.
 - 18 Jacques de Reynier, "Report on the Dayr Yasin Fighting (Jerusalem)," 13 April 1948, ICRC archives, G59/1/GC, p. 3, and cited in Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, p. 131.
 - 19 Untitled memorandum, Paul Ruegger (resident of the ICRC), 24 May 1948, ICRC archives, G59/I/GC, cited in Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, p. 125. The text of the appeal is reprinted in "Le conflit de Palestine: Appel du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge aux belligérants," *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge et Bulletin international des sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 30, no. 353 (1948), p. 341–42. The appeal was addressed specifically to Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan, and Israel.
 - 20 Telegram from Azzam Pasha (Secretary of the Arab League), Cairo, to ICRC, Geneva, 26 May 1948, ICRC archives, G59/I/GC; and telegram from Shertok (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Provisional Government of the State of Israel) to Ruegger, Geneva, 27 May 1948, ICRC archives, G59/I/GC, and Israel State Archives (ISA), MEA/1987.7, cited in Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, p. 126.
 - 21 Egypt and Iraq signed on in the 1930s, and Israel in August 1948. Transjordan, Syria, and Lebanon did not sign the treaty.
 - 22 See Theodor Meron, "The Geneva Conventions as Customary Law," *American Journal of International Law* 81, no. 2 (1987), pp. 348–70.
 - 23 For an overview of the ICRC Palestine war files, see Jalal al Hussein, *Palestinian Refugee Archives (1948–1950): ICRC, Geneva, Overview and Analysis* (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 1999); and Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik, eds., *Reinterpreting the Historical Record: The Uses of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Jerusalem Studies and the Institute of Palestine Studies, 2001).
 - 24 Jean-Francois Pitteloud, "New Access Rules Open the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross to Historical Research and to the General Public," *International Review of the Red Cross* 36, no. 314 (1996), pp. 551–53.
 - 25 The summaries contained in the *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge et Bulletin international des sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* appear incomplete, and the documents reviewed for this study include only a sample of the ICRC reports on visits to the camps that were made during the 1948 war. Some indication of their frequency can be gleaned from the *Report on General Activities (1 July 1947–31 December 1948)* (Geneva: ICRC, 1949), p. 110, cited in Junod, *Imperiled Red Cross*, p. 224.
 - 26 Another source of information about conditions in the camps are the weekly reports that the elected representative of the POWs ("homme de confiance") in each camp were required to prepare. Copies of these reports were sent to both the camp commandant and the ICRC. They were not, however, among the documents reviewed for this article.
 - 27 Part 1(a) of the "General Section" of Plan Dalet, dated 10 March 1948, states the plan's objective: "to gain control of the areas of the Hebrew state and defend its borders. It also aims at gaining control of the areas of Jewish settlement and concentration which are located *outside* the borders [of the Hebrew state]" (emphasis added). See appendix B of Walid Khalidi, "Plan Dalet Revisited: The Zionist Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1988), p. 24. The article was originally published in *Middle East Forum* 37, no. 4 (November 1961).
 - 28 Acre fell three days later. Of these cities, only Haifa and Tiberias were mixed.
 - 29 Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing*, p. 26.
 - 30 The extent to which Israel was eager to be rid of the Palestinians is clear in the testimony of a prisoner captured much later, in autumn 1948, who recounts that the Israeli soldiers told a

- group of 450 Palestinian men who had been rounded up and herded into a cage that “anyone who wants to go to an Arab country will be released immediately.” The prisoner added that he and the others had “stayed because we knew our expelled families” had remained in the country, hiding in the hills. Kamal Ghattas, interview, 3 July 2002.
- 31 “Prisoner of War: Yusuf Sayigh, 1948 to 1949, Excerpts from His Recollections,” as told to and edited by Rosemary Sayigh, *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 29 (2007), pp. 13–32; and Walid Ragheb Khalidi, *Ramla Speaks* (Amman: n.p., 1991), pp. 168–78. The “unofficial camp” Sayigh was first taken to in Jerusalem may have been Neve Sha’anana.
