UNPACKING THE MODERN, NATIONAL SELF:
THE DIARY OF KHALIL AL-SAKAKINI

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Nadim Bawalsa, B.A.

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A Note on Translation

Throughout this thesis, I have endeavored to present Khalil al-Sakakini’s words as he meant to deliver them. The translations are entirely my own, and since the author wrote with a mastery of the Arabic language, there is little room for misinterpretation. He rarely included colloquialisms or vernacular expressions unless he qualified them as such beforehand. I am indebted to Sakakini for his precise and meticulous penmanship.
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Introduction

Khalil al-Sakakini was a fascinating man. His diary survives him and bespeaks an individual of countless thoughts, sentiments, and ambitions. Writing with tremendous detail for nearly half a century (1907-1952), Sakakini and his diary have been unsurprisingly valuable for investigations of twentieth-century Palestinian intellectual thought, especially in Jerusalem, the city where he spent most of his life. His charismatic and erudite persona, his involvement in the reform of the Greek Orthodox Church, his numerous publications and centers for learning, as well as his public role as an educator and political activist, explain why this man has appeared repeatedly as a devoted nationalist in literature on this period. Yet Sakakini was also a troubled man. Indeed, the diary reveals that he was often burdened with distressful cognitions that problematize efforts to describe him as a Greek Orthodox or a nationalist. While several historians have examined Sakakini’s diary and have noted peculiarities in his behavior, there has thus far been no attempt to explicate his curious and often mercurial disposition. In this thesis, therefore, I reassess the existing scholarship on Sakakini by analyzing these components of his character. I argue that these complexities reflect the highly subjective and involved processes of self-reflection that took place within this diary. As a work in micro-history, this investigation thus has broader implications for an evaluation of historians’ tendency to construct dominant narratives on this period in Palestinian history.

The trend in typifying Sakakini as a Greek Orthodox nationalist has simplified his complex character. In 1958, Elie Kedourie wrote that Sakakini’s diary “affords striking evidence of the state of mind of the educated class of his community and generation.” He continued:
These Orthodox Christians, living for centuries under the dominance and at the margin of Muslim society, are suddenly found asserting that they are no mere apolitical minority, but part and parcel of the Arab nation, equally entitled with the Muslims, should this nation achieve sovereignty, to the exercise of political power.¹

For Kedourie, the diary provided a window through which to locate the development of nationalist identity during Mandatory Palestine, at least among the Orthodox Christian community. Yet in his diary, Sakakini reiterated that during this period, he did not consider himself to be part of any political or confessional community, and certainly not the Greek Orthodox one. On 26 March 1915, for example, he expressed: “I am not Christian and not Buddhist, not Muslim and not Jewish, just as I am not Arab, or British, not German and not Turkish. I am just one among humankind.”² But Kedourie is one of many scholars who have taken Sakakini’s voluminous diary and fit him categorically under an identifiable label, most commonly, Greek Orthodox nationalist. These claims must be reassessed.

This study will demonstrate that the national and confessional identities with which Sakakini has often been associated are less transparent than much of the secondary literature has presented. Rather, I argue that Sakakini’s entangled and often dissonant thoughts and behavior indicate that compounded processes of self-identification were occurring throughout the diary, processes identifiable through rigorous micro-historical examination of the interplay between this individual and his environment. In order to uncover these processes, I support my alternative interpretations of Sakakini’s character using theories from psychology and sociology, namely, Leon Festinger’s theory of

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² Khalil Sakakini (a), _Kadha ana ya dunya_, ed. Hala Sakakini (Beirut: al-ittihad al-‘amm lil-kuttab w-l-sahafiyin al-filastiniyyin, al-amana al-‘amma, 1982), 89.
cognitive dissonance and Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus*. Consequently, the narrative of Sakakini contributes to the growing body of micro-histories that provide necessary nuance to investigations of nationalism and colonial identity – macro-historical trends – as they appeared in Palestinian history.

Many scholars have debated the notion that Arab nationalism emerged and developed monolithically in the early twentieth-century Arab East, a key point for understanding Sakakini’s diary. Philip Khoury’s work on Damascene notables in the pre-World War One period highlights that the loyalties of the agents of nascent ideologies are often conflicted. He argued that the intellectual elite of Damascus were not opposed to Ottomanism, per se, but were growing increasingly disgruntled politically and socially due to new Ottoman policy. As a result, argued Khoury, monopolizing on growing Arab separatist sentiment was a sociopolitical convenience for these elites, a way to secure their local power and prestige. Moreover, Lisa Anderson, Rashid Khalidi, et al. have produced a substantial volume titled *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* in which they combined several essays that address the rise and development of a sentiment of Arab nationalism in the early twentieth century. The general argument of this volume, like Khoury’s, is that a group of local elites, goaded by a threat to their power-base, united under a common ideology: Arab nationalism. The volume therefore revises the dominant narrative that Arab nationalism emerged naturally in this historical context and that it was an ideology to which all Arabs felt an intrinsic and unanimous attachment.

