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Journalism, separation, and independence: newspaper coverage of the end of the British Mandate for Palestine, 1948

Introduction

A century after the Balfour Declaration, and half a century after the Six Day War, history continues to have great influence over the narratives of conflict in the Middle East. As Ilan Pappé wrote of his experience of teaching a class, at Haifa University, which included Palestinian and Jewish students, ‘both groups regard history as just another prism through which to view present rather than past reality’ (2006: 1). Outside the region, news reporting contributes to much of western understanding of the conflict – although the historical role which Britain in particular played in the region features less frequently in public discussion. This article will argue that news reporting of the end of the British Mandate is a valuable source for understanding the relationship between correspondents and Colonial power then, and, that despite both the pressures placed upon them, and their close relationship with the Colonial authorities, journalists achieved a degree of independence in their reporting. In doing so, the article will also seek to determine the nature and extent of that independence.

By late 1947, Palestine was becoming increasingly ungovernable. Thirty years had passed since General Allenby took possession of Jerusalem from retreating Ottoman forces, an episode of British colonial history captured for global distribution using the latest technology: film (Colonial Film, 1917). Humbled, even as a conquering imperial hero, by the sanctity of the city, Allenby famously dismounted and entered on foot (Mansfield, 1992: 159). Three decades later, at the end of a period during which, ‘The purpose of the Mandate was never entirely clear to those serving in Palestine,’ (Shepherd, 1999: 5), British authority in Palestine was coming to an end. The final days of the Mandate were the subject of unusually extensive media scrutiny. In his diary, the last Chief Secretary of the Mandatory Government, Sir Henry Gurney, noted that there were ‘120 Palestine newspapers’ and ‘about 70 foreign correspondents who send out a continual stream of facts or misstatements, according to whom they get it from.’ (Golani, 2009: 70). This ‘continual stream’ seems to have been a consequence of the fact that Mandate affairs were followed closely far beyond the borders of Palestine. ‘Perennially the focus of Parliamentary questions, journalistic scrutiny, often partisan international attention from press and politicians, the Mandate was never a quiet backwater, much to the chagrin of local officials.’ (Sherman, 1997: 32). Dealing with propaganda was part of the job of Mandate officials. They also faced impossible competing demands from Palestine’s Jewish and Arab populations, and daily personal danger. Gurney’s predecessor, Sir John Shaw, had left Palestine in 1946, ‘unable to continue in office because he was under certain threat of assassination.’ (Golani, 2009: 4). Shaw’s departure followed the bombing in July 1946 of a wing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, which then served as headquarters for the Mandate authorities. Ninety-one people were killed in the explosion (Shepherd, 1992: 225). Peter Duffield, then correspondent for *The Daily Express*, was in another part of the King David when the bombers – Jewish fighters seeking to drive the British from Palestine, and hasten the creation of a Jewish State – hit their

target. His account of the attack was carried in the next day's newspaper, along with material – relating to a meeting in Shaw's office – which had obviously been prepared before the explosion. Duffield picked out one detail which seemed to sum up the conflict. 'That Palestine scene – with its fierce hatreds, its distortions and mutilations of the truth – is visible in Shaw's wastepaper basket. Into it each day, after perusal, go thousands of words of propaganda, pleading, demands and threats.' (Duffield, 1946). The extent and efficacy of this 'perusal' is perhaps questionable. As Sherman has pointed out (1997: 27), 'Since few British officials knew Hebrew, the complex political and ideological controversies that agitated the Jewish community, reflected in lively press and public debate, were unknown to all but a few'. In terms of communication with the peoples of Palestine, in fact, it has been argued that the British Mandate authorities spoke more than they listened. 'A discourse appealing to the desirability of uplifting social evolution via the technology of benevolent colonial rule and industrial capitalism was deployed mercilessly and aggressively.' (Ghandour, 2010: 3).

The present article considers some 50 news and other items from newspapers published on or around May 14th 1948. The *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, and *The Observer* were the main British newspapers selected, partly because their use of bylines – not then a universal convention – allowed the work of individual correspondents, especially Clare Hollingworth, to be followed. *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* were also considered, although are cited less here principally because their lack of bylines meant journalists' work could not be traced in the same way. The *New York Times* was selected for its long tradition of international reporting in order to provide contrasting perspectives – not only politically, but also, as will be demonstrated, because its correspondents enjoyed better access than their British counterparts.

The correspondents' world: colonialism, and Orientalism?