- 32 Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing*, pp. 133–37.
- 33 Statement by Marwan ‘Iqab al-Yahya published in Muhammad Nimr al-Khatib, *Nakbat Filastin* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, 1951), pp. 203–14. A further clarification was made by al-Yahya in a typed statement to the writer and in a telephone interview from his home in California on 11 July 2002.
- 34 In his first report, dated July 1948, ICRC delegate André Durand reported that Palestinians held at Neve Sha’anana appeared to have been transferred to a second camp near Tel Aviv (i.e., Ijlil) on 2 and 3 of July 1948. ICRC, André Durand, “Monthly Report No. 4,” Jerusalem, 11 July 1948, p. 6.
- 35 ICRC, “Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge en Palestine,” *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge et Bulletin international des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 30, no. 356 (1948), p. 554.
- 36 *New York Times*, 12 October 1948, quoted in Walid Khalidi, ed., *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), p. 242.
- 37 Sayigh, “Prisoner of War,” p. 22.
- 38 Atlit camp is now maintained by the Society for Preservation of Israel Heritage Sites. Information about the camp, however, makes no reference to its later use as a detention camp for Palestinian civilians and Arab POWs. See the web site of the Society for the Preservation of Israel Heritage Sites, <http://eng.shimur.org/Atlit/>. Another prison near Sarafand had been used during the Mandate to intern Palestinian political prisoners.
- 39 Land of Israel Archives, 580/56/246, 75, and 324/50/24, 28, cited in Klein, “Arab Prisoners of War,” p. 570.
- 40 Land of Israel Archives, 580/56/246, 75, and 324/50/24, 12, 27, cited in Klein, “Arab Prisoners of War,” p. 569. Sixty dunams is equivalent to 6 hectares or 14.8 acres.
- 41 Land of Israel Archives, 6127/49/105, 48, and 580/56/246, 75, cited in Klein, “Arab Prisoners of War,” p. 571.
- 42 Land of Israel Archives, 6127/49/105, 48, and 580/56/246, 75, cited in Klein, “Arab Prisoners of War,” p. 571.
- 43 Review of Aharon Klein, “The Arab POWs in Israel’s War of Independence,” in Alon Kadish, ed., *Israel’s War of Independence 1948–1949* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 2004), in American Veterans of Israel (AVI) Newsletter, Summer 2004, p. 21.
- 44 Klein, “Arab Prisoners of War,” p. 570.
- 45 Land of Israel Archives, 324/50/24, 23, 32, cited in Klein, “Arab Prisoners of War,” p. 569.
- 46 ICRC, Maximilien de Meuron, “Report No. 1,” Haifa, 2 May 1948, ICRC archives, G59/1/GC, p. 3.
- 47 De Meuron, “Report No. 11,” Haifa, 30 June 1948, G.59/1/GC, G.3/82, p. 1.
- 48 Jacques de Reynier, “Monthly Report No. 4: June 1948,” Jerusalem, 2 July 1948, p. 5. Klein notes that Israel detained civilians between the ages of 14 and 70, the age of military inscription. Klein, p. 574.
- 49 ICRC, “Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge en Palestine,” *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge et Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 30, no. 356 (1948), p. 556.
- 50 ICRC, Emile Moeri, “Report on the Situation of the POWs in Jewish Hands,” Tel Aviv, 6 February 1949, p. 2.

- 51 ICRC, Dr. Moeri, "Report No. 20, Visit of Ijlil camp 9 November 1948," 12 November 1948, ICRC archives G59/I/GC G/82 p. 3.
- 52 ICRC, Dr. Moeri and Dr. Lehner, "Report No. 19," Tel Aviv, 11 November 1948, ICRC archives, G59/I/GC, G3/82, p. 1.
- 53 ICRC, *Rapport Général d'Activité de la Délégation ICRC (Janvier 1948-Juillet 1949)* (Beirut, 6 July 1949), p. 22.
- 54 De Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 4 for June 1948," p. 5.
- 55 Sayigh, "Prisoner of War," p. 23.