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James Gelvin critiqued the authors of *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* for foregoing a more in-depth investigation of nationalism itself. He argued that: “The overwhelming problem with this book is that the contributors write as though Arab nationalism were a phenomenon *sui generis*.”\(^5\) Instead, Gelvin contended that a historical investigation of the rise and development of Arab nationalist, or any nationalist, ideology could not be undertaken without addressing further issues, chief among them an appreciation for the complex “web of factors (class, ethnicity, status) which define identity within a given culture or sub-culture.”\(^6\) Gelvin continued:

In addition, nationalist origins cannot simply be traced to debates among imperilled elites who impose their doctrines uni-directionally, that is, from the top down; on the contrary, successful nationalisms emerge as the result of a complex bargaining process between elites and non-elites.\(^7\)

Gelvin also explained that the transition of Arab nationalism, as it were, from a “‘cultural reawakening’ to a mass movement” was not simply attributable to an increase in the number of its supporters. Rather, he asserted:

each phase of what historians project backwards as a coherent national movement differs from other phases in terms of the structure according to which the movement is organized, its targeted constituency, and the core leadership.\(^8\)

These debates demonstrate the trouble with the existing literature on Sakakini and his nationalism; there has been a tendency to project contemporary meanings of the term “nationalist” onto an individual whose diary must be read in its historical context. While I do not undergo an investigation of the emergence of Arab nationalist sentiment


\(^6\) Gelvin, 101.

\(^7\) Ibid, 101.

\(^8\) Ibid, 101.
throughout the period Sakakini wrote his diary.\(^9\) I agree with Gelvin that understanding nationalist movements and ideologies requires more nuanced analyses of the complex web of factors that constitute a given ideology. As I will show in this study, the curious case of Sakakini’s diary supports this contention.

In order to comprehend the extent of his peculiarity, I propose a crucial angle for understanding the character of Sakakini: his enthusiasm for modernity. The diary reveals that Sakakini was an admirer of things western, specifically, education, science, philosophy, and even a western brand of national consciousness. The different instances in the diary where Sakakini would praise America or the British for their cultural superiority while denigrating Arabs for their backwardness obfuscate efforts to brand him as an Arab nationalist. Indeed, by working for the Mandate authorities, instructing his children in the ways of sophisticated modernity, and by sending them to colonial schools and abroad for higher education, Sakakini would automatically accept the epistemological ascendancy of western modernity over local methods. I argue that Sakakini’s penchant for the West and for institutionalizing modernity in Palestine influenced his interaction with his Palestinian cohorts and contributed to his distressful cognitions, thus creating a bewildering sense of national and social identity.

Contextualizing the diary, it is evident that the introduction of a logic of modernity, reflected in the structures and institutions of the British Mandate, defines this period and forms the backdrop of much of Sakakini’s writing. Salim Tamari discussed these changes in his article, “City of Riffraff: Crowds, Public Space, and New Urban

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Sensibilities in War-Time Jerusalem, 1917-1921.”¹⁰ He argued that during the immediate post-WWI period, Jerusalem developed into a space for social, economic, and political modernity, both through the Mandate and through remnants of Ottoman modernity. He examined British officials’ memoirs from this period, as well as several notable Jerusalemites’ and observed that the British Mandate brought about great change. The Mandate, he explained, instituted modern forms of government, “including a new civil service and police force, and the centralization of the national bureaucracy in Jerusalem.”¹¹ Additionally, it introduced rudimentary features of citizenship and icons of unfulfilled sovereignty (currency, stamps, passports); a modern secular educational system; and finally an infrastructure of roads and communication system, including a broadcasting authority – the Palestine Radio in 1931.¹²

Tamari emphasized that this modernity emerged within Jerusalem, an urban space. He showed how different British officials, such as Jerusalem Civic Advisor, C. Ashbee, serving in post-WWI Jerusalem, had plans for urban renewal that were specifically catered to the city’s architecture and landscape. As a resident of Jerusalem, these changes impacted Sakakini’s conception of himself, and delimited the boundaries of his social placement.

