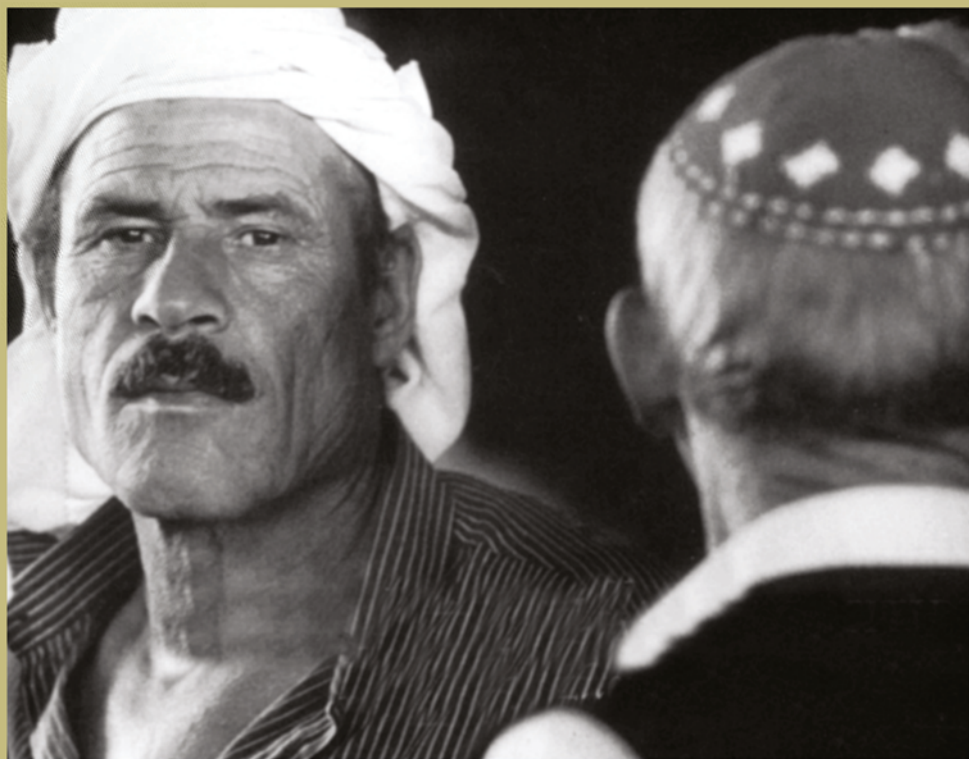


The Rhetoric of Violence:
Arab-Jewish Encounters in
Contemporary Palestinian
Literature and Film



Kamal Abdel-Malek



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IN CONTEMPORARY PALESTINIAN
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To Angela Dawn with love—wa ana aydan
and
To the memory of my beloved nephew Basim

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PREFACE

This is a study of the ways Palestinian Arab writers and filmmakers have depicted Arab–Jewish/Israeli encounters from the establishment of Israel in 1948 till the present.

The Arab–Israeli conflict has been raging on for more than half a century now. At present the news media show images of daily killings of Palestinians and Israelis, of scenes of destruction and carnage, and of dashed hopes for a peaceful settlement between Arabs and Jews in our time.

No other conflict in modern history has caused so sharp a polarization between Arab and Jewish communities the world over, so visceral a hatred, and such calls for revenge. Sadly it has been customary for Arab and Jewish observers and officials to trade blame and point fingers at one another. Many books have been penned to defend one partisan position against another, one exclusive claim over another, so that it is at times hard, if not impossible, to come across a balanced treatment of this conflict over the land that Arabs call Palestine and Jews call the Land of Israel. This book is an attempt to come to grips with the various aspects of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict in its literary and artistic manifestations. The main focus of the book is Palestinian literary works and films, but whenever relevant some comparisons are made with Israeli literature and films as well. These occasional comparisons are mainly meant to be suggestions for further research.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In order to make this book more readable and accessible to the general reader I have decided to not use the cumbersome transliteration system often adopted in our field. The specialist, however, will recognize the Arabic and Hebrew words and phrases in the book. Simple spelling of common proper names is used; for example, Emile Habibi, unless it is spelled otherwise in quotations (e.g. “Imil” or “Habiby”).

NOTE ON ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Todd van Horn for his excellent editorial help, which has rendered my text smoother and more felicitous. I am also grateful to Angela Abdel-Malek for her help and many useful suggestions, but above all else for her strong support and love. I have to thank several individuals and institutions for their help over the years. I am indebted to my former colleague at Brown University David Jacobson for all the collaborative work that has contributed to my understanding of the Arab–Israeli conflict and the kind of literature it has produced over the years. Several terms and insights in this book can be traced to this period of collaborative work with David and I am happy to acknowledge my intellectual debt. Brown University through several research grants and the prestigious Wriston Award for excellence in teaching and research (1998) gave me more than a junior faculty member could hope for. The American University of Sharjah (AUS) has been good to me in granting me both time to do my research on this book and funds to defray the cost of research trips to the UK and Egypt, and I thank Vice-Chancellor Amr Abdel-Hamid and Dean Robert Cook of the College of Arts and Science for having been instrumental in the decisions to grant me the time and the funds needed and for general support throughout the years at AUS. Lorin Richie and the staff of the AUS library have rendered many services in obtaining for me important sources for my study and have been generally both professional and friendly. My unbounded love for my daughters Amira and Layla has sustained me during the many months I spent away from them while writing this book. They do now and will always have my undying devotion.

The book includes excerpts from prose works as well as quotations from poetry collections. I am grateful to all who have given me permission to reproduce these. I am particularly grateful to the late Fadwa Tuqan, Hanna Ibrahim, and Mahmoud Darwish, who graciously granted me permission to include quotations from their works. Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own.

INTRODUCTION

Publications on the various aspects of the Arab–Israeli conflict abound; there are historical, political, social, military, and diplomatic accounts that fill library shelves the world over. The vast majority of these publications, however, largely ignore how the Arab–Israeli conflict is portrayed in the artistic realms of literature and film. This book is but an attempt to explore this terra incognita in order to glean an understanding of how the creative word and the artistic image depict the assumptions both sides have about their violent confrontations and moments of reconciliation. What is embedded deep in the obscure poem, the little-read piece of fiction, or the cinematic screen shot of Arab–Jewish encounters may be more revealing of the true sentiments of either side than their respective political declarations to world media.

The feature films and the literary works (novels, short stories, poetry, autobiographies) presented in this book are mainly Palestinian. A survey of Arabic literature produced by Arab writers other than Palestinian reveals an astonishing paucity of works that deal with Israeli Jews. Distinguished Arab novelists such as the Egyptian Najib Mahfuz, winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature, cannot claim a single piece of fiction that has a sustained treatment of the Arab–Israeli war or peace, or a well-developed Jewish or Israeli character. There is of course no dearth of literary works by second-tier writers, who, in one fashion or another, present crude plots in which they include defamations against Jews and warnings against their alleged conspiracies—the most noted of this kind of writer is Ali Ahmad Ba-Kathir (d. 1969) of Hadramaut.¹

There are however a few personal narratives penned by Arab and Israeli writers in which they depict with various degrees of sophistication and nuance Arab–Jewish encounters. Among these is the little-known 1957 narrative by the Egyptian journalist Izzat Ibrahim, under

the simple but telling title *Kuntu fi Israil*² (I Have Been to Israel). The book describes a trip to Israel during which Ibrahim toured the country and met with some prominent Israeli politicians, surprisingly at a time of great enmity between Egypt and Israel. Other narratives by Egyptian writers include *Enemy in the Promised Land: An Egyptian Woman's Journey into Israel*, by Sana Hasan (1986),³ *Rihla ila Israil*⁴ (Trip to Israel, 1994), by the noted Egyptian playwright Ali Salim (commonly spelled Salem in English-language references), and *Fi Intizar al-Mukhallis: Rihla ila al-Ard al-Muharrama*⁵ (Awaiting the Messiah: A Trip to the Forbidden Land, 2000), by Rauf Musad. Some Palestinian writers and activists have published accounts of their return to hometowns in the Occupied Territories or in Israel proper; for example, the accounts by Edward Said,⁶ and Murid Barghouthi's fictionalized *Ra'aytu Ramallah* (1998; *I Saw Ramallah*, 2000).⁷ Some prominent Palestinian political figures, such as Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad), Bassam Abu Sharif, and more recently Hanan Ashrawi, have published personal memoirs which include relevant details about their encounters with Zionist Jews inside and outside Israel.⁸

Some Israeli writers have published their own accounts of their contacts with Egyptians or their visits to Egypt, made possible after the signing of the Egyptian–Israeli Peace Treaty (1979), such as Amos Elon's *Flight into Egypt* (1980) and Isaac Bar-Moshe's Arabic book, *Misr fi Qalbi*⁹ (Egypt in My Heart, 1994). As early as 1974 the Israeli Amos Elon and the Egyptian Sana Hassan published a book of dialogue under the title *Between Enemies: A Compassionate Dialogue Between an Israeli and an Arab*.¹⁰

The topic of Arab–Jewish encounters in history, literature, and the arts has received relatively little scholarly attention. The first major book-length treatment of Arab–Jewish historical relations is S.D. Goitein's *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts Through the Ages* (1955).¹¹ It is a pioneering and informative study with a few unbalanced judgments on Arab culture, written in a period of tension between Israelis and Arabs. There are a few English-language articles of uneven quality on the image of the Jew/Israeli in Arabic literature, all published in the 1970s (see Abraham, Altoma, Alwan, Cachia, Le-Gassick).¹² While not dedicated specifically to this subject, the following books treat aspects of Arab–Jewish encounters in history, literature, and film: Ami Elad-Bouskila, *Palestinian Literature and Culture* (1999);¹³ Kamal Abdel-Malek and David Jacobson (eds.), *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History and Literature* (1999);¹⁴ Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (1993);¹⁵ and David Shipler *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land* (1987).¹⁶

As for the depiction of Arab–Jewish encounters in film, there are a few books that deal in part with this topic, including Yosefa Loshitzky's *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen* (2001),¹⁷ Ella Shohat's *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (1986),¹⁸ Mahmud Qasim's *Surat al-Adyan fi al-Sinema al-Misriyya*¹⁹ (The Representation of Religious Themes in the Egyptian Cinema, 1997), and Jean Alikson's *Al-Suhyuniyya wa al-Sinema* (Zionism and Cinema, 1989),²⁰ among others.

The most detailed and serious study on the evolving images of Jews in Palestinian literature is Adil al-Usta's *Al-Yahud fi l-Adab al-Filastini bayn 1913–1987* (1992—originally a doctoral thesis written in German. I have benefited from some of al-Usta's insights into the subject).²¹ Later, after the Oslo Agreements, he published another study on Palestinian literature, under the telling title *Adab al-Muqawama: Min Tafaul al-Bidayat ila Khaybat al-Nihayat*²² (The Literature of Resistance: Initial Optimism and Ultimate Final Disappointment, 1998), in which he depicts how the Palestinian disillusionment with the peace process is manifested in the creative works produced after the promising Oslo Agreements in 1993.

There are some books that deal with the Arab–Israeli peace negotiations, and Arab attitudes to peace and normalization with Israel; these books vary greatly in quality and are penned by established figures such as Jalal Amin, Botros Ghali, Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal, Sayyid Yasin, or less well-known journalistic figures such as Arafa Abduh Ali or Amira Khawasik.²³ Recent publications in Egypt that reveal a marked interest in matters Israeli include issues of the Cairo literary magazine *Ibda'* under the editorship of the famous Egyptian poet Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi,²⁴ which deal soberly with various aspects of Israeli society and culture.

The time frame for our study is from 1948 to the present. In recent years much has happened in Palestinian–Israeli relations, and Arab–Israeli relations in general, the most dramatic of which have been the 1993 “Declaration of Principles” agreement between the PLO and Israel, which envisioned a final settlement of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict; the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza; the deterioration of Palestinian–Israeli relations and the outbreak of the Second Intifada (known in Arabic as Al-Aqsa Intifada in reference to the al-Aqsa mosque whence the first spark of the Intifada came in response to the provocative visit of Ariel Sharon); the horrific 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington; and the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. These recent events are bound to produce a different set of Arab/Palestinian perceptions of Israeli Jews, and further research will be in order.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A glance at the writings penned by Palestinian authors about their own national cause reveals recurrent themes of exile, identity, temporal and topographical transitions, living on borders, border crossing, struggle to return to the homeland, etc. Concepts of home, exile, separation, transition, and return all conjure up the idea of the rite of passage. The literary depiction of the deep scars war and exile have inflicted on Palestinians can be understood in light of western works on the marginal and on marginality in literature²⁵ or more specifically what is referred to in anthropology as the “liminal.” The term “liminal” is derived from the Latin *limen* meaning threshold and etymologically associated with “nouns like limit, limb, limbo, limbus, slime, lintel; with verbs like limn, delimit, and eliminate; and with adjectives like preliminary, sublime and subliminal.”²⁶ The terms “liminal” and “liminality” were made current by Arnold Van Gennep in his book *Rites de Passage* (1909), in which he provides a scheme of rites of passage²⁷ in this manner:

- (1) Separation: when a person is separated from his community.
- (2) Transition: when a person is held in a transitional, liminal, period between the two rites.
- (3) Incorporation rites: when a person is reincorporated into his community.

Separation can be seen in funeral ceremonies, whereas the incorporation rites can be seen in marriage. As for the transitional, liminal rites, they are prominent in pregnancy, betrothal, and initiation.²⁸

Victor Turner parallels Van Gennep’s ritual processes by developing his own theory of structure, antistructure, and structure, each corresponding to an element in Gennep’s tripartite process of separation, transition, and incorporation.

VAN GENNEP	TURNER
Separation	Structure
Transition	AntiStructure
Incorporation	Structure

Van Gennep shows a special interest in the transitional phase. To illustrate this he refers to those early times in human history when countries did not border directly on to each other but were divided by a neutral zone. In this zone travelers found themselves in a special situation, as the laws of neither of the adjoining countries applied.

As we will see in this study, some Palestinian characters have ended up in this neutral zone of no-man's-land and had to face the consequences.

In his book *The Ritual Process* (1969) Turner adds a spatial dimension to Van Gennep's definition of the liminal, in-between, threshold position. As K. Lang illustrates in a study of existence on the threshold, the threshold evokes images of entering, passages, crossing, and change. It marks the point at which choices must be made in order to move on, and, as Lang observes, it would be unusual to think of it as a place of permanent residence.²⁹

But for Turner liminality can be a state in its own right and may even be a permanent one at that.³⁰ The "liminars" (the persons in a threshold position) are "necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial."³¹ Liminals are "no longer classified and yet not classified"³² and therefore hard to grasp by a mind that is trained to perceive only clearly defined objects.

Turner's antistructure period is the equivalent of Van Gennep's transitional (liminal) period. But for Turner there are three forms of liminality:

- (1) *Ritual liminality*: maturation, initiation ceremony.
- (2) *Outsiderhood*: a condition in which the individual is "set outside the structural arrangements of a given social system or voluntarily setting himself apart from the behaviour of status-occupying, role-playing members of that system."³³ Like marginality it is a semipermanent or permanent form of antistructural existence.
- (3) *Marginality*: marginals are "simultaneously members . . . of two or more social groups whose social definitions and cultural norms are distinct from, and often even opposed to, one another."³⁴

Everett V. Stonequist describes the marginal as an "individual who through migration, education, marriage, or some other influence leaves one social group or culture without making a satisfactory adjustment to another and who finds himself on the margin of each but a member of neither."³⁵

Marginals have no prospect of a final stable resolution of their ambiguity: they will never be fully integrated into the one side or the other.³⁶ This ambiguous position distinguishes them from outsiders: while the former are situated in between different or opposing social

groups, the latter retreat to a position at the boundaries of the established social system. (Liminars are bereft of status and also of rights—much like Palestinians, as will be illustrated later on.)

The liminal position is elaborated by Gustavo Perez Firmat—whose many insights have greatly benefited me—when he states that “the liminal entity, whatever its nature (an individual, a group, an event, a text), is one that at a given situation takes up a position of eccentricity, one that occupies the periphery in relation to a contextually determined center.”³⁷ Firmat’s inclusion of texts under the rubric of liminal entities sheds light on the status of some Palestinian works of ambiguous literary classification. As will be illustrated in this book, some Palestinian works fall between the cracks of the literary classificatory grid, defying the neat classifications beloved of scholars.

For Mary Douglas a confusion of categories is perceived as pollution. Violation equals dirtiness: the unclear is ritually unclean. Interestingly this appears to correspond to the Arabic words *nakira* (indefinite) and *munkar* (reprehensible), both derivatives of the root *n/k/r*; this point is made the clearer when one considers the antonyms: *mu‘rraf* (definite) and *ma‘ruf* (good deed, defined), both derivatives of the root *‘r/f*.

A man who has spent some time “inside” is put permanently “outside” the ordinary social system. With no rite of aggregation which can definitely assign him to a new position he remains in the margins, with other people who are similarly credited with unreliability, unteachability, and all the wrong social attitudes . . . A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger³⁸

How the Palestinian works under study lend themselves to such a scheme of investigation is one of the main concerns of this analysis.

The book deals with the Palestinian literary works (prose as well as poetry) that have been produced, mostly in the Arabic language, with a few in English, by writers who define themselves as Palestinians, wherever they may live—as Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel, residents of the Occupied Territories, or living in exile in or outside the Middle East. For this reason the Arabic literary works penned by Israeli Jewish writers are excluded; these writers do not define themselves as Palestinian Arabs, and when they write about Jews they write about the self, not the other. Wherever relevant, however, there will be references to Israeli Hebrew literature that deals with encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, in order to take a comparative look at the literature produced by this Arab–Israeli struggle.

The focus of this book is literature. However, films, both Palestinian and Israeli, are also an integral part of this work. The inclusion of films attests not only to the power and impact of the image—greater at times than those of the written word—but also to the remarkable sophistication of both Palestinian and Israeli cinema in dealing with Arab–Jewish relations in modern times.

The book is divided into five chapters, along with an introduction and a conclusion, in which a thematic treatment of the Arab–Jewish relations in Palestinian literature and film is presented. This thematic presentation corresponds roughly to the chronology of these literary works and films so that one can comprehend better the development of images and views over time. In order for the reader to be able to situate the works under study in their historical contexts, chronologies of both modern Palestinian and Israeli histories are presented at the beginning—after the introduction. Both chronologies are presented for comparative purposes and for better understanding of the significance of events and dates for both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews (consider for example the significance of the year 1948: the tragic year of national disaster (*nakba*) for the Palestinians and the triumphant year of Israel's independence). The three appendixes contain respectively selections of poems, a list of Palestinian films arranged by theme, and selections of prose works relating to Arab–Jewish encounters.

CHRONOLOGY OF MODERN PALESTINIAN HISTORY*

- 1858 Ottoman land reform creates a powerful, landowning, urban leadership that supplants tribal leadership and ushers in the modern era in Palestine. This leadership will play an important role in later conflict with Zionist movement
- 1867 New Ottoman law permits foreigners to own land
- 1978 The first Zionist colony is founded near Jaffa. Thirty Zionist colonies will be founded, mostly near the coast, by 1914. At that time the Jewish population reached about 80,000, a little more than 10 percent, in the region. Two-thirds of the land Zionists will buy will be sold by Arabs living outside Palestine, particularly in Beirut
- 1882 First aliyah (wave of Zionist immigration); Baron Edmund de Rothschild, French Jewish banker, begins to support Jewish settlement in Palestine
- 1890s Boom in exports of Jaffa oranges as agriculture is commercialized and Palestinians convert to market economy. Zionists begin to grow oranges but will not dominate their cultivation until World War II
- 1897 The mufti (top Muslim leader) of Jerusalem heads a commission to analyze Jewish land acquisition
August: The first Zionist congress is held at Basel, Switzerland, where it founds the World Zionist Organization
- 1903 The second aliyah: Russian and East European Jews flee pogroms
- 1908 The Palestinian journal *Al-Karmil* is founded in Haifa to oppose colonization.
July: The Young Turk Revolution deposes Sultan Abdul Hamid. A new constitution and parliament bring crowds to the streets in the Arab provinces

* Based on Salma Jayyusi, *An Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. xxv–xxxiii.

- 1908–1914 Friction grows between Istanbul and Arab Provinces as the government espouses Turkish nationalism. Arabs, including many Palestinians, form the Arab Nationalist movement to seek autonomy
- 1911 The first book in Arabic on Zionism, *Zionism: Its History, Objectives, and Importance*, is published by Palestinian journalist Najib Nasser. The Palestinian newspaper *Filastin* is established
- 1914 *August*: World War I begins. The Ottoman Empire allies with Germany against Britain
- 1916 *May*: The British, French, and Russians agree secretly on a postwar plan to divide the Arab world under separate spheres of influence in the Sykes-Picot Agreement
June: Sharif Hussein of Mecca leads Arab nationalists in the Arab revolt. Allied with Britain, Arab armies sweep north from the Saudi peninsula against the Ottomans. The Sharif understands from Sir Henry McMahon, British high commissioner in Egypt, that Britain will permit the Arabs to form an independent, unified state after the war
- 1917 *November*: Arthur James Balfour, British secretary of state for foreign affairs, sends a secret letter to Baron Lionel Walter de Rothschild, a British Zionist, seeking Jewish support in the war. The Balfour Declaration promises a national home for Jews in Palestine and protection of the civil and religious rights of “non-Jewish” inhabitants
- 1918 *September*: British General Sir Edmund Allenby occupies all of Palestine
November: Word War I ends
- 1919 *January*: The First Palestinian National Congress in Jerusalem rejects the Balfour Declaration and demands Arab independence under King Faisal in Damascus
June: The Treaty of Versailles and Covenant of the League of Nations are signed, allowing the establishment of mandates in the Middle East
- 1920 *April*: The mandate for Palestine is awarded to Britain at the San Remo Conference. Riots in Palestine kill five Jews, wound 200 others
May: The British block the convening of the second Palestinian Congress
August: The first quota on Jewish immigration is set at 16,500 per year in an attempt to balance conflicting aims of Balfour Declaration

December: In response to the fall in July of King Faisal's Arab-nationalist regime in Damascus, the Third Palestinian Congress in Haifa breaks with Arab nationalists and focuses policy on securing the independence of Palestine only. It appoints an executive committee to head the movement for a representative Palestinian national government and a rejection of the Jewish national home

- 1924 Third aliyah: mostly traders and artisans from Poland
- 1929 Several weeks of riots in Jerusalem, Hebron, and Safed kill 133 Jews and wound 339; 116 Palestinians are killed, 232 wounded, mostly by British soldiers. The riots are sparked by the founding of the Jewish Agency in August and by a right-wing Jewish protest of customs regarding use of the Wailing Wall
- 1930– Fourth aliyah: 64 more Zionist colonies are founded as
1936 refugees arrive particularly from Nazi Germany. Jewish population rises to nearly 30 percent of the total in Palestine
- 1932– The Palestinian movement reorganizes, as five new parties are
1935 established. After the failure of Palestinian delegations to London to change British policy, the idea of armed rebellion is born with the formation of a commando group by Shaikh 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam
- 1936 *April:* The Great Rebellion begins and will last for three years. The rebellion is sparked partly by unemployment and by the British Parliament's rejection in March of Arab demands for elections. On April 15, Palestinian commandos kill three Jews, followed by the killing of two Arabs. On April 25, the five parties unite under the Arab Higher Committee, headed by the mufti of Jerusalem, al-Hajj Amin al-Husseini
- 1937 *July:* The Royal Peel Commission recommends partition of Palestine into three states: Arab, Jewish, and a British-controlled central region including Jerusalem. This plan for the first time formally recognizes the incompatibility of the Balfour Declaration's twin aims. The plan draws a divided response: a majority of Zionists accepts the partition while the Palestinian leaders reject it
- 1938 George Antonius publishes *The Arab Awakening* in English
- 1939 British crackdown on the rebellion succeeds. More than 1,000 Palestinians are killed during the three years (1936–1939) and most of their leaders are exiled

May: A British White Paper formally drops the partition plan and offers a ten-year plan to reunite Arabs and Jews under a single independent state. It includes a policy of limiting Jewish land acquisition and immigration in an attempt to foster Arab goodwill. Both Zionist and Palestinian groups reject the plan

1944–1947 Zionist forces begin guerilla warfare against British, undertaking terrorist raids and assassinations which are followed by British reprisals. In 1946, the militant right-wing Zionist group Irgun, headed by Menachem Begin, blows up British headquarters in the King David Hotel

1947 Britain announces that it will withdraw from Palestine and cedes responsibility for the country's future to the United Nations

1948 *January:* Fighting between Palestinians and Zionists escalates into war with 1,974 killed on both sides by January 10. The Palestinians are ill-organized and poorly armed. Between 5,000 and 7,000 Arab volunteers enter Palestine to join the fighting. The Zionist Haganah's operation has been organized since 1946, when it numbered 62,000 troops armed with weapons smuggled from Europe and stolen from the British

April: On April 9, 254 villagers are massacred by Irgun and the Stern Gang at Deir Yasin. By the end of April more than 10,000 Palestinians have fled as Zionist military groups conquer Tiberias, Haifa, Jaffa, eastern Galilee, and areas near Jerusalem

May: Fighting continues with more Palestinian losses. On May 14 the British high commissioner leaves and an independent Jewish state is proclaimed at Tel Aviv. The British Mandate ends May 15, as troops from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq cross the border, and United States President Harry Truman recognizes the state of Israel. By then, about 200 Palestinian villages have been attacked and conquered by Zionists, and 200,000 Palestinians have fled their homes

Fighting continues throughout the year and Israeli victories in the summer extend the size of Israel well beyond the 1947 United Nations partition plan. Many villages are razed and replaced by Israeli settlements, as absentee-Arab lands are transferred to the Israeli government. By December there are nearly one million Palestinian refugees. Palestinians

- and other Arabs refer to the events of 1948 as “The Catastrophe”
- 1949 *February–July*: Israel signs armistice agreements with individual Arab countries
December: 430,000 Palestinians are living in Red Cross and United Nations refugee camps, while an additional 250,000 are receiving free food rations
- 1950 *April*: Jordan annexes central Palestine, absorbing more than 600,000 Palestinians refugees and residents of what comes to be called the West Bank
May: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) is set up to aid Palestinian refugees
The eve of October 29: On the eve of the attack on the Suez Canal Israeli forces enter the village of Kufr Qasim, a border village in the “Little Triangle” prohibited to Israeli forces by the United Nations Document S/1302/Rev. 1 of June 20, 1949, Article VI, para. 6, and impose a curfew while the villagers are still in their fields. The Israelis open fire on the villagers, who are unaware of the curfew. Fifty-one are killed (among them 12 women and 17 children), and 13 others are wounded
- 1956 *October 29*: The Suez War. Israel, Britain, and France attack and occupy Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula after President Jamal Abd al-Nasser nationalizes the Suez Canal
 The three allies are later forced to withdraw from Egypt under American pressure. Nasser becomes the preeminent Arab-nationalist leader, popular among most Arabs, especially the Palestinians, who see in him their best hope for regaining their homeland
- 1957–1958 Yasir Arafat and others found the Palestine liberation movement, Fatah, a commando group, in Kuwait. Other commando groups also form, including the Arab Nationalist Movement (later the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), which the famous writer Ghassan Kanafani joins
- 1964 The Arab League establishes the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the political directorate of a projected Palestinian entity. It is virtually under the political control of the United Arab Republic (Egypt)
- 1965 *January*: The first Palestinian commando raids cross into Israel from Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Israeli retaliatory raids lead to escalation in tension, culminating in the June War

- 1967 *The June War* begins on June 5, when the Israeli Air Force attacks and destroys the Egyptian Air Force. By June 11 Israel occupies the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. More than 350,000 refugees flee from the West Bank and Golan Heights. On June 28 Israel annexes the Old City of Jerusalem
- 1968 *March*: Palestinian commandos battle an Israeli column at Karameh in Jordan. Their stiff defense increases the popularity of PLO resistance movement. Various Palestinian groups join the PLO. Palestine National Covenant, stating the basic aims of the Palestinian movement, is adopted. Gush Emunim—bloc of the faithful—establishes the first Israeli settlement in Hebron in the West Bank
- 1969 Fatah takes over command of the PLO, freeing it from Egyptian control, and increases the frequency and scope of guerilla activity. In Lebanon, clashes between Palestinian and Christian militias become frequent. In Jordan, King Hussein struggles to maintain sovereignty over Palestinians who come to establish a state within a state
- 1970 *Black September civil war*: Fierce fighting breaks out between the Jordanian army and Palestinian commandos. The Palestinians are defeated, and, after being expelled from Jordan in the summer of 1971, they set up headquarters in Lebanon
- 1973 *August 1*: The Palestine National Front (PNF) is set up in the occupied West Bank as a union of various indigenous and progressive underground groups engaged in civil disobedience under the leadership of the PLO
The October War: On October 6 Syria and Egypt attack Israeli positions in occupied Sinai and the Golan Heights. After initial gains Israel counterattacks, and crosses the Suez Canal into Egypt. OPEC declares an embargo against the United States, the Netherlands, and other supporters of Israel
November 28: The Algiers Arab Summit Conference recognizes the PLO as sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people
- 1974 *June 8*: The Palestine National Council endorses the concept of a “Palestine National Authority” to be established in any area vacated by Israel
October 14: The UN General Assembly adopts Resolution 3210 recognizing the PLO as representative of the Palestinian people and conferring upon it the status of “observer”

- October 29:* Rabat Arab Summit Conference declares the PLO sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people
- November:* PLO leader Yasir Arafat addresses the UN General Assembly. In his call for settlement of the Palestine question he declares: "Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand."
- November 22:* UN General Assembly passes Resolution 3236 reaffirming the right of the Palestinians to "self-determination, national independence and sovereignty," and requests Secretary General to establish contacts with the PLO on all matters concerning the question of Palestine
- 1975 *April:* Civil war breaks out in Lebanon. Palestinians are drawn into the hostilities
- 1976 *April 12:* First municipal elections held in Palestinian Occupied Territories produce an overwhelming victory of nationalists affiliated with the PLO
- June:* At the request of Lebanese President Franjieh, Syria invades Lebanon in support of Christian Phalangist militias against the Palestinian/Lebanese leftist alliance
- August:* Tel al-Zaatar and Karantina Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut are overrun by the Lebanese Christian Phalangist militias with the help of the Syrian forces, and their inhabitants massacred. Christian inhabitants of Damour in southern Lebanon are massacred
- 1977 *June:* "The Iron Fist" policy is announced in Occupied Territories almost as soon as Menachem Begin becomes Prime Minister of Israel for the first time
- November:* Egyptian president Anwar Sadat addresses the Israeli Knesset in Jerusalem
- 1978 *September:* Egypt and Israel sign the Camp David accords. Israel agrees to a staged withdrawal from Sinai. The agreement calls for "self-rule" for Palestinians in occupied territories
- The Israeli army invades Lebanon, engaging the Palestinian forces and occupying South Lebanon for two months
- President Carter threatens Israel with the application of the Export Control Act because they have used US weapons "offensively" not defensively
- 1979 *March:* The National Guidance Committee is set up in the Occupied Territories to coordinate the nonviolent resistance to the Israeli occupation
- The Israeli–Egyptian peace treaty is signed

- 1980 *May*: Mayors of Hebron and Halhul are expelled by Israeli occupation authorities
June: The mayors of Nablus, Ramallah, and Bireh are maimed in a terrorist attack by an Israeli underground organization
- 1982 *June*: The Israeli ambassador to the UK is attacked in London. Israel invades Lebanon with the goal of expelling the PLO from Lebanon. Israelis battle PLO fighters and the Syrian army. Israel lays siege to Beirut and directs massive artillery and air assault against the city in an effort to force a PLO evacuation. Several Palestinian refugee camps are destroyed, more than 1,500 Palestinians are killed or wounded, and over 300,000 left homeless
August: PLO fighters leave Beirut under protection of multinational forces
September: Israeli forces look on as Christian militias massacre over 1,700 Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut
- 1987 *December 8*: The Intifada, the most comprehensive revolt since 1936, breaks out in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A local leadership structure, the United National Command, is established and directs the mass uprising against Israeli occupation. The Israelis respond with administrative detentions, curfews, expulsion of Palestinian activists, closing of Palestinian schools and universities, and destruction of Palestinian homes. In the first three years of the Intifada about 700 Palestinians are killed by the Israeli military, and an estimated 200–300 accused of collaboration with the Israelis are killed by fellow Palestinians. Almost 12,000 Palestinians are wounded, and 10,000 Palestinians are placed under administrative detention. Israeli casualties through July of 1990 are 18 killed and 3,300 wounded
- 1988 *July*: King Hussein of Jordan officially severs Jordanian administrative and judicial control in the West Bank.
November 15: The Palestine National Council declares Palestinian independence and launches a peace initiative based on the United Nations Resolution 181 on November 29, 1947, known as the Partition Plan
December: Arafat officially recognizes Israel and rejects use of terror, thereby removing obstacles to talks between the United States and the PLO