- 56 See Kamen, "After the Catastrophe I," p. 478, table 14, "Percent of Adult Male Populated in Selected Localities Held in Prisoner-of-War Camps." In Ramla, Israeli forces rounded up several thousand Palestinian civilians and transferred them to a nearby prison camp; see Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing*, p. 169.
- 57 A number of prisoner accounts mention the influx of prisoners after Operation Dani. Yusif Sayigh, for example, noted the arrival in Ijlil of hundreds from Lydda and Ramla at the time. Sayigh, "Prisoner of War," p. 25.
- 58 Tawfiq Ahmad Jum'a Ghanim, interview, Amman, 6 July 2002.
- 59 Shimoni to Sasson, Paris, 12 November 1948, ISA, FM2570/11, quoted in Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 226.
- 60 Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, p. 228.
- 61 Nadim Musa, interview, Abu Sinan, Galilee, 3 July 2002.
- 62 Lt. Colonel Sore (French army), "UNTSO Summary of Interrogation Report," 16 November 1948, UN DAG 13/3.3.1:10, 1st file.
- 63 ICRC, Emile Moeri, and Roland Troyon, "Report No. 21," Tel Aviv, 12 November 1948, G59/I/GC, G3/82, p. 1. Other ICRC reports also described the deleterious impact of the men's detention on their families. See, for example, de Meuron, "Report No. 9," Haifa, 6 June 1948, G59/I/GC, p. 1. See also Kamen, "After the Catastrophe I," p. 477.
- 64 Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir Abu Sayf, interview, Amman, 6 July 2002.
- 65 UN Military Observer Group, "Report of Incident submitted on 19 October 1948 by Major Lemoine and Captain Bossuyt attached to Nablus Headquarters," Nablus, Palestine, 22 January 1949.
- 66 Jacques de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 14: April 1949," Beirut, 2 May 1949, p. 5.
- 67 Jacques de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 11: January 1949," Beirut, 12 March 1949, p. 3.
- 68 ICRC, Maximilien de Meuron, "Report No. 11," Haifa, 30 June 1948, p. 1.
- 69 Sayigh, "Prisoner of War," p. 25.
- 70 The figures in the Israel State Archives differ slightly: 4,999 Palestinians interned in Israel's POW camps in early 1949, of whom 160 were irregulars and 6 were soldiers. ISA, 324/50/15, 15, cited in Klein, "Arab Prisoners of War," pp. 26, 574.
- 71 ISA, 67/51/29, 6, 8 and 4224/49/197, 12, cited in Klein, "Arab Prisoners of War," p. 6. Israel's former Ministry of Minorities mentions five thousand prisoners as of January 1949, although Kamen notes that the total number for this period was probably greater. Kamen, "After the Catastrophe I," p. 1, citing Government of Israel, Ministry of Minorities, Activities, May 1948-January 1949, Jerusalem, 1949 [in Hebrew].
- 72 David Ben-Gurion, *Diary*, 3:829 (entry for 17 November 1948), cited in Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing*, p. 201.
- 73 ICRC, Moeri and Lehner, "Report No. 19," Tel Aviv, 11 November 1948, G59/I/GC, G3/82, p. 2. See also ICRC, Maximilien de Meuron, "Report no. 11," p. 1.
- 74 ICRC, de Meuron, "Report No. 9."
- 75 ICRC, de Meuron, "Report no. 11."

- 76 ICRC, Jacques de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 8: October 1948," Beirut, 5 November 1948, p. 3.
- 77 Jacques de Reynier (chief delegate), *Rapport Général d'Activité de la Délégation CICR pour la Palestine*, (Beirut, 6 July 1949), pp. 19, 22.
- 78 David Ben-Gurion, *War Diary, 1947–1949* [in Arabic] (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993), p. 598 (entry for 27 October 1948).
- 79 Ben-Gurion, *War Diary*, p. 694 (entry for 5 January 1949).
- 80 Muhammad al-Batrawi, interview by Fatma 'Asi under Salih 'Abd al-Jawad's supervision. See S. Abdel Jawad, "Why Our History Cannot Be Written without Oral History: 1948 War as a Case Study" (presented in Arabic at Oral History Workshop, Amman, May 2005). The private libraries of many well-known figures in the western neighborhoods of Jerusalem as well as others ended up at the National Library of the Hebrew University. See Gish Amit, "Salvage or Plunder? Israel's 'Collection' of Private Palestinians Libraries in West Jerusalem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40, no. 4 (Summer 2011), pp. 6–23; and Hannah Mermelstein, "Overdue Books: Returning Palestine's 'Abandoned Property' of 1948," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 11 (2011), pp. 46–64.
- 81 Mustafa al-Wali, ed., "Eye Witnesses Described the Tantura Massacre" [in Arabic], *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filistiniyya* 43 (2000), p. 127.
- 82 Marwan 'Iqab al-Yahya, statement in al-Khatib, *Nakbat Filastin*, pp. 203–14.
- 83 According to the web site www.mapisrael.info, Mitzpe Ramon (Ramon Lookout) is situated high on a ridge 2,800 feet above sea level in the Negev Desert and was "founded originally as a camp for workers building a road to Eilat in [before] 1951." See also *Carta's Official Guide to Israel and Complete Gazetteer to All Sites in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: State of Israel, Ministry of Defence Publishing House, 1993), p. 336.
- 84 Private information from the Abu Sbayh family.
- 85 Private information from the families of the two prisoners.
- 86 Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, 1929, Geneva, Art. 31.
- 87 In her discussion of the protection of POWs since World War II, Beaumont notes that "the 1929 prohibition on labor that had 'a direct relation with war operations' had proved to be inadequate and ambiguous in 1939–45. In the modern 'total war' what economic activity was *not* related to the war effort?" Joan Beaumont, "Protecting Prisoners of War, 1939–95," in Bob Moore and Kent Fedorwich, eds., *Prisoners of War and Their Captors in World War II* (Oxford: Berg, 1996), p. 281.
- 88 ICRC, *Procès-Verbal d'Entretiens*, Tel Aviv, 20 June 1948, G59/1/GC, G3/82, p. 2.
- 89 Article 31 of the 1929 Geneva Convention states: "In particular, it is forbidden to employ prisoners in the manufacture or transport of arms or munitions of any kind, or on the transport of material destined for combatant units."
- 90 Memorandum, "Jewish Atrocities in the Holy Land," enclosure with letter from Issa Nakleh (representative of the AHC for Palestine) to the Secretary General, 28 July 1948, UN Doc. S/925, p. 4.
- 91 Al-Wali, "Eye Witnesses," pp. 118–40; and Kamal Ghattas, interview.
- 92 Sayigh, "Prisoner of War," p. 25.
- 93 Tawfiq Ahmad Jum'a Ghanim, interview, p. 30.
- 94 "When Beersheba Fell: An Eyewitness Account" [in Arabic], *Akhbar al-Nagab*, 8 November 2004.
- 95 "When Beersheba Fell."
- 96 Marwan 'Iqab al-Yahya, statement in al-Khatib, *Nakbat Filastin*, p. 206–207.
- 97 Marwan 'Iqab al-Yahya, statement in al-Khatib, *Nakbat Filastin*, p. 211.
- 98 Marwan 'Iqab al-Yahya, written testimony, by facsimile, 11 July 2002, p. 5 of 7.
- 99 Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir Abu Sayf, interview.
- 100 Marwan 'Iqab al-Yahya statement in al-Khatib, *Nakbat Filastin*, p. 207.
- 101 Nadim Musa, interview.

- 102 Kamal Ghattas, interview.
- 103 Marwan 'Iqab al-Yahya statement in al-Khatib, *Nakbat Filastin*, p. 211.
- 104 Al-Wali, "Eye Witnesses," p. 127. See also the testimony of Mahmud Nimr 'Abd al-Mu'ti, Yusuf Mustafa Bayrumi, Muhammad Kamil al-Dassuki, and 'Abdullah Salim Abu Shukr, pp. 63, 128, 131, 135, 137 respectively.