Besides infrastructural transformations, Tamari highlighted the less tangible changes that came about as a result of the War and the ensuing power shift. As he paraphrased from Omar Salih al-Barghouti’s diary, it was easy to observe in post-War Jerusalem the

¹¹ Tamari, 24.
radical impact of the movement of population and the war economy on the normative aspects of daily life: villagers coming to the city on a regular basis, women going to school and removing their veils, the emergence of café culture, and the decline of religiosity in Nablus and Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{13}

Concomitantly, explained Tamari, tastes and sensibilities began to reflect the social shifts under way. He showed how café culture in Jerusalem became essential for the propagation of ideologies of modernity, such as science, intellectual freedom, secularism, embourgeoisement, and increasingly, individualism:

Secular education, cafes, social clubs and recreational centers catered to the growth of new bourgeois tastes and sensibilities. The private writings of this period ushered a sense of individualism and escape from familial and communitarian bonds.\textsuperscript{14}

Sakakini’s diary emerges against this backdrop of social flux and negotiation. Replete as it is with detail and self-expression, it is small wonder that the diary has provided fodder for many historians of Palestinian history. Yet many of these historians, in an effort to construct master narratives of Palestinian nationalist thought, have effectively diminished our understanding of this individual and of his reaction to elements of social change. It is undeniable that Sakakini experienced many changes in his life as a result of these volatile periods during which he lived and wrote. But for all of the changes which accompanied Ottoman and British modernities, perhaps the greatest change rendered to Sakakini has occurred postmortem, as authors have simplified his life to fit within their histories.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, 33. See Omar Salih al-Barghouti, \textit{Al-Marahil} (Beirut: Dar al-Anwar, 2001).
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 43.
Reading the Diary and its Author

Sakakini’s diaries and letters were written over the course of 45 years. The diary, moreover, first appearing in 1955 in *Kadha ana ya dunya*, was edited for publication by Sakakini’s daughter, Hala Sakakini.15 Later editions of his diary, organized into eight volumes, were published starting in 2003 by different houses and editors, including the Khalil al-Sakakini Cultural Center and the Institute for Jerusalem Studies. Different ideologies, political and otherwise, have certainly colored the editing process. Akram Musallam, editor of the third book, *The Mandate Experience and Questions of Identity 1919-1922*,16 described Sakakini as a true nationalist and educator dedicated to the cause of Arab nationalism and to the future of Palestine. Consequently, for Musallam, the diary during that period highlighted Sakakini’s distinct awareness of the threat of Zionism, and therefore, his struggle (*nidāl*) for freedom.17 Tanya Nasir, who introduced the fourth book, *Between Father and Son, the Letters of Khalil to Sari in America, 1931-1932*18 in

15 The original diaries of Khalil al-Sakakini have recently been published in their entirety. For the purposes of this research, however, I will rely mainly on Hala Sakakini and abridged edition, since the authors I am critiquing only utilize this source. Moreover, and while it might be methodologically problematic to produce a research paper purporting to respond to incomplete interpretations of Khalil al-Sakakini using diaries that are themselves incomplete, I stress that the conclusions I present in this paper are propositions that serve to deepen our understanding of this individual, consequently responding to the existing scholarship that I argue has only superficially approached Sakakini’s diary.

It is also important that I stress my reasons for undergoing this project. My aim is not to glorify or isolate Sakakini in this history. There are numerous Palestinians from this period who have kept personal records, and theirs are no less worth investigating. The aim, rather, is to analyze Sakakini’s diary in a way that has not yet been done in order to achieve an understanding with which I would be satisfied. The character of Khalil al-Sakakini has fascinated and perplexed me since my first encounter with his diary in 2006, and I have yet to read a source that acknowledges the phenomena I observe in this source. In a sense, then, I hope that the analysis I present here will incite further debate and produce reactions from others who might also feel investigations of this diary are in order.

16 My own translation of *Al-intidab wa as’ilat al-hawiyya*, 1919-1922.


18 My own translation of *Bayna-l-ab wa-l-ibn, rasa’il Khalil ila Sari fi Amrika*, 1931-1932.
2005, hailed Sakakini as the father-humanist *par excellence* of his time, devoted not only to the promotion of human dignity, but also to the well-being of his only son, Sari:

Sakakini’s concern for human nurturing, science, as well as moral, mental, and even physical, development comprises a large part of his letters to Sari. After all, these issues are part and parcel of Sakakini’s makeup, his ambitions, and his dreams.\(^{19}\)

Moreover, for Nasir, and as a result of her personal relationship with the Sakakini family, Sakakini led an extraordinary life:

These letters are testimony to, and a unique summary of, a unique life that joined normal simplicity and high culture, a life refined in its entirety in an unaffected, spontaneous melody, portraying Sakakini’s grandeur and his distinction as one of the most important Palestinian and Arab figures in the twentieth century.\(^{20}\)

On the other side of the Atlantic, scholars have been approaching the diary with their own agendas as well. In a footnote to his 1977 article on Arab officials working for the British Mandate, Bernard Wasserstein described Sakakini as “a Greek Orthodox Christian from Jerusalem, a teacher, and an Arab nationalist.”\(^{21}\) As previously mentioned, Sakakini’s zealous denial of his confessional identity was evidently overlooked in Wasserstein’s account. Similarly, M. Peled (1982) argued that Sakakini’s struggle, as described in his diary, with his choice to move to New York City in 1907 and his subsequent return to Jerusalem shortly after in 1908 “should be considered part of the heritage of Palestinian literature expressing, as they do, his longing for Jerusalem, his city of birth, and its surrounding area.”\(^{22}\) Yet a closer examination of those diary entries reveals a man struggling with his failure to secure a career and home during his few

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\(^{19}\) Khalil al-Sakakini (c), *Yawmiyyat Khalil al-Sakakini, al-kitab al-rabi’; bayna-l-‘ab wa-l-‘ibn, rasa’il Khalil ila Sari fi Amrika, 1931-1932*, ed. Akram Musallam (Ramallah: The Khalil al-Sakakini Cultural Center, 2005), 20.

\(^{20}\) Sakakini (c), 11.


months abroad. Consequently, his return to Jerusalem should not be read as a matter of pride and longing for his homeland so much as a difficult decision to return as a failure. In this paper, therefore, I pose the following questions: what is the historian to do with the many peculiarities evident in Sakakini’s character? More urgently, why has Sakakini’s diary been repeatedly misinterpreted?

In order to better understand why Sakakini and his diary have been appealing for historians, we must locate more precisely the diary and its writer historically. Khalil al-Sakakini was born in Jerusalem in 1878. As urban Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire, Sakakini’s parents were able to afford for their son a relatively privileged education at the Greek Orthodox School, then at the Anglican Christian Mission Society College, and finally at the Zion English College where he read literature.23 In late 1907, Sakakini arrived in New York to pursue employment. His brother Yousef resided and worked in Philadelphia as a traveling salesman. During his nine-month sojourn in America, Sakakini translated and wrote for Arabic literary magazines in New York. His most prestigious position was his translation job with Professor Richard Gottheil at Columbia University.24 Unfortunately, his earnings from his work with Gottheil were insufficient, and with some help from a close friend, Sakakini started work at a factory in Rumford Falls, Maine in June of 1908 only to decide shortly after that the job was miserable and returning to Jerusalem would be a better choice: “There is no difference between the factory worker and the machinery he works; he comes and goes with no

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23 Hala Sakakini, in her memoir, Jerusalem and I (Amman, JO: Economic Press Co. 1990), says her paternal grandfather was a “master carpenter who had several apprentices. At the same time he was the mukhtār of the Greek Orthodox community in Jerusalem” (page 2). In addition to Arabic, he spoke both Greek and Turkish.  
24 Gottheil was a Jewish-American scholar who, during his early career, was active in the Zionist movement. In the early 1900s, he chose the quiet life of academia and, while at Columbia University, edited several publications on Oriental studies for which Sakakini was a valuable asset.
thought or ambition, with no trace of mind in all that he does. [...] How dark the lords of money and how ugly this city!"\(^{25}\)

In the historiography, Sakakini’s story gains momentum as soon as he returned to Jerusalem. With news of Sultan Abdulhamid’s decision to reinstitute the Ottoman Empire’s Constitution of 1876 in the summer of 1908, Sakakini packed his bags and booked his boat home from New York on July 29. Upon his return, he continued writing and teaching, and he even tutored American expatriates at the American Colony in Jerusalem. Being close to his beloved Sultana once again, Sakakini felt at home, despite his meager earnings and pressure from the Greek Orthodox Church:

I wish I could find a job in Jerusalem but how when I am a Greek Orthodox? The English bishop wants me to wear the clerical robe, join the students to church and read to them the Bible. The C.M.S. [Christian Mission Society] wants me to be a preacher, and neither can I do.\(^{26}\)

But the following years were to prove formative for Sakakini. His establishment of and involvement in the Orthodox *nahda* movement was to impact his politics and personal life during this period and for years to come.\(^{27}\)

Sakakini’s decision to renounce his faith, the Orthodox Church, and eventually, the Orthodox *nahda* in 1914 was not easy. On January 11, Sakakini wrote:

I cannot imagine that I will work with the priests without feeling disgusted with myself. My self tells me to resign and sever all relations with priests and the community [*al-milla*], and it tells me even to withdraw from the Orthodox Church.

\(^{25}\) Sakakini (a), 29. 30 June 1908.
\(^{26}\) Ibid, 38. 21 September 1908.
\(^{27}\) The Orthodox *nahda* (Renaissance), spearheaded by Sakakini, was based on the premise that the Greek Orthodox Church in Palestine had grown corrupt. The agenda of the *nahda*, for Sakakini, was to reform the Church so as to rid it of the dishonorable dogma that it had developed. In 1913, Sakakini published a pamphlet titled “The Orthodox Renaissance in Palestine” which led to his subsequent clashes with the Church hierarchy. In a telling diary entry dated 11 January 1914, Sakakini wrote of his disgust with the Greek Orthodox patriarchy and its followers: “I cannot be under the leadership of these corrupt, base priests, nor be numbered among this hateful denomination [...] I am not Orthodox! I am not Orthodox!” (Sakakini (a), 57).
and to rid myself of the *nahda*, certainly since the *nahda* has become one of meeting individual needs and of effectuating prestige.28

The next day, Sakakini convinced himself of this decision:

My withdrawal from the Church and the *nahda* at a time like this [...] is a sign of honor and a title of pride. Indeed, withdrawing today while I am still active and determined would be more beneficial for my future and more in-line with my principles.29

For years thereafter, Sakakini devoted his time to teaching, and to the inculcation of his brand of nationalistic sentiment in his students at the *Dustūriyyah* School, which he established in 1909.30 Truly an avant-garde institution, this school and its mission provided later historians with the necessary evidence to label Sakakini as a nationalist.

Yet his diary would obfuscate the notion that his nationalism, understood anachronistically as organized Arab separatism, was so evident. In 1917, the Ottoman authorities imprisoned Sakakini for sheltering a Polish-American Jew, Alter Levine, in his home.31 The two of them were sent to Damascus for a short period of incarceration.

Prior to their exile, Sakakini justified the aid he offered Levine as follows:

I do not know why the Ottoman government wishes to distance me from Jerusalem [...] It does not bother me at all that the British have arrived to this

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30 As part of its mission, the *Dustūriyyah* School did not believe in a rewards-based system. Students were not given grades, prizes, or punishments; rather, the emphasis was on fomenting nationalistic sentiment and equality. The language of instruction was in Arabic, not Turkish, and emphasis was placed on music education and athletics.

On 1 January 1911, Sakakini described his school in 11 points. The points demonstrate the spirit of the school, its mission, and strengths, which include its modern teaching methods (point 3), emphasis on athletics and military trainings (point 6), and care for music and nationalist songs (point 11). Following these points, Sakakini concluded: “You will not find in the *Dustūriyyah* a weak-bodied student, a coward, liar, idle-minded, short-sighted, dirty, or lowly individual” (*Sakakini* (c), page 52).

31 Tom Segev offers an interesting interpretation of the relationship between Sakakini and Levine during the days Levine was seeking shelter in Sakakini’s home before their exile. Taking theirs as a micro-narrative of the broader changes sweeping through Palestine at the time, he presents an image of two men locked in an uneasy and tense state of affairs. Issues of modernity, tradition, faith, ideology, and politics intersect in their meeting. Segev rightly acknowledges that, “Both were extremely complex men, full of contradictions and with many doubts and questions about their cultures and their identities.” See Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 1999), 27.
country, for I have decided that if I survive this war, I will leave this country for America where I will put my son in American schools, and wherever I am, I am but a human [...] And what is nationalism? If nationalism means that the human must be healthy in the body, strong, energetic, straight-minded, of noble values, affable, and kind, then I am a nationalist. But if nationalism means favoring one ideology over another, or contradicting one’s brother if he is not from one’s country or ideology, then I am not a nationalist.\(^{32}\)

The complexity of these diary entries and Sakakini’s trouble with self-identification during this period should not be overlooked in the literature. His conviction that nationalism was the pursuit of knowledge and humanity, while harboring his own dreams of leaving Jerusalem one day for America, signals a perplexing psychological dissonance that merits investigation. Consequently, stamping the label of “nationalist” on this character, with its modern and anachronistic implications, as several historians have done, is reductionist.

During the British Mandate, the next phase of the diary, Sakakini’s thoughts and behavior strike further intrigue and reveal the superficial treatment of his diary in the literature. In the preface to the third volume, Akram Mussalam argued that during the 1919-1922 period: “Khalil al-Sakakini waged the national battle against the enemies of his people in different arenas.”\(^ {33}\) Musallam then inserted an excerpt from Sakakini’s diary that proved this description, namely, when Sakakini commented on the presence of the British: “I prefer that we lead ourselves, even if we commit hundreds of mistakes in a day.”\(^ {34}\) But Musallam did not include the sentence immediately preceding this declaration in the diary: “Some who observe me with the British may think that I take their rule over us lightly. No matter how much I love the English, or how much I admire their values, I prefer that we lead ourselves [...].” Other entries from the same period reveal further the

\(^{32}\) Sakakini (a), 96. 2 December 1917.

\(^{33}\) Sakakini (b), 10.

\(^{34}\) Sakakini (a), 175. 4 April 1919.
extent to which Sakakini’s behavior has not been closely analyzed. For example, Musallam did not mention the conversation between Sakakini and one of his British superiors, Colonel Waters-Tyler, on 6 March 1919, during one of their scheduled Arabic lessons. Instead of their lesson, Waters-Tyler invited Sakakini to chat over a cup of tea. Sakakini recounted the following:

[Waters-Tyler] said: ‘I will leave Jerusalem for Nazareth in a few days.’ So I said: ‘Why?’ He said: ‘We have divided the country into three or four large zones: Jerusalem and its environs, Nazareth and its environs, Acre and its environs, and Nablus and its environs. And I have chosen Nazareth […]’ I received this news with regret, so I said: ‘In the days of the Turks, if we loved a ruler, and the government wished to relocate him, we would hold on tightly to him and send telegraph after telegraph requesting he stay with us. If the British authorities permitted this, Jerusalem would rise in its entirety and ask that you stay, because it loves and respects you.’

Musallam’s disregard for excerpts that reflect peculiarities in Sakakini’s nationalism indicates his personal reading of the diary and his understanding of its author. It also demonstrates the problematic way in which Sakakini has been portrayed in the literature.

Though the first years of the British Mandate were undoubtedly complex in terms of assessing allegiances and loyalties, Sakakini’s intellectual and cultural preference for the West, both Britain and America, is unequivocal. Yet, and for reasons that I will explore later, Sakakini remained in Palestine, establishing schools and educating generations of students. In 1919, Sakakini was appointed head of the Jerusalem

35 Sakakini (b), 93. An interesting interpretation would explain that Sakakini, a former Ottoman subject of considerable local prestige, was merely reacting to the new British authorities the only way he knew how – the same way he would have behaved with his Ottoman leaders – in order to sustain his local prestige. This inaugurates a compelling area of study, namely, Sakakini’s elite social status in Jerusalem and the extent to which his social standing impacted his behavior.

36 In an interview published in the Journal of Palestine Studies, Salih Baransi remembered being a student of Khalil al-Sakakini: ‘Khalil al-Sakakini was a man it is impossible to forget. He was very influential in the moulding of the Palestinian character. He was interested not only in book-learning, but also in values and human character. I always remember him saying: ‘Before any of you learns that 1 + 1 = 2 or that the subject in the nominative, he must be a human being with dignity and independent character.’
Teachers’ College, a position he accepted with great honor. Now part of the Educational Authority for Palestine, a branch of the British Mandatory force, Sakakini could combine his love for teaching with his admiration for modern British institutions. Yet during the 1920s, Sakakini was also involved in writing political commentaries for different newspapers and he wrote several patriotic poems; he even composed the anthem of the Arab Revolt. In 1925, he established the Wataniyyah School, another institution celebrated for its novel educational methods and nationalist sentiment, and finally, in 1931, he sent his only son Sari to study in America for six years.

The decision to send his son to America signaled Sakakini’s chronic qualms with his own life choices. Tanya Nasir introduced the letters Sakakini sent to his son between 1931 and 1932 in the fourth volume of the Sakakini series, and while she correctly argued that the letters demonstrate the positive level of concern and involvement Sakakini put into his son’s life, she did not report that they also reveal the extent to which Sakakini struggled to accept himself. In several letters, Sakakini grappled with his past, more specifically, with his decision to have returned from America in 1908 when he could have stayed and accepted factory work, thus increasing the likelihood of his family’s future in America. Furthermore, Sakakini’s repeated instructions to Sari to forget that he is an Arab, a son of Jerusalem, and to become an American, bespeak Sakakini’s own crisis accepting not only his life choices, but also the reality that is Palestine and

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The al-Nahda College was one of the few schools in which corporal punishment was forbidden. (If it came to the knowledge of the Board of Governors that a teacher had so much as laid a finger on a pupil, he was immediately dismissed.) At all meetings of the Board of Governors, al-Sakakini used to stress that what he was interested in was building the pupil’s character, so that he might come to rely on himself, with dignity and pride, and I think that this is more important than teaching.” (Salih Baransi, “Oral History: The Story of a Palestinian Under Occupation,” Journal of Palestine Studies, vol. 11, 1 (Autumn 1981): 3-30, 3-4.
Palestinians and his place among them.\textsuperscript{37} The constant disappointment with his country and countrymen evident in the diary from the early years should not be overlooked in an analysis of this source. Nasir may have elected to pass over these “truths” about the character of Sakakini by highlighting his fatherly instinct and ceaseless concern for his son’s education and safety, but when it comes to an investigation of the man behind the letters and the diary, an investigation which should invariably be conducted when dealing with this sort of primary source, these truths cannot be ignored.

For many of these authors, the story and character of Khalil al-Sakakini has proven a helpful source for historical inquiry, yet their conclusions often raise concerns. Elie Kedourie, in 1958, wrote the first article that tackled the Sakakini diaries. For Kedourie, Sakakini was a symbol of the Christian Orthodox fervor that became “an appendix to the panarab [sic] campaign against Zionism.”\textsuperscript{38} Sakakini and his diaries were summarized in one paragraph:

In 1919 he becomes a leading advocate of panarabism [sic], agitation for which was then being directed by the Sharifians in Damascus. In 1920 he resigns from the Education Department because the High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel, is a Jew. In 1935 he builds a house in Jerusalem, and gives each room the name of an Arab capital.\textsuperscript{39}

The perfunctory summation of these complex and multidimensional diary entries into three sentences spanning 16 years does more of a disservice to our understanding of Sakakini’s thoughts and behavior. Sakakini’s reservations about the Pan-Arab movement were no less important than his support of the Sharifian movement, and his renunciation of the Orthodox Church and Orthodox nahda cannot be underappreciated in an article purporting to examine the involvement of Christian Palestinians in politics during the

\textsuperscript{37} I return to an analysis of these letters later in the paper.
\textsuperscript{38} Kedourie, 93.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 93.
British Mandate. Indeed, the extent to which Kedourie recognized Sakakini’s struggle with the Church was as follows:

But in Sakakini’s case […] the rebellion [against the Church] itself was a poor affair, fervent no doubt, but disoriented and undiscriminating. These men of principles who claimed the leadership of their community, clutched now at this, now at that principle, and ended by involving themselves in a style of politics as devoid of charity as of principle.40

Rather than explore the implications of the disorganized rebellion, for Kedourie, Sakakini’s fervent character and the strength of his conviction in his decisions revealed not the inner workings of a man torn between duty and desire, past and future, or even East and West, but his alarming fluctuation and capriciousness:

One day he advises his son to be a pacifist, and three days later he exclaims, ‘Power! Power! This is the new gospel which we must spread […]’ And he again advises his son to adopt this ‘philosophy’. Traditional lore and learning is thus rejected, and an eager, incoherent grasping at the latest novelty takes its place.41

While Kedourie was correct to observe these contradictions in Sakakini’s behavior, he simultaneously reduced our understanding of the different dimensions of Sakakini’s character, and of the volatile period in which he lived, in order to demonstrate the extent to which “anti-Zionist” sentiment was disorganized at the time.42

In 1982, M. Peled included Sakakini and his diaries in an article on Palestinian literature between 1917 and 1948. Peled argued that locating a uniquely Palestinian literature does not require the existence of a geopolitical Palestinian state. Indeed, for Peled, “being aware of the political nature of one’s national identity is certainly not the sole component of national literature.”43 He continued:

40 Ibid, 88.
41 Ibid, 89.
42 Ibid, 89-94.
43 Peled, 145.
Thus the poem written by the priest Elias Marmura of Nazareth, praising the beauty of his city in tender words and with obvious pride, is undoubtedly a Palestinian poem [...] The letters of Khalil al-Sakakini, sent from New York, where he had stayed for awhile before the first world war, should be considered part of the heritage of Palestinian literature expressing, as they do, his longing for Jerusalem, his city of birth, and its surrounding area. Both these examples are no less part of Palestinian literature for having been written by writers who were not conscious of being Palestinians in the modern sense.44

While Sakakini’s diary should not necessarily be excluded from “Palestinian literature,” Peled’s cursory handling of Sakakini’s short stay in America should be critiqued. Sakakini was indeed homesick, writing to his beloved Sultana, struggling with his decision to have left to begin with. Yet the details of his struggle may reveal more than a “special attachment to the land of birth.”45 On 7 June 1908, Sakakini shared:

I still spend all day thinking about returning, but how will I pay for my return and what will they think of me? Will they accept my excuse or accuse me of weakness, cowardice, laziness, and immaturity? What will Sultana say? Will she keep her faith in me and will she still accept me, or will she feel disappointment and regret? And I swear to you, Sultana, if there were gain in my stay here, I would not return this fast. But what do I do if I am not given any hope? Do I continue to consume despair and lunch on worry?46

Sakakini’s candid confession of his fears of humiliation and rejection upon return suggest that for him, succeeding in America would have meant more at that moment than his return to Jerusalem. This is confirmed when considered with the regret we see him confess in letters to his son in the 1930s. For Peled, however, arguing for the existence of a Palestinian literature that longs for an identifiable homeland in the first two decades of the twentieth century trumps the more intriguing conclusions that can emerge from a more nuanced reading of the diary.

46 Sakakini (a), 27.
Whether accurate or misleading, several historians who have dealt with the diary of Sakakini have produced perspectives on his ideologies, his community, and his writing. A historical certainty that emerges unequivocally from the diary, however, is that the period during which Sakakini wrote was one of dramatic change. As Tamari has argued, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the eruption of the First World War, the arrival of the British and Zionist forces, and the ensuing ideological transformations (specifically, through the institutionalization of modernity and a culture of nationalism) colored the present and future of this region, namely, Jerusalem, and its inhabitants.

Khalil al-Sakakini, a former Ottoman subject who chose to record a diary, can therefore provide us with a lens through which to examine the ways in which these changes and these ideological confrontations played out in the mind of an individual. Is Nasir correct in arguing that Sakakini was unique? Perhaps so, though a comparative analysis of other autobiographies from this period is beyond the purview of this investigation. The aim of this study is not to provide a revised and generalizable perspective of the period or of some of its thinkers. Rather, the aim is to provide an alternative and in-depth examination of one character in this history, using interdisciplinary theories, in order to revise the existing scholarship addressing him and to reassess the dominant narrative of national consciousness during this phase of Palestinian history. Through this diary, it is evident that in fact, complex networks of self-identification were unfolding at an individual level, networks that obfuscate the notion that Palestinian “nationalism,” as it were, was conceived of uniformly or monolithically.
The Diary as Source

As a source, Sakakini’s diary is rich. The different entries allow the historian a glimpse into the individual experience of a man living during a formative period in Palestinian history. It becomes easier for the researcher to fathom the impact of the various sociopolitical events that took place between 1907 and 1952 at a micro level. Yet the trouble with the diary as a source for historical investigation is evident in its subjective nature. In a recent New Yorker article, “But Enough about me,” Daniel Mendelsohn investigated the reasons why memoirs and autobiographies of different types appeal to the modern reader. As Mendelsohn colorfully explained, filled as it is with “unseemly self-exposures, unpalatable betrayals, unavoidable mendacity, a soupçon of meretriciousness: memoir, for much of its modern history, has been the black sheep of the literary family.”47 The author of the autobiography, often writing with little concern for objectivity, is “motivated, it would seem, by an overpowering need to be the center of attention” thus alienating the memoir as a source from its “soberer relatives (philosophy, history, literary fiction).”48

Yet despite the highly personal and occasionally slippery content of the autobiographical source, historians have often readily appropriated it to different ends. As shown above, Kedourie, Musallam, Nasir, and Peled sought labels, or truths, (“nationalist,” “Greek Orthodox,” “humanist,” etc.) in such a way that the autobiographical source was manipulated. Indeed, Mendelsohn linked the memoir’s appeal to the readers’ quest for “truth,” since it is ultimately a source representing actual

48 While memoirs and diaries constitute different literary genres, I treat them both as autobiographical sources, and hence use them interchangeably, as I discuss Mendelsohn’s article.
lived experience and actual thought. Comparing the novel with the memoir, Mendelsohn argued: “the truth we seek from novels is different from the truth we seek from memoirs. Novels, you might say, represent ‘a truth’ about life, whereas memoirs and nonfiction accounts represent ‘the truth’ about specific things that have happened.”

Mendelsohn probed this search for truths further and explicates its implications. He first cited a passage from philosopher David Hume’s 1740 *Treatise of Human Nature*. In this passage, Hume compared the “experience of a reader of what he called ‘romance’ to that of a reader of ‘true history’:

The latter has a more lively conception of all the incidents. He enters deeper into the concerns of the persons: represents to himself their actions, and characters, and friendships, and enmities: he even goes so far as to form a notion of their features, and air, and person. While the former, who gives no credit to the testimony of the author, has a more faint and languid conception of all these particulars; and except on account of the style and ingenuity of the composition, can receive little entertainment from it.\(^{49}\)

The autobiography, then, is imbued with a truth value that is subsequently deemed of greater importance than that of a non-autobiographical source. The autobiographical source is thus only guilty of fraud and exaggeration insofar as its readers seek from it truths which they decide are valuable. Nevertheless, the extractable truths from Sakakini’s or any other’s diary or autobiography are not necessarily meretricious due to their inherent subjectivities; rather, the implication is that this literary genre begs us to deal with its truths differently from the modern historiographic methods of fact-finding. Instead, as Raymond Walters explained in a 1960 New York Times article, our approach should be as follows:

The reader who picks up an autobiography merely for several hours’ entