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Demobilised Soldiers and Colonial Control: The British Police in Mandate Palestine and After

When the British established a gendarmes and then police force for Mandate Palestine in the 1920s, they took former servicemen as recruits for the British portion of the force (British officers led the police with Arab and Jewish officers in the force doing the daily police work, at least for as long as their respective communities were not in revolt against the authorities at which point Arab and Jewish officers became unreliable). Until 1930, the Crown Agents in London only recruited ex-Servicemen for the Palestine Police. In the early 1930s, in an attempt to modernise the force after its failure to deal with Arab-Jewish rioting in 1929, the force accepted civilians recruited through the Crown Agents in London and who were to be trained in police work at a depot on Mount Scopus near Jerusalem and not just be soldiers in police uniform. The head of the Palestine police in the 1930s, R. G. B. Spicer, demanded of the Crown Agents that they find him men of «reasonable education» for the police force, men who would make a career of the job and not simply be demobilised soldiers who took the pay and then left at the end of the short contracts offered. When the Arabs rose in revolt in April 1936, the police again turned to former soldiers to swell police ranks as Arab police officers deserted en masse under threat of rebel assassination. Despite attempts to normalise the police, regular demobilised soldiers went out to Palestine as recruits for the police, which lasted until the Palestine police was disbanded in 1948.

1 The author acknowledges the support of the Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives and Itamar Radai.
1. «Black and Tans» and «Auxiliaries» in Palestine

British rule in Ireland and the policing methods of the militarised Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) spread styles of policing and personnel across the British Empire, including Palestine, from the 1920s to the 1950s, more especially after Irish independence as a Dominion in 1921 when RIC officers left for service elsewhere. The demobilised veterans of the Great War who fought in the «Black and Tans» and «Auxiliary» units alongside the RIC during the war of independence added to the militarisation of the RIC, a force that was already run along military lines. The men of the «Black and Tans» were tough adventurers, many of whom were unable to make their way as civilians, helped along by the pay of £1 a day, «the highest in any uniformed police force in the world at that time». These former soldiers who had served in Ireland during its war of independence (1919–1921) dominated the early years of the Palestine police. The Palestine police was paramilitary in style, equipped and trained on military lines, and it served alongside the Army. One would intuitively expect the men of the Palestine police to bring to their new imperial role the discipline, violence and trauma of their previous war experience.

The public stories of the British men who went to join the Palestine police in the early 1920s are those of soldiers in other armies, filled with adventure, masculinity and the cosh of tough drill sergeants, all willingly endured – what has been termed the «masculine ideal» in the context of the US Marine Corps. «It was like being in a concentration camp, enjoyable, but you never stopped from dawn to dusk» was Reuben Kitson’s recollection of the Palestine police recruits’ depot on Mount Scopus, one run on military lines and staffed by Guards drill staff. It was filled with old soldiers’ tales of the Great War, men at a loose end in the bleak times of the Depression and who wanted «fresh air and adventure» – «I was in a dead end job», remembered Geoffrey Morton – and he sought escape in a new, even tougher life. The Palestine police attracted men who were in some real or imagined sense on the margins of society, rather like recruits for the French Foreign Legion, to which some police officers made explicit reference. The commander of the «Black and Tans» in Ireland even referred to his men as «Bashi Bazouks». As well as seeming «exotic» for men coming from Britain, the Palestine police was a «crack force» – the expression used in recruitment posters in the 1940s – by which was meant a tough elite police force.

8 R. Kitson, 10688/6, Imperial War Museum Sound Archive, London (IWMSA).
9 E. De Val, 12592/3, IWMSA; G. Morton, 12960/6, IWMSA.
unit for men who would not shy away from the violence inherent in colonial control.\(^\text{12}\) The British Palestine police force was militarised, aimed at enforcing colonial pacification. It also expressed the racism of empire, as we shall see.

There are two histories of policing in Palestine, one visible, one hidden: that of British men having the adventure of their lives as police officers, full of humour and novelty; the other, harder to find, expresses the quotidian, structural power of colonial rule, and is a less comfortable experience. This article presents the hard, violent reality of colonial policing by former soldiers – the private, hidden histories of police service abroad in Palestine, and one that resonates more broadly with colonial pacification across the British Empire.\(^\text{13}\) Colonial policing was not based on popular consent and British imperial rule had always required some level of real or threatened force; in Palestine, the official policy of support for Jewish immigration and settlement (up until 1939) sharpened and deepened the violent encounter between the forces of the State and local Arabs. After 1945, the security forces fought Jews in the country. The romance of contemporary recruitment for colonial policing and the nostalgia of men’s memories jar with the contemporary data on the violence of the colonial project, as I will now show.