Like journalists in any age, the correspondents in Palestine then were surrounded by factors which were potential influences on their reporting. The wider global political situation is significant. This was the period immediately following the Second World War, during which 'political leaders were gratified by how uncomplainingly editors, reporters and film-makers lent their talents to the war effort' (Caruthers, 2011: 90), and when 'BBC Staff felt themselves to be in the front line,' (Briggs, 1985: 194). Given their proximity to the colonial elite – one thing which comes through the coverage of the bombing of the King David Hotel is the number of reporters, in addition to Duffield, who were themselves nearly killed or injured – the correspondents shared some of the dangers which officials faced, and so may have come to share their viewpoints. Views of the inhabitants of the Holy Land then were not necessarily antagonistic, but nor were they always realistic. 'Upon the Arabs of Palestine [...] the British tended to project expectations and feelings absorbed largely from a romantic literary tradition of Orientalism,' wrote Sherman (1997: 25). Certainly, his *Mandate Days: British Lives in Palestine 1918-48* provides plenty of material to support his statement. Yet the Orientalism of the Mandate was more than that 'romantic literary tradition'. In as much as they thought of it at all, the correspondents then would have understood Orientalism to signify, in addition to that artistic and

literary genre, ‘the scholarly study of the languages and cultures of ‘the Orient’: a geographically nebulous region comprising North Africa and the present-day Middle East, ranging through South Asia and extending as far east as Japan.’ (Teo, 2013: 2). Today, any assessment of the word must include discussion of Edward Said’s *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978), and later writings – especially such characterizations as, ‘What we must reckon with is a long and slow process of appropriation by which Europe, or the European awareness of the Orient, transformed itself from being textual and contemplative into being administrative, economic, and even military.’ (1995: 210). The British Mandate for Palestine was obviously one of the latter cases. The correspondents were naturally expected to follow the activities of the political and military leadership of the Mandate. In other words, they and their reporting were part of the ‘administrative, economic, even military’ construct which was the British Mandate for Palestine. Orientalism, therefore, provides in some respects a useful way of characterizing the body of British correspondents’ work in Palestine in this period. However, it is not a complete explanation. To this theoretical approach must be added a recognition of practical factors: particularly language barriers, and physical ones of access. Nor were these factors for British reporters alone. They may have been allowed into Irgun news conferences from which British correspondents were banned, but life was not all easy for correspondents from the United States either. A footnote to a *Daily Express* article from the time reported, ‘Transjordan has warned the U.S. government that no visas will be given to American correspondents because it cannot be responsible for their safety.’ (Footnote to Grey, 1947).

The day after the bombing of the King David, Barbara Board, of the *Daily Mirror*, told readers of the way a military policeman at the hotel entrance had thrown her to the ground and shielded her with his body. (Board, 1946). The correspondents were there too when British soldiers dug through the rubble in search of survivors, and dead. ‘In broad daylight, dozens of Jews, Arabs, and Britishers, were murdered in cold blood by the notorious Jewish terrorist organization, Irgun Zvai Leumi’ ran the commentary on a contemporary newsreel. (Imperial War Museum Films, 1946). Having themselves been in personal danger, the journalists may well have been more likely to identify with the colonial officials who were the target of the attack. Another correspondent, Clare Hollingworth, could not overcome her anger even decades later. One of the group behind the bombing, Menachem Begin, was a future Israeli Prime Minister. ‘When Begin rose to power in the late 1970s I often found myself in his presence. But I never greeted him. I would not shake a hand with so much blood on it,’ she wrote in a later memoir (1990: 141). Such a response is understandable, given the danger in which Hollingworth had found herself. It also casts doubt on the efficacy of part of the Irgun’s strategy, given that, ‘Much of the terrorist campaign of the Irgun was directed at the British media. Begin himself recognised the importance of that factor in the various meetings of the High Command.’ (Zadka, 1995: 178). In the King David attack, ‘the terrorist campaign’ seems, if anything, to have driven the British press into the arms of the Mandate authorities: in Board’s case, literally so.

The importance of the press

Yet there were divisions between the political elite and the correspondents. Close as they may have been in outlook, and in physical location, the journalists were also kept at a distance – even

as their potential power was understood. In his diary entry of 5th April 1948, just weeks before the Mandate was to come to an end, Gurney recorded the fact that *The Times* was to run a piece on a new book, published by the British Government's Stationery Office. The book included 'admirable pictures and photographs' of 'the Holy City under British care.' (Golani, 2009: 87). That 'care' may have been about to stop. The way in which it was to be portrayed retained great importance. Indeed, the 'administrative, economic, even military' aspects of the British Mandate were complemented by what were probably then cutting-edge public relations techniques. On Gurney's staff, as Public Information Officer, was Richard 'Dick' Stubbs 'previously advertising manager for Bob Martin's condition powder' (Golani, 2009: 200) – a preparation then, as now, designed to keep pet dogs in top shape. Even with Stubbs' assistance, Gurney admitted, 'It's not easy to follow what's going on.' (Golani, 2009: 70) This led him to compare his own access to information with the task facing the press, in terms that suggest a degree of admiration, 'even when you have access to all the information there is, but these fellows have to go out and get it for themselves.' (Golani, 2009: 70). This is not within this article's main scope, but his use of the word 'fellows' is interesting for what it says about gender attitudes in that milieu at that time – especially given that two of the most prominent correspondents, Board and Hollingworth, were women.

If one can detect among the British political elite in Palestine an understanding of the importance of press coverage, and even a degree of respect, then it is not always returned. Those who had 'to go out and get it for themselves' could be scathing of those who did not. At one point, Gurney wrote that Duffield had complained that the assistance offered by Stubbs' Public Information Office had made some reporters' lives too easy (Golani, 2009: 70). Hollingworth and her colleagues – although perhaps not those whom Duffield all but accused of laziness – did want to try to find out what is going on. Throughout her career, starting with her famously (and correctly) reporting in August 1939 – when she was herself 'only three days into [her] first journalism job' (Garrett, 2015: 67) – German armoured divisions on the Polish border, and poised to invade, Hollingworth was one to get the story herself. In Palestine, it was the sheer difficulty of doing so which frustrated her. In her article published in *The Observer* on 11th April 1948, she explained why. The opening of her piece included a line, 'It is the first time in history that shells have landed in the Holy City,' designed, as the best reportage should be, to gain, and retain, the audience's attention. As the piece continued, she reflected on the difficulty of establishing what was happening. Having apparently reached a dead end in her quest for 'hard' facts, Hollingworth turned her ire on those who, she obviously felt, should have been providing more reliable information.

The sound of gunfire was audible all over the centre of Jerusalem, and shells fell within two miles of the Dome of the Rock Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Before the shelling began, the only 'hard' facts of a situation which daily becomes more obscure and confused were that the Arabs this morning retook Mount Castel and that there was heavy fighting along the western approaches to Jerusalem – the only possible entry into the city for Jewish traffic.

There is no longer the slightest reliance to be placed in Jewish reports. Their Press is under strict censorship, imposed and enforced by the Jewish Agency, and its misrepresentations and distortions are reaching astonishing heights. There is indeed an atmosphere of quite unbelievable reality in the Jewish approach to the situation, which is based upon the determination to maintain at all costs the illusion that it is impossible for Jews to lose in any encounter with Arabs.

On the Arab side the Press indulges in childish boasting and highly-coloured accounts of Arab victories while what must be termed “official Arab sources” simply do not know what is happening, as their means of communication and collection and collation of data are hopelessly inadequate.

Unfortunately, the British authorities police and military, who might be expected to provide at least a check upon the prevailing exaggerations, appear usually to be in the position of having to obtain their information from the Press. They never know anything more.

Hollingworth’s piece has been quoted some length here because it illustrates at least two important points about the significance of the newspaper coverage of the end of the British Mandate for Palestine. This, surely, was journalistic independence in text form. Hollingworth did not feel she owed anything to any of her potential sources. On the contrary, she felt that they were failing her, and, by extension, her readers. With the exception of their access to British officials (and Gurney’s reflection that he, unlike the journalists, had ‘access to all the information there is’ suggests that was probably of limited scope and value) the correspondents were at a distance from the people whose lives and conflicts they were covering. Perhaps one can therefore also read a degree of frustration into Hollingworth’s criticism of British officials who ‘appear usually to be in the position of having to obtain their information from the Press’. Just as they seem to be at a distance from what is going on, so are the correspondents. In the fifty or so news reports which formed the core of the research for this article, one looks in vain for any reflection of Arab or Jewish opinion other than that offered by official sources. Whatever one might think of later 20th century, and 21st century, reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as it is now more readily known (and some scholars, such as Philo and Berry (2004, 2011) have been deeply critical of it), this seems striking. The reporting at this time seems removed from the people, Jewish and Arab, of Palestine. The human interest stories of the café owner, school teacher, farmer, or casual labourer, which might today be expected to provide context, or even a superficial indication of public opinion, are absent. Where are the casual contacts – the taxi drivers, the shopkeepers, with whom western correspondents might now chat? Where are the academics, the religious leaders, from whom they might seek more nuanced understanding of, or elite opinion from within, the communities which they were covering?

Their absence might tend to support an interpretation suggesting that western reporters had, at least in part, an Orientalist approach to the story, in the sense employed by Said. ‘Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed (sic) not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or – as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory – taken over.’ (1995: 207. In considering whether this was the case, it proved instructive to look at some of the work which Hollingworth in particular published on other assignments. Hollingworth’s

reporting was selected because of the range of other stories which she covered during the period shortly before and after the end of the British Mandate for Palestine. Duffield, Broad, and others, such as O'Dowd Gallagher of the *Daily Mail*, who were also reporting from Palestine in this era, did not travel as extensively as she. This is understandable. Given the huge amount of editorial appetite for coverage of Palestine, they had little incentive to do so. Hollingworth, on the other hand, seems to have been more restless. Even a brief examination of her work for *The Observer* in 1948 and 1949 uncovers datelines in Greece, Egypt, and Yugoslavia. Her work from these locations displays, in addition to her versatility as a correspondent, a frequent reliance on elite sources. There is one important distinction. The sources to which Hollingworth had access in other locations seemed very well informed – at least, that is the impression given from the detail in which she is able to report either the purge of the Secret Police in Yugoslavia (Hollingworth, 1948c) or the diet of the dying Greek Prime Minister (Hollingworth, 1948d). The lack of access to detailed, reliable, information she experienced in Palestine explains the frustration she expressed in the article cited above – and also why her reporting, and that of her fellow correspondents, sometimes feels removed from the action.

Security, an issue which will be discussed in more detail below, may have been another factor in this sense of separation. A week after the British authorities quit Mandate Palestine, Richard Wyndham, a reporter for Kemsley newspapers, was killed in the Sheikh Jarrah district, on the approaches to the Old City of Jerusalem (Daily Express News Service, 1948). We should not forget that Board, Duffield, and Hollingworth had all personally been uncomfortably close to the bombing of the King David Hotel. Hollis (2016: 10) has described the end of the Mandate as a time when the British political elite in Palestine were antagonistic to, and felt antagonized by, the peoples whom they were supposed to govern. 'Both communities were criticised in language that patronised the Arabs and demonised the Jews, as these British servants of the empire began to realise that they themselves were increasingly the objects of hostility from both quarters.' The reporting reflects a similar detachment, and, certainly in the case of Hollingworth, rigorously expressed disdain. So while Orientalist (in the sense employed by Said) perspectives formed part of the relationship between western reporters and the peoples whose conflict they were covering, there were additional factors: security, access, and probably language, too. Sherman's point, cited above, about the lack of Hebrew skills among British officials presumably applied equally to western correspondents.

The second point about Hollingworth's 11th April, 1948 article worthy of more detailed discussion here is the attempts which the belligerents make to mislead correspondents. Using phrases such as 'misrepresentations and distortions' and 'childish boasting and highly-coloured accounts' (Hollingworth 1948a), Hollingworth, frustrated as she was by the dearth of "'hard" facts' at least made it clear to her readers that she was not taken in by the information she had been fed. Although attempts to influence coverage, especially coverage of armed conflict, are as old as war reporting itself, these attempts to mislead are especially significant given what has followed. There can be few languages which have a single word for 'public diplomacy' in the sense of trying to influence public opinion. Hebrew is an exception. The word *hasbara* defies straightforward translation, but definitely includes this concept. 'There is no English word. It's either public diplomacy or information, some would say indoctrination,' is the explanation offered by Nitzan Chen, current Head of the Israeli Government Press Office (cited in Rodgers, 2015: 119). Judging from Hollingworth's experience, this is where that 'indoctrination', or

attempt at the same, begins to establish itself: ready to grow in scope and sophistication as the State of Israel itself develops, right up to the age of social media (see Kuntsman and Stein, 2015). Hollingworth's experience has its counterparts in every era of the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In 1967, for example, David Hirst, the veteran Middle East correspondent who was then a young stringer based in Beirut, wrote, 'There are two wars – the real war and propaganda war.' (Hirst, 1967). His article went on to describe 'fierce rhetoric pouring in' from Arab radio stations, and 'Arabic counterblast from Israel' (Hirst, 1967) – the Jewish State, then not even two decades old, already adept and using the language of its foes to fight the media battle. If this process of Arab-Israeli propaganda war did not exactly begin in 1948, Hollingworth's experience shows that it was at a highly significant point during the last days of the British Mandate – already established as one of the enduring elements of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the journalist which chronicles it.

Distance, discourse, and danger

The coverage of the massacre at Deir Yassin on April 9 1948 – a month before the Mandate came to an end – is significant for what it tells us about Jewish armed groups' attempts to restrict and shape international reporting, and the kind of reporting which resulted. In recent decades, the State of Israel and the Israeli Army have been in charge of issuing, through the Government Press Office (GPO), journalist accreditation, and controlling access based upon whether or not the journalist in question holds a GPO card. In the conflict in Gaza in 2008-9, known as 'Operation Cast Lead', the Israeli Authorities actually banned international journalists from entering Gaza for the duration of their campaign in the territory. The decision was reversed after the Foreign Press Association, which represents journalists employed by international news organizations to report from Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, successfully took the government to court. (FPA News, 2009). It is understandable that the Israeli Authorities might wish to keep international correspondents away. The British Mandate authorities had closer contact with British members of the international press corps than is the case today with the Israeli government and correspondents from outside the country. That does not mean that the correspondents of the Mandate era enjoyed unrestricted access, or that they universally shared the political and military authorities' outlook – consider Hollingworth's questioning of their competence; Duffield's frustration at what he saw as the easy life the Public Information Office afforded to his competitors. Gurney's reflections on the press seem to mirror those of military men in difficult situations throughout modern history: an annoying necessity whose needs must be considered. By the final weeks of the Mandate, however, British authority in Palestine had dwindled to an extent that being a British correspondent, or being accredited to the Public Information Office, was not sufficient to grant reporters the kind of access which they needed to do their job.

The massacre at the village of Deir Yassin is a case in point. The killing there of some 250 villagers (Khalidi, 1992: 290) on April 9 1948 was described by Gurney in his diary as 'one of the worst things the Irgun and Stern¹ have done' (Golani, 2009: 111). Even Harry Levin, a journalist working then for the illegal radio station run by the Haganah (a Jewish military organization set up during the Mandate era²) seems to have been horrified by what he heard. 'Last night Etzel³ captured Deir Yassin. Appalling accounts are circulating of their indiscriminate killing of men, women, and children. The entire purpose of the operation is

questionable.’ (Levin: 1997: 57). Gurney himself is in the dark as to the details of what has happened. The British correspondents are, too. The *Times* correspondent, Gurney writes, is unable to reach Deir Yassin, ‘stopped by the Haganah’ (Golani, 2009: 111). Further, remarkable, indication of the conditions under which British correspondents were working appeared in the next day’s edition of *The Times*. Not only had the paper’s correspondent been prevented from reaching Deir Yassin. Two paragraphs of a Reuters despatch carried in the paper on April 10th reported that Irgun and Stern leaders had actually organized a news conference ‘outside Jerusalem’ the night before – a news conference at which they ‘claimed they had killed 200 Arabs – half of whom were women and children’ (Reuters, 1948). However, ‘Only American and Jewish correspondents were admitted to the Press conference, the British being banned as “untrustworthy”.’ (Reuters, 1948). The reasons why the British journalists are seen in this way are not given, but it might be reasonable to assume that those giving the news conference feared being identified, and subsequently arrested – and that they did not ‘trust’ British correspondents to deliver the kind of coverage they sought. The Reuters despatch suggests a great deal of confidence, an air even of being untouchable, on the part of the ‘Irgun Commander’. The fact that the commander is quoted as saying that ‘the main Jewish assault on Arab-held territory would not begin until after the British withdrawal’ (Reuters, 1948) makes clear that the Irgun feel free to say what they like without fear of British reprisal. With the Mandate so clearly on its last legs, the days when ‘much of the terrorist campaign’ needed to be ‘directed at the British media’ (Zadka, 1995: 178) were over. A reading of the *New York Times*’ report, however, suggests that there may still have been an element of security consciousness, too.

The report, by Dana Adams Schmidt, appeared in the *New York Times* on 10th April 1948, under the headline, ‘200 Arabs killed, Stronghold Taken’. The massacre is infamous to this day for the number of civilians killed. It is also a turning point in the history of Jewish Militant groups’ involvement in the conflict of the late Mandate era. As Schmidt wrote, ‘This engagement marked the formal entry of the Irgunists and Sternists into the battle against the Arabs. Previously both groups had concentrated against the British.’ (Adams Schmidt, 1948). The most telling paragraphs from the point of view of the access afforded to Adams Schmidt and others appear lower down the piece, under the crosshead ‘Victors Describe Battle’

The Irgunists and Sternists escorted a party of United States correspondents to a house at Givat Shaul, near Deir Yasin (sic), tonight and offered them tea and cookies and amplified details of the operation.

The spokesman said that the village had become a concentration point for Arabs, including Syrian and Iraqi (sic), planning to attack the western suburbs of Jerusalem. If, as he expected, the Haganah took over occupation of the village, it would help to cover the convoy route from the coast.

The spokesman said he regretted the casualties among the women and children at Deir Yasin but asserted that they were inevitable because every house had to be reduced by force. Ten

houses were blown up. At others the attackers blew open the doors and threw in hand grenades.

One hundred men in four groups attacked a 4:30 o'clock in the morning, the spokesman said. The Irgunists wore uniforms of a secret design and they used automatic weapons and rifles. (Adams Schmidt, 1948).

The perpetrators of the killings at Deir Yassin did keep some details to themselves: their identities, for one. These were not for publication. Throughout Adams Schmidt's report, he refers to the speaker as 'the spokesman'. No name or description appears. Adams Schmidt's report, based on access denied to his British counterparts, is a kind of masterpiece of extreme journalistic objectivity. As such, it serves to highlight what can go wrong when correspondents adhere so strictly to such an approach. It excludes any reflection, or speculation, upon the suffering endured by the inhabitants of the village as their attackers fell upon them. While the headline writers have picked out the death toll, Adams Schmidt's report saves it for the end of the first paragraph, which concludes 'the Jews killed more than 200 Arabs, half of them women and children.' (Adams Schmidt, 1948). To be fair to Adams Schmidt, it is impossible to know at this distance whether the number of dead was placed at the end of the paragraph by editors in New York, perhaps on the grounds that the figure appeared prominently in the headline. The matter-of-fact tone of the rest of his report suggests that he may genuinely not have considered it the top line of the story. The word of 'the spokesman' is taken at face value. Nothing in the report suggests that Adams Schmidt or his colleagues challenged the spokesman, or asked for an explanation. Nor is the fact that the attack began at '4.30 o'clock in the morning' (Adams Schmidt, 1948) commented upon. It may help to explain why only 'some' of the 'women and children' who were told to 'take refuge in the caves' (presumably adjacent to the village) apparently did so.

Adams Schmidt's report is memorable for the fact that it brought news of the massacre to a wider audience. Its indifference to the fate of those killed, and its readiness to convey unchallenged the spokesman's words as he seeks to justify the deaths of civilians, make it stand out in another way, too – even decades later. No attempt is made to put a human face on those killed. Throughout, they are simply 'Arabs' or, as Said (1995: 207) might have seen it, 'Orientals [...] seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people.' In common with the British correspondents, Adams Schmidt may have found it impossible to get to Deir Yassin itself (although his reporting from around the time of the massacre does not mention any attempt to do so), but he did at least have access to sources in the way that the British correspondents obviously did not. He, along with his American colleagues, was trusted by the Jewish militant groups to the extent that they shared information with them, albeit apparently on entirely their own terms. In terms of the close relationship between Israel and the United States which was to follow later in the 20th century, and into our own, it is interesting to note the Jewish militant groups' attempts, even on the eve of Israeli statehood, to favour American correspondents with privileged access.

Given the Jewish militant groups' antagonistic approach to the British press, it seems less surprising that the correspondents seem at a distance from those they are covering. They lack contacts in the circles which would help them to understand in more detail what is happening. In this case they are distanced from the peoples of Palestine not because of an Orientalist barrier. They are distanced because, whatever efforts they might make to try to find out what is happening, physical obstacles are put in their way.

That is not to say such barriers of discourse did not exist in the coverage at the time. At the end of the previous year, 1947, when the timescale for British withdrawal from Palestine was first being outlined – 'Large-scale evacuation of British troops and officials from Palestine will begin early in January,' (Daily Mirror, 1947), as the Mirror put it in early December of that year – the British correspondents' distance from the story seems more marked. Writing in the Daily Express a couple of days later, Eric Grey gave an account of unrest in Jerusalem

British troops barricaded the King David Hotel: the civil and military headquarters. Arab youths fought it out with Palestine Police who used armoured cars to bar them from the Jewish quarters.

Then 200 Jewish youths carrying cudgels marched out, looking for trouble. Police reinforcements were called to keep the rival mobs apart. (Grey, 1947).

Grey's story was datelined 'Jerusalem', but the source of his information is not clear. His reference to British troops barricading the King David Hotel (despite the bombing of the year before, the building did remain the British 'civil and military headquarters' right up until the end of the Mandate) suggests that he may have been there, or at least seen the troops protecting the hotel. The lack of descriptive detail of the barricade; the 'Arab youths'; or the 'Jewish youths' however, suggests that Grey may have been elsewhere, and based his story based on official statements. That lack of detail in this incident, as in Deir Yassin, suggests a combination of factors shaping the reporting.

Whatever the shortcomings of the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in this century, it is very difficult to imagine that were a massacre of this scale to take place today, there would not be at least some attempt to find survivors, or relatives of those killed, to put a human face on such a horrific story. Criticizing T. E. Lawrence (often known as 'Lawrence of Arabia') for the way he describes the Arabs among whom he lives and alongside whom he fights, Said writes

We are to assume that if *an Arab* feels joy, if he is sad at the death of his child or parent, if he has a sense of the injustices of political tyranny, then those experiences are necessarily subordinate to the sheer, unadorned, and persistent fact of being an Arab (1995: 230) (Italics in original).

Said was not writing about the way British correspondents covered the people among whom they were staying, but his words here, especially those about being 'sad at the death of his child or his

parent’, seem apt – as do his words on the work of Gertrude Bell ‘about life in Damascus’ (Said, 1995: 229). Said suggests that Bell’s words ‘wipe out any trace of individual Arabs with narratable life stories.’ (Said, 1995: 229). The same could be said of some of the reporting of the end of the British Mandate.

Days of change, transition, and reflection

By the time of the massacre at Deir Yassin, the British Mandate had only a few weeks to run. The words attributed to the ‘Irgun Commander’ at the press conference following the killings show that Jewish militant groups were already forming strategy based on what they might be able to achieve ‘after the British withdrawal’. When that came, the British newspapers provided coverage which combined various elements of patriotic pride. These ranged from justification of British control of Palestine, and a cataloguing of achievements, to concern for the future. On the morning of May 14th 1948, the *Daily Mirror*’s story was headlined ‘Palestine – last appeal as we quit’ (Daily Mirror, 1948). Under the crossheading ‘Underdeveloped’, the paper reported that

When British rule began, says the Colonial Office, Palestine was primitive and underdeveloped.

The population of 750, 000 were disease-ridden and poor. But new methods of farming were introduced, medical services provided, roads and railways built, water supplies improved, malaria wiped out. (Daily Mirror, 1948)

Given that the British departure was to herald Palestine’s descent to an even greater intensity of armed conflict, there was a motive to seek out the positive, the achievements. The British investment in terms of blood and treasure had, after all, been significant – and many of those directly involved, or their families, would have been reading the *Mirror* and other papers. As the story points out in the next paragraph, ‘We had 84, 000 troops in Palestine.’ (Daily Mirror, 1948a). The number is astonishing, especially when the current strength of the British Army is considered for comparison.⁴ Little wonder, then, that Palestine was such a story. If there was any sense of weariness, failure, or futility, the British Newspapers were generally keen to keep a lid on it. The coverage of the very end of the Mandate tended to focus instead on the disorder which followed. In the *Daily Mirror* of May 15th, ‘The Jews claimed to have won control of Jerusalem after house-to-house fighting.’ (Daily Mirror, 1948b). On the coast, Eric Grey reported for the *Daily Express* on an Egyptian air-raid, apparently aimed indiscriminately at civilians, part of the assault by Arab armies which meant that, ‘Israel was thus born in the midst of war.’ (Shlaim, 2000: 34).

Egyptian spitfires dive-bombed a bus station in the heart of Tel-Aviv at the rush hour this evening. Forty-one people including children were killed, and more than 60 wounded.

I watched two planes come in from the sea and circle at 10,000 feet.

Then with a three-minute interval between them, they dived to 500 feet, dropped four small bombs – and started machine-gunning. Their green markings could be seen.

Those three minutes saved many lives: they gave hundreds of people a chance to take cover.

Two bombs dropped near a long queue waiting for suburban buses. One fell right on the station building.

Several buses were shattered, and the road was strewn with dead and wounded.

Until tonight the raids have not been taken seriously. The city thought it was a joke when four Jewish girls captured an Egyptian pilot shot down this morning. (Grey, 1948)

Alongside this kind of coverage – these dramatic accounts of armed conflict, albeit with the moment of levity, when the inhabitants of Tel Aviv thought the air raids ‘a joke’ – another theme is also present: that of a sense of an end of a chapter of British imperial history. In the *Daily Express* on May 15th, Sydney Smith encapsulates this moment and the conflict which erupts in its wake. He describes British officials taking their leave, ‘the Union Jack was hauled down at Government House and a Red Cross flag took its place. Hardly had they left when the Arabs and Jews resumed their battle for Jerusalem.’ (Smith, 1948). Compare this account of a battle with the apparently calm and dignified surroundings into which the same flag arrived in London only a few hours later (brought by plane, ahead of many officials, who made the journey by sea)

The weather-beaten, sun-dried Union Jack which was lowered for the last time from British Headquarters in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem early yesterday was carried in the airways terminal building at Victoria, S.W. at 12.45 am today.

The flag, symbol of the end of the British mandate, was tucked under the arm of Mr Maurice Dornan, Under-Secretary for Administration in Palestine.

With the last party of officials to leave Jerusalem – led by sir Henry Gurney, Chief Secretary – they had just flown to England.

The *Daily Mail* reporter in Haifa cabling last night said that as General Sir Alan Cunningham, last High Commissioner, left Jerusalem a solitary piper played on the roof of Government House.

Sir Alan flew to Haifa then drove to the port through heavily guarded streets.

Sir Alan stepped into a naval barge, saluted and sped to the cruiser *Euryalus*, while two flights of Spitfires dipped low over the water. (*Daily Mail*, 1948).

The *Daily Mirror* added more detail, again designed to emphasize the sense of imperial history. The paper reported that Mr Maurice Dornan, the official who carried the flag on arrival in London, had ‘climbed on to the tower (i.e. of the King David Hotel) and hauled down the flag.’ The report added, ‘Sir Henry Gurney said “The withdrawal from Jerusalem was done in an orderly and proud manner”’. (Daily Mirror, 1948b).

What followed was neither orderly, nor something of which to be proud.

The British were supposed to bear responsibility for preserving law and order until midnight, May 14, 1948; on several occasions they defended Jewish settlements and neighborhoods (sic), among them the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem. They did not, however, attempt to prevent the advance of the Haganah or the flight and expulsion of the Arabs. (Segev, 2000: 512)

Conclusion

‘The flight and expulsion of the Arabs,’ is still, almost seven decades later, one of the issues which enrages Palestinians, and to which no just or lasting solution has been found. As Said argued in an essay first published in Western Newspapers in 1998 (on the 50th anniversary of the end of the Mandate, and the coming into being of the State of Israel), ‘What makes it especially galling for Palestinians is that they have been forced to watch the transformation of their own homeland into a Western state, one of whose express purposes is to provide for Jews and not for non-Jews.’ (Said, 2000: 268). If the way in which the Mandate ended, or even the fact that it existed at all, is rarely discussed in Britain now, it is not forgotten in the region. If they did not know that, correspondents travelling there to report on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are often reminded. The experience of Channel 4 News’ Paul Mason, in the summer of 2014, was fairly typical: ‘As a Brit in Gaza, “it’s all your fault”, is a line I’ve heard a lot,’ (Mason, 2014). The end of the Mandate was reported extensively at the time it happened; remembered by journalists in this decade only in blog entries, rather than in mainstream news outlets. The correspondents who covered the end of the Mandate cannot be blamed for the relative obscurity of an era which helped to shape the modern Middle East. For they did manage, within the restraints placed upon them both by discourse and physical danger, to convey a sense of what was happening; of the longer term trends in the region. For that reason, their work merits re-reading today – especially as the greatest challenges they identify remain unsolved.

Decrying the departure from Jerusalem of Cable and Wireless (the company whose communications she used to send her stories) Hollingworth concluded ‘an important British interest has been needlessly sacrificed. There is little doubt that the Jewish State will build itself up commercially at considerable speed and provide the United States with a firm foothold in the Middle East.’ (Hollingworth, 1948b). Once again, Hollingworth knew what she was talking about – not only observant but prescient: foreseeing Washington’s rise to become the dominant outside power in the region for the remainder of the 20th century. Had there a prize for journalism on the end of the Mandate, though, it should probably have gone to the *Manchester Guardian*’s editorial dated 15th May 1948. Interested readers may wish to seek it out in its entirety, but one extract will suffice to show how succinctly it diagnosed the condition in which Britain was leaving Palestine

The promise to favour “the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people” without prejudice to “the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine” led us straight to the terrible conflict which is now being settled by the blood of Jews and Arabs. (Manchester Guardian, 1948).

Notes

¹ The Stern Gang was a splinter group from the Irgun (Irgun Zvai Leumi) dedicated to violence as a means of achieving Jewish statehood

² For details of its founding, see Segev (2000: 209)

³ The Hebrew initials of the Irgun (see Segev: 2000: 384)

⁴ A British Government website in October 2014 gave the number of personnel in the British Army as 89,200. Please see https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/373115/af-quarterly_personnel_report_oct14.pdf . Accessed 27 February 2017.

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