- 105 Marwan 'Iqab al-Yahya statement in al-Khatib, *Nakbat Filastin*, p. 209.
- 106 Kamal Ghattas, interview. The same story is told in Hanna Ibrahim, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Memoirs of a Young Man Who Did Not Travel* 2nd ed. [in Arabic] (Acre: al-Aswar, 1996), pp. 96–98, 118–20.
- 107 Tawfiq Ahmad Jum'a Ghanim, interview.
- 108 Marwan 'Iqab al-Yahya statement in al-Khatib, *Nakbat Filastin*, p. 213.
- 109 Sayigh, "Prisoner of War," p. 23.
- 110 Nadim Musa, interview.
- 111 Kamal Ghattas, interview.
- 112 ICRC, Moeri, "Situation of the POWs in Jewish Hands," p. 2.
- 113 ICRC, de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 13," p. 5.
- 114 ICRC, de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 14," p. 5.
- 115 Nadim Musa, interview.
- 116 ICRC, Jacques de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 7: September 1948," 17 November 1948, p. 3.
- 117 ICRC, *Rapport Général*, p. 19.
- 118 De Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 4: June 1948," p. 5.
- 119 De Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 8," p. 3.
- 120 De Reynier, "Monthly Report no. 11: January 1949," p. 3. Also in January 1949, the Israeli government amended its classification of civilian internees from "civilians" to "others" or "unclassified" (Land of Israel Archives 7335/49/416, 73, and 324/50/15, 51, cited in Klein, "Arab Prisoners of War," p. 7).
- 121 S. P. Mackenzie, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in WWII," *Journal of Modern History* 66, no. 3 (1994), p. 489.
- 122 ICRC, *Rapport Général*, p. 20.
- 123 "Suggestions Presented by the United Nations Mediator on Palestine to the Parties on 28 June 1948," part 2, para. 9, UN Doc. S/863. The mediator would elaborate provisions for the return of refugees in his September report to the United Nations. UNGA, *Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for Transmission to the Members of the United Nations*. UN GAOR, 3rd Sess., Suppl. No. 11, UN Doc. A/648, 16 September 1948. Bernadotte was assassinated by members of the Stern Gang (Lehi) the day after he submitted his report to the UN.
- 124 Jacques de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 5: July 1948," Jerusalem, 3 August 1948, p. 5.
- 125 De Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 14," p. 6.
- 126 Jacques de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 9: November 1948," 14 December 1948 p. 3.
- 127 De Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 9," p. 3.
- 128 ICRC, de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 13," pp. 4–5. There was not a separate armistice agreement for Iraq, which was included in the Israel-Transjordan agreement.
- 129 ICRC, de Reynier, "Monthly Report No. 4: June 1948," p. 5.
- 130 The photographs taken by the ICRC of the Palestinians being transported subsequently became a symbol of the 1948–49 ethnic cleansing.
- 131 ICRC, "Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge en Palestine," *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge et Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 30, no. 356 (1948), p. 556.

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- 132 See Klein, "Arab Prisoners of War," p. 11.
- 133 Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir Abu Sayf, interview.
- 134 The reference appears to be to Dr. Emile Moeri.
- 135 Sayigh, "Prisoner of War," p. 23.
- 136 On the other hand, the ICRC delegates were not immune to the kind of racism and cultural bias prevalent at the time. In his June 1948 monthly report, for example, Jacques de Reynier referred to Palestine as "this country of savages" (p. 7), while Emile Moeri, in his "Rapport Sur la Situation des PG's en Mains Juives (G59/I/GC, G3/82, 9 February 1948) noted that the camps' *hommes de confiance* were "sincere, courageous and intelligent [men] . . . in whom we have complete confidence," adding in parenthesis, "Don't forget we are in the Orient" (p. 4).
- 137 Dr. R. Pflimlin (ICRC Southern Sector, Gaza) to M. de Reynier, ref. no. 350 ICRC archives Em/?GS/9, 14 January 1949, G59/I/GC, G3 /82, 9 February 1948.