2. The Transfer of Violence and Brutality

The men who first went to Palestine in the early 1920s were acclimatised to violence. They were war veterans twice over, most having served in the First World War and then in Ireland in the «Black and Tans» and «Auxiliary» forces during the Irish rebellion, and they easily transferred the violence of Ireland to Palestine. Service in Ireland had been hard, Servicemen hating the population that they supposedly served, attracting only hatred in return, «and thus began a vicious cycle of violence to which there seemed no logical end».\(^\text{14}\) The men were «ruthless», «arrogant» and, like the soldiers of the French Foreign Legion, they drank heavily.\(^\text{15}\) This continued in Palestine, men «drinking deeply», so deeply that on one occasion off-duty police officers were lucky to escape a grenade attack on the bar in which they were drinking – a more sober soldier with them having the foresight to hurl the device back out in to the road – after which police officers «thrashed» every Arab they saw. «The last thing I remember is unhitching a cart horse and racing someone on a donkey down the main street», recalled a policeman at the scene.\(^\text{16}\)


\(^{13}\) The former Burma policeman George Orwell in his 1934 novel Burmese Days and in his 1931 short story «The Hanging» tells some of this story of colonial rule.


\(^{16}\) Letter, Burr to Alex, n.d., 88/8/1, Burr Papers, Imperial War Museum Documents, London (IWMD).
«Black and Tan methods» was the neologism used to describe the brutality of the police force in Palestine; the «third degree» or «gentle persuasion» were other euphemisms for a system that hid violence behind the fig leaf of language.17 British clergy in Palestine wrote of how they were «seriously troubled at the ‹Black and Tan› methods of the police», adding that they could do little to stop what was happening.18 Soldiers and police «turned the blind eye», «bumping off» suspects who were «shot trying to escape» – all of which «saved a lot of trouble».19 Gasps and mumbles can be heard during the last comment in a later oral history recording by police officer Geoffrey Morton – a combination of bad memories and old age, one suspects. The machismo of the police was comical, such as when policeman Sydney Burr received a handkerchief from home, after which he was forced to write back (rather absurdly): «I am afraid I will not be able to use it here, the old Black and Tans who were the beginning of this force do not look upon such effeminate apparel in a kindly light. They think the force is going to the dogs as it is. It is because of the soft ways that are creeping into the police that the Arabs are so defiant.»20

Ironically, the police were more violent than British soldiers, Army commanders having to issue «stringent orders against harshness and unnecessary violence» to prevent police brutality spreading to the troops.21 When Palestinian fighter Bahjat Abu Ghariyah recounted to me his memories of being tortured by the police, he singled out the police and not the Army as using pre-meditated brutality.22 The Army was less bad, simply wrecking villages and shooting people. Soldiers had better discipline, lived away from local people and only served temporarily in the country during times of trouble when the police could not cope. The Royal Ulster Rifles, a hard-charging regiment that knew all about punitive operations wrote to the High Commissioner complaining about the brutality of the police.23

3. Imperial Rule and the Law

The Palestine police worked initially under Ottoman law – heavily influenced by the Napoleonic system – which the Mandate authorities gradually replaced with UK Statute law, notably in legal reforms enacted in 1935–1936.24 In the field, British

17 Letters, O’Connor to Wife, 22 October and 2–3 November 1938, O’Connor Papers, 3/1/18, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHCMA); Letter, Burr to Parents, n. d. [May–June 1936], 88/8/1, Burr Papers, IWMD.
18 Letter, Stewart to J. G. Matthew, 9 June 1936, J & E Mission papers, GB 165–0161, Box 61, File 1, Middle East Centre, St. Antony’s College Oxford (MEC).
19 Memoir, «Fifty Days with a Company in Palestine», 1, 82/24/1, Faviell Papers, IWMD; C. Evans, Lever Arch File 53, Thames TV Material, Imperial War Museum Film Archive, London (IWMFA); Geoffrey Morton, 12960/6, IWMSA.
20 Letter, Burr to Parents, n.d. [April 1937], Burr papers, 88/8/1, IWMD.
21 Letter, O’Connor to Wife, 2–3 November 1938, O’Connor Papers, 3/1/18, LHCMA.
22 Prison conditions in League for the Rights of Man, 28 December 1938, 1 in J & E Mission papers, GB 165–0161, Box 65, File 5, 116, MEC.
23 Letter, Burr to Parents, n.d., 88/8/1, Burr Papers, IWMD.
Police continued with nasty, practical Ottoman traditions of policing, what they called «Turkish methods», brutality that was often outsourced to Arab police officers who spoke Arabic, knew the land and did the bulk of the day-to-day work, what policeman Jack Binsley called «real» police work or the «interrogation methods» that «smacked of the previous cruel Turkish system». The British in Palestine did nothing to stop these excesses, instead combining brutality with collective punishment, establishing official ordinances on collective punishment in the early 1920s as the legal standard, backed up by draconian emergency regulations in the 1930s. Service by policemen and soldiers in Ireland (and elsewhere such as Iraq, India and Egypt) in the 1920s had established a pattern of collective reprisals, leaving, for instance, the Irish village of Balbriggan after a Black and Tan reprisal raid «looking like a Belgian town that had been wrecked by the Germans in the war». This was standard practice among European colonial powers. The French had similar practices in North Africa, holding the nearest village to any incident against the forces responsible, and shooting ten Algerians if a French soldier was killed – what they called «collective responsibility». British colonial authorities in Palestine were ruled by the official fiat of orders-in-council, an easy way to pass draconian legislation outside the UK where such things would be contested. In Palestine, these laws were the destructive official basis for policing, blending new codified group punishments based on cultural stereotypes of how to rule unruly Arabs with practical legacies of violence from the Ottoman era, easily adopted by men accustomed to such things. Such structures blended easily with the institutional memory of «Turkish» policing held by Arab officers, now under overall British command. David Smiley, an Army officer on patrol with police in 1940, witnessed Arab policemen seizing three suspects, beating the soles of their feet, applying lighted cigarettes to their testicles, and smashing in their faces. When he remonstrated with the British policeman in charge at the «Gestapo» methods being used, he was told «[...that] force was the only language these Arabs understood. Under Turkish rule they had been brought up to respect such methods. «Where do you think we would get», he asked me «if we questioned them like a London bobby? I’ll tell you; the police methods would be laughed at, we should get no results, and our methods would be regarded as a sign of weakness». «In these interrogations», he went on, «I make it a rule never to beat anyone up myself. I let Arab police beat up Arabs, and Jewish police beat up Jews».»

British police officers absorbed «Turkish ways», accepting them as the cultural norm in a colonial setting, and by using local police to torture local people, the

25 Binsley, Palestine, 39.
British exacerbated the embedded brutality of the Ottoman period, making it officially acceptable, but now set within a much better organised and more efficient British-run colonial state. In prison, the British would get Jewish guards to beat Arab suspects and vice versa, spreading the idea of acceptable levels of official violence, 29 and they «ordered» Arab policemen to carry out torture. 30 Abu Gharbiyah remembered that a Jewish police officer «Sofer» took part in torturing suspects, a point supported by the written record in which two Britons, Biggs and Robinson, 31 and a Jew, Sofer, 32 were «principal offenders». 33 Robinson – of «Greek» descent – once interrogated Abu Gharbiyah who also recalls a «notorious» CID officer of (Christian) Lebanese origin, Muneer Abu Fadel, who later became a member of Lebanon’s parliament. The British outsourced the «frightfulness» (to use a contemporary word) to foreigners – Jews, Greeks and Lebanese – making non-British people complicit in the management of the colonial state. 34

4. Racial Hierarchies

The racism and racist language that underpinned colonialism contributed both to normalising and casualising violence by the police, as one policeman, Douglas Duff, recalled: «our attitude was that of Britons of the Diamond Jubilee era, to us all non-Europeans were «wogs», and Western non-Britons only slightly more worthy». 35 As Duff concluded: «Had our Arabic been better we might have sympathised with them; though I doubt it, for most of us were so infected by the sense of our own superiority over «lesser breeds» that we scarcely regarded these people as human». 36 Police officers in vehicles would try to knock down Arabs, «as running over an Arab is the same as a dog in England except we do not report it». 37 The legacy of colonial control from places such as Palestine carried on to later counter-insurgencies, which lasted until the deployment of British troops to Northern Ireland in the early stages of the Troubles in the late 1960s and early 1970s, referring once again to Catholics protesters as «wogs».

It is not clear what came first: the officially tolerated thuggery that delegitimised the police, or the ineffectual police force that could only establish temporary forms

29 Prison conditions in League for the Rights of Man, 28 December 1938, 1 in J & E Mission papers, GB 165–0161, Box 65, File 5, 116, MEC.
31 Allegations of Ill-treatment of Arabs by British Crown Forces in Palestine (translated from the Arabic by F. Newton, 19 June 1939), 2 in J & E Mission papers, GB 165–0161, Box 65, File 5, 142, MEC.
32 Presumably S. N. Sofer, who was a Detective Inspector in 1936 and a CID Acting Assistant Superintendent in 1938.
33 Allegations of Ill-treatment of Arabs by British Crown Forces in Palestine (translated from the Arabic by F. Newton, 19 June 1939), 2 in J & E Mission papers, GB 165–0161, Box 65, File 5, 142, MEC.
34 Diary, 14 May 1939, Forster papers, GB 165–0109, 119–20, MEC; Frightfulness in Retreat, London 1917.
35 D. V. Duff, Bailing with a Teaspoon, London 1953, 46.
36 Ibid., 36.
37 Letter, Burr to Alex, n.d. [December 1937], Burr papers, 88/8/1, IWMD.
of order through violence. The Palestine police depended on Arab and Jewish officers for day-to-day policing; it relied on the Jews or the armed forces for much of its intelligence gathering; in times of riot and rebellion it failed in its job, necessitating the deployment of the British Army. Reliant on locally recruited Arab officers for so much of what it did, the police suffered greatly in times of rebellion when these officers, in fear of their lives at the hands of rebels, deserted en masse. British police officers could (and did) rely on Jewish officers for local knowledge but both Jewish and Arab officers leaked intelligence to their respective communities and were never fully reliable.\textsuperscript{38} The Inspector-General of the Palestine police struggled to modernise the force in the 1930s, trying to establish proper police methods, to get educated recruits and obtain better intelligence through a reformed CID branch.\textsuperscript{39} In the end, the Palestine police was neither an efficient police force nor an elite fighting force and, as the force struggled in its mission, it became frustrated and more brutal.

5. The Realities of Colonial Rule

In times of peace, the police functioned by getting the Arab and Jewish officers to do the policing, using whatever violence was necessary; in increasingly turbulent times, morale and discipline collapsed as, without support, British police officers could not keep order, and failure manifested itself in violence, drunkenness and looting.\textsuperscript{40} This meant that the Colonial Office called in the Army, further delegitimised the police. Hastily trained British police replacements rushed out to Palestine to replace lost Arab officers in times of revolt had no knowledge of local cultures or language.\textsuperscript{41} As stated earlier, the disorder was such that the Army feared that police behaviour would infect the soldiers: «Some of the police started running amok a bit in the bazaar and breaking things up in a most wanton manner. No doubt they have an awful lot of provocation for behaving like that but the whole proceeding was rather revolting and a very bad example to the troops.»\textsuperscript{42}
was unimpressed with it all and when it came to the help of the police in 1936 during a major Arab revolt, one Brigade commander remarked that the police did not know what they were, «mock soldiers – neither soldiers nor policemen». 43 No better than «second class» was how another Army Brigade commander described the police in a letter to his wife. 44 Fighting, looting, robbery, destruction, torture, and death squads became the order of the day. This is not to say that all policemen were thugs – they were not –, but that the ethos of their institution coupled to the practicalities of day-to-day policing resulted in extreme forms of coercion.

That the police would regularly shoot surrendered suspects caught in the field – men «bumped off» or «shot trying to escape» – is not surprising in the context of colonial rebellion. 45 Similar things had happened in Ireland. 46 The violence in Palestine that was meted out to civilians, old men, women and children who had nothing to do with rebel fighters seems more shocking until one considers the collective punishment regime on which rested the colonial state and that normalised such things. British Assistant District Commissioner A. T. O. Lees (a former soldier) wrote of the police reaction to a raid by a rebel band on Hebron in 1938, after which the police punished the inhabitants: «[...] the British police, no less valiant in <suppressing disorder>, had set fire to three shops, utterly gutting them, and had then looted three general goods stores, stealing some £300 worth of goods and altogether doing damage later assessed by a C.I.D. Committee of Enquiry (which would presumably not err on the side of extravagance) at £3000.» 47 The official phrase for such police operations was «restoring order», as Lees noted ironically. 48

6. The Manshiya Outrage

To cover their tracks, police went in plain clothes – in «mufti» – on operations, such as when a group raided the homes of poor Arab families in the Manshiya district on the border between Jaffa and Tel Aviv on 23–24 October 1938 (it is not apparent why the police targeted this poor neighbourhood). This time, the police made the mistake of committing the outrage when a British official, Lees, was in the area. Officers beat up local people, a two-year girl had her femur broken by a bullet as police opened fire on a woman trying to bar their entry (wounding the woman, too), houses were robbed, men cudgelled, windows broken, police broke chairs on people’s heads, they beat Arabs with pistol butts, police kicked men in the testicles so badly that the victims were hospitalised, they smashed up a local bakery and assaulted the bakery staff. Lees «[…»] found the wrecked and blood-spattered rooms

43 Brig. Evetts in Diary, 10 January 1938, Tegart Papers, Box 6, Item 4, GB165–0281, MEC.
44 Brigadier Carr (Jaffa) to Wife, 25 October 1936, Carr Papers, Letter 247, LHCMA.
45 Maj.-Gen. V. W. Street to Father, 29 May 1938, Street Papers, Letters Home File, LHCMA; Telegram to Secretary of State, n.d., S25/22762, Central Zionist Archive, Jerusalem (CZA); Haaretz [The Land], 26 August 1936.
46 Crozier, Ireland, 122.
47 Memoir by Lees entitled «Unbeaten Track: Some Vicissitudes in Two Years of a Public Servant’s Life by el-Asi», Lees Papers, 5/13, 2, LHCMA.
48 Ibid., 3.
and the bullet holes, and I saw the less seriously injured victims. In one room I found an old man of evidently well over eighty years, lying on the floor on his blood-stained bedding, a blood-soaked bandage around his head, and his poor belongings lying in shreds and splinters around him. The police also humiliated women in Manshiya, lining them up, questioning them in Arabic, «asking them their names and saying «How much to-day?» God knows what they meant. They then made indecent gestures with their revolvers and sticks». That said, police sexual violence towards women seems to have been limited, as other studies have shown, at least by British officers.

The tacit official backing for these operations was such that when Lees protested to the British Chief Magistrate, giving the name of one policeman involved, nothing happened. More seriously for Lees (and his career) was that furious local Arabs drew his attention to the scene of the assassination of an Arab suspect in the Manshiya neighbourhood on the morning of 24 October 1938, the day after Lees was dealing with the attack on the Arabs of Manshiya. On the spot, recording the assault on their residents, Lees then left a detailed account in English of an even more shocking outrage. Lees collated the statements from seventeen witnesses who saw four uniformed British police stop their Dodge saloon car in the street and force out of the vehicle a handcuffed Arab, Mohammad Haddad, with them in the car, telling him to run. They tried this twice, Haddad obviously aware that once he was at some distance from the officers they would shoot him. When he refused the second time, the police shot him as he stood close to the officers with a rifle from two metres, after which the man faltered, a volley of shots then left the Arab writhing on the ground, at which point one of the officers, W. E. T. Wood, shot him with his pistol at close range. Haddad refused to die and still writhing he tried to raise himself on his elbow, «whereupon one of the other policemen stooped down and struck him a blow on the side of his head with his fist. After this the Arab lay still and the four Policemen started smoking cigarettes and laughing». A police truck later came to the scene and picked up the body, after which an official report stated that the dead man had been shot «while attempting to escape». A policeman later the same day stopped at the local garage of Amin Andrawus (also spelt Andraus) – a local man who had witnessed the outrage – and spoke to the garage clerk about

49 Ibid., 4.
50 The Manshia Exploits of the Three British Police-men in Mufti during the Night of 23–24 October, 1938, Exploit No. 1, Khalil Hamameh and Witness Statements, Forster Papers, GB165–0109, 79 MEC.
52 The Manshia Exploits of the Three British Police-men in Mufti during the Night of 23–24 October, 1938, Incident of the «Bumped off» Gangster, GB165–0109, 80ff, MEC. This material is also available in J & EM Papers, GB165–0161, Box 66, File 2, MEC.
53 The Manshia Exploits of the Three British Police-men in Mufti during the Night of 23–24 October, 1938, Incident of the «bumped off» Gangster, GB165–0109, 82, MEC.
what had happened: «Know all about that. The man was a gangster, and had to be killed», or words to that effect. The clerk remonstrated, saying that if he was a gangster he should be properly tried and convicted, to which the constable replied, «No, it’s better to kill him like this», or words to that effect.54

Andrawus, the garage owner, fled to Beirut, fearful of being killed by the police as a material witness. His family and friends had urged him not to appear as a witness, «as it might cost him his life».55 In a plea to the Palestine High Commissioner, Andrawus wrote: «I make this report in great fear of my own life and that of my wife and family. Murder by the police is not uncommon there are so many means available to them to carry it out. I ask Your Excellency’s personal security for myself and my family be protected against police vengeance.»56

Lees, meanwhile, made an official report that helped to prompt a trial of the four policemen in December 1938, the only recorded case – to my knowledge – of official sanction against the police for such things during the Arab revolt in Palestine, 1936–1939. The policemen involved – T. Mansell, P. Crossley, W. E. T. Wood, and T. Crossley – received sentences in January 1939 ranging from being bound over (the two Crossleys) to one year in jail (Mansell) to three years for Wood (for manslaughter), Mansell’s sentence being reduced on appeal.57 Woods had had «the comparative decency to administer the <coup de grâce> to the poor wretch whose bowels were protruding from wounds in the back» and he paid the judicial price as it was his pistol that delivered the final shot, leaving him accused of the most serious charge. The colonial Government had neutered the Palestine judiciary following a ruling that had gone against the Government in 1936 by the British Chief Justice in Palestine, Sir Michael McDonnell, after which McDonnell was dismissed. By 1938, the judiciary knew its place and returned (without a jury, as was the case in Palestine) the astonishing verdict of «attempted manslaughter» on Wood. The Colonial Secretary made the most of this verdict, pointing out to Parliament in London that such allegations were unfounded but, if found, the Government would not hesitate to prosecute offenders.58

The High Commissioner sent Lees home to the UK, a tale told in detail by an angry Lees in his private papers, after which police officers broke into his home in Jaffa – OGPU methods, as a friend of Lees pointed out59 (nor did Lees’ luck improve: he was interned during the Second World War for his alleged connections to the British Union of Fascists). English friends had told Lees before he left Palestine not to sit by uncurtained windows or be out of doors after dark lest he «stop» a

54 Ibid.
55 Statement of Mr Amin Andraus (Jaffa), 27 October 1938, J & EM Papers, GB165–0161, Box 66, File 5, MEC.
56 Andraus (Jaffa) to High Commissioner (Palestine), 26 October 1938, J & EM Papers, GB165–0161, Box 66, File 5, MEC.
58 Lees, «Unbeaten Track», Lees Papers, 5/13, 6–7, LHCMA.
59 Lees to M. MacDonald, 8 January 1939, Lees Papers, 5/8, LHCMA; Lees to High Commissioner (Palestine), 31 October 1938, Lees Papers, 5/8.
«stray bullet» from the offended police.\textsuperscript{60} Being white and British did not grant one protection from police depredations, as being white and French did not save Henri Alleg from being tortured in Algeria in the 1950s by a Foreign Legion «specialist».

S. O. Richardson of Jaffa, a British lawyer and local representative of the Federation of British Industries, wrote to the High Commissioner regarding the Manshiya assassination, concluding how if the High Commissioner were to take any action, «I ask that you will if possible suppress my name. Even an Englishman of some prominence is in no small danger in these days if he offends the police».\textsuperscript{61} That said, it might be that British police considered killing a British resident in Palestine but it seems highly unlikely that they would have tortured him. I have found no evidence of police killing any British resident in Palestine.

7. The Dajani Hospital Outrage

While determining the details surrounding the murky business of police assassinations is problematic, the contemporary record sheds some partial light. Recent empirical and theoretical work by scholars such as David Cesarani and David French is useful in this regard.\textsuperscript{63} Partial names of those responsible emerge from the archives. Writing to Lees, Richardson noted how «[the] man who is really responsible for these murders was of course Collinge who has now joined the murdered […]. The victim is the son of the litigant Ibrahim Abu Kuheil whom you know, a youth of 21. As far as I can ascertain he was shot merely in mistake for an alleged terrorist.»\textsuperscript{64} This refers to a botched assassination at a hospital by police of an alleged terrorist in which the assassins who had been «ordered to bump off» the suspect shot the wrong man, «the first wounded man they could find, in the hope of clicking for the King’s Police Medal which usually follows these episodes in Palestine».\textsuperscript{65}
The incident that Richardson was referring to seems to have been one at the Dajani hospital in Jaffa where, on 15 June 1939, a party of police some in uniform and some in mufti appeared, some of them climbed over the wall, while others knocked at the door. When let in by the doorman, a group of four policemen went to a ward in which was one was one Ibrahim ibn Khail (obviously the son of the person as mentioned above), suffering from a bullet wound in the shoulder inflicted by police four days earlier. «As the light was switched on, the man wakened from sleep and finding himself covered by revolvers sat up in bed with a scream. The police fired one shot through his head, blowing out his brain, and retired whence they came». One policeman then remarked: «[…] we have carried out our orders». Later a police officer arrived, ostensibly to take statements. He explained that the victim had tried to escape through the window. It should be noted that, «shot while trying to escape», or, «shot while breaking the cordon is a daily announcement in this country. Most, or many, of these incidents are bumpings-off – nothing more or less.»

According to Lees, the target for the police was a man who was one of the principal witnesses against a British police Sergeant and a Jewish Advocate who were to be tried for conspiracy and the taking and giving of bribes to facilitate illegal Jewish immigration. Police violence was not just about political assassinations; criminality by officers played its part and low-level theft from civilians by police was an endemic problem in Palestine.

8. Death Squads?
The events at Manshiya and the Dajani hospital establish that there were police death squads, a «dirty war» in Palestine, euphemistically called «special squads». When back in London, Lees met a former constable of the Palestine police who told him that the man shot in Manshiya had first been tortured and then taken out to be killed: «[…]he had actually heard the British C.I.D. Sergeant concerned give the order to his «Special Squad» to take the prisoner out and shoot him («Take him for a ride» were the actual words), after repeated floggings had failed to elicit from him whatever information it was the Sergeant desired.» Lees was told by friends not to return to Palestine as his life was under threat, advice that he heeded. This was not new, such things were being called «assassination direction» in Ireland, after which the «hidden hand» protected those involved in breaking the law. In Galilee in 1938, a British Army officer, Orde Wingate, established Army-run «Special Night

66 Note, Jerusalem, 25 June 1939, Lees Papers, 5/9, LHCMA.
67 Lees, «Unbeaten Track», Lees Papers, 5/13, 14, LHCMA.
68 For problems with theft, see, Hughes, «The Banality of Brutality», passim.
69 Lees, «Unbeaten Track», Lees Papers, 5/13, 6–7, LHCMA.
70 Ibid., 22.
Squads», responsible for gross abuses against local Palestinians.\(^72\) Evidently, both the police and the Army liked to be «special». Hugh Foot (later Lord Caradon), a senior colonial official at the time in Palestine, saw first-hand the impact that soldiers such as Wingate had as he «wiped out opposition gangs by killing them all. He was taking sides. It was a dirty war of assassination and counter-assassination. I don’t think we should have got mixed up in that».\(^73\)

Commands relating to the sorts of abuses discussed here were «usually conveyed verbally and in a coded language».\(^74\) «Secret orders issued sub rosa from Dublin for the murder of Dr. Fogarty for instance, had brought in their tracks all kinds of other crimes – wholesale robberies, arson, murder, beatings – because once an outlying policeman has been told to act illegally, in secret, to serve his masters, he will not hesitate to do the same (if it suits him) to serve himself.»\(^75\)

In Algeria, those killed by the forces of law and order had been «neutralised».\(^76\) When the French Army wanted to kill trouble makers the suspects were «let loose in the countryside».\(^77\) In South Africa under Apartheid, orders to state-sanctioned death squads were always given verbally.\(^78\) This complicates the task of the historian. While there is one candid memoir of the reality of policing in Palestine by a British Constable\(^79\) that can be set alongside a similarly revealing set of private papers, again from a junior officer involved,\(^80\) history sheds a dim light on events, the battle in Palestine, as with the one in Algeria later on, literally and figuratively, «s’est déroulée la nuit».\(^81\) The stories of the (often illiterate) peasants who bore the violent brunt of this hidden history are rarely told, except by way of deep mining of Western archival sources. There is some Arabic-language material from Bahjat Abu Gharbiyah, Khalil al-Sakakini and Akram Zu’aytir dealing with abuses,\(^82\)


\(^73\) Interview with Lord Caradon (Hugh Foot), Lever Arch File 55, Wingate and SNS, p. 11, Thames TV Material, IWMFA.

\(^74\) House / MacMaster, Paris, 12.

\(^75\) F. P. Crozier, Ireland, 121.


\(^77\) Ibid., 125.

\(^78\) For Apartheid see Campbell / Brenner (eds.), Death Squads, 241.

\(^79\) H. Arrigonie, British Colonialism: 30 Years Serving Democracy or Hypocrisy, Bideford 1998.

\(^80\) Burr papers, 88/8/1, IWMD.


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alongside local protests passed by way of the Anglican clergy in Palestine stored in a UK archive, but not much, reflective perhaps of the uninterested disdain of Palestinian elites towards their own poor. Ted Swedenburg’s published English-language oral history project on the Mandate years is remarkable. As one war veteran remarked, he and his comrades did «not want to remember the bad stuff», a sentiment applicable not just to perpetrators but also to victims, one imagines, and one reason why it is so hard to uncover the truth of some histories.

Torture sat atop the systemic structures detailed above. Arabs knew what awaited them if arrested and they threatened suicide if ever detained by certain, named police officers. The Palestine police ran the country’s prisons and by 1938 it had established dedicated torture centres, very much like the one at el-Biar near Algiers where Henri Alleg was tortured in 1957 by French paratroopers and legionnaires. As well as the main police headquarters at the Russian compound in west Jerusalem, police CID had a separate, secret house at the Talavera military camp at the Allenby barracks in south Jerusalem, now covered by residential housing; another torture site was in Acre Citadel prison. Arab suspects were «lifted» from their homes and executed; others found themselves the subject of torture «in methods we would hear about in the Middle Ages». Euphemisms were again deployed to mask what was really going on, the torture facilities being referred to as «Arab Investigation Centres», in Kenya in the 1950s, such places were called «Mau Mau Investigation Centres».

9. Colonial Policing and the Historical Record

There are different ways of telling the story of law and order in Palestine after the Great War. Traditional histories present a romantic tale of adventure or they argue that the problem with the Palestine police was inadequate training, the poor quality

accounts from Arabs recorded for «Palestine: Promises and Rebellion» (Thames TV, three parts, 1977–1978) and filed in the Imperial War Museum Film Archive (not on open access).

Allegations of Ill-treatment of Arabs by British Crown Forces in Palestine (translated from the Arabic by Frances Newton, 19 June 1939) in J & E Mission papers, GB 165–0161, Box 65, File 5, 141–43, MEC.


M. Mitri (Jaffa) to Lees, 20 June 1939, Lees Papers, 5/10, LHCMA.

Ileg, The Question, passim. See also Aussaresesses, The Battle, 117 ff.

Author interview, Bahjat Abu Gharbiyah, Amman, 21 June 2009 and subsequent elucidatory correspondence to Abu Gharbiyah via his son Sami Abu Gharbiyah, July-December 2009.


of recruits and the lack of good intelligence, all of which made the force less than effective.\textsuperscript{91} Certainly, there was adventure to be had for young British men in Palestine; there were also serious systemic deficiencies in the system of formalised violence as embodied in the police, ones that came to the fore every time there was widespread rebellion, as there was in 1929, 1936 and 1945, when the colonial authorities had to call in the Army. The police was unable to rely on popular consent to do its job and it was reliant on the Army in times of major disturbances. This weakness manifested itself in systematic informal, grass-roots based coercion, violence that got worse as the police grip on power weakened, as it did in 1938–1939, at the height of the Arab revolt.

When the British departed Palestine in 1948, they left a legacy of legally enshrined collective punishment (fines, house destruction, seizure of goods, etc.) and violence (assault, torture, detention) towards Arabs, and tacitly accepted abuse by agents of the State, embodied in the Mandate legal system and the police force. The British established unjust collective punishment as the norm for an amorphous Oriental mass of peasants unused to justice. The Palestine police had also employed many thousands of «Loyalist» Jews as temporary,\textsuperscript{92} full- or part-time\textsuperscript{93} police officers to enforce the law in peaceful periods and in times of revolt they were there to assist the British to suppress the Palestinians. The Jews who had served under the British set up the Israeli state apparatus in 1948. Their attitudes mirrored those of the British before them, under whom they had served, made worse by Jewish settlement and State-building, a project that required the removal or subjugation of recalcitrant local Arabs. As a Jewish doctor in Mandate Palestine told a British Army officer serving out in the country, the «Turks» had not only been much tougher and much better at controlling the Arabs but also that «the Arabs understood the lash and expected the lash. And the harder you treat them the better they will behave.» The doctor added, «And there's no doubt that the British have never I think really been harsh».\textsuperscript{94} The new regime of Jewish order in the country was to be even tougher – certainly more efficient in what it did – and run by people with an intimate knowledge and understandable dislike of the local non-Jewish population who blocked the path to the creation of a Jewish State. Familiarity bred contempt, as it did for the police; the Army’s temporary rotations through Palestine by regiments softened any hostility: «I think we British rather admire the Arabs», was one Army officer’s far from isolated comment.\textsuperscript{95} As colonists, the Israelis adopted

\textsuperscript{91} M. Thomas, Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorders after 1914, Berkeley, CA 2008, 240–241. See also Imray, Policeman, 8–12.

\textsuperscript{92} The British recruited thousands of extra Jewish supernumerary police – 14,411 according to one source – during the Arab revolt of the late 1930s: A. Lefen, Ha’Shai: Shorasheha Shel Kehilat ha’ Modi’in ha’Israelit [The Roots of the Israeli Intelligence Community], Tel Aviv 1997, 273.

\textsuperscript{93} For a personal account of part-time policing, see E. Kluk, A Special Constable in Palestine, Johannesburg 1939.

\textsuperscript{94} Lt.-Col. R. King-Clark, 4486/07, p. 35, IWMSA.

\textsuperscript{95} Capt. C. P. Norman, 4629, 8–9, IWMSA.
British imperial policies in their dealings with the Arabs after 1948 – the British were, after all, experts in such things – instituting collective punishments and abusing the local Arabs, often in the same torture centres established under the Mandate Government. The French handed on a similar collective, colonial memory of what to do to the Belgians in the Congo and, more significantly, to the Americans, planning for the war in Vietnam in the early 1960s. French Army officers from Algeria – men who had served with the elite shock troops of the Legion and the paratroopers – such as Paul Aussaresses, Roger Faulques and Roger Trinquier instructed the Americans on insurgent warfare and they travelled to places such as Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to teach the US Army the rules of counter-insurgency. Similarly, the Palestinian police did more than just pass on ways of doing things to the Israeli State. When the force was disbanded in 1948, the men were given the option of staying in the service and many went to Malaya, just as the conflict began against Communist guerrillas, after which there were insurgencies to fight in Kenya, Cyprus, Aden, and Northern Ireland, right up to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Men who had been in the «Black and Tans» were still serving as policemen and officials in Britain’s colonies in the 1950s. The continuity from policing in Ireland in the 1920s to Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s, and then to the post-war British Empire meant the transfer of an institutional memory from one setting, such as Palestine, to the next, a fascinating subject but one that is beyond the remit of this article.


informed by war veterans – continued after the disbandment of the Palestine force in 1948, both within Israel and in other parts of the British Empire where former Palestine police officers went to serve in the 1950s. In telling the full story of policing in Palestine, this article extends our understanding of inter-war colonial policing, including its impact on local people, and it makes useful connections to other colonial powers operating in similar circumstances to the British in Palestine, which extend our knowledge of imperial and neo-imperial histories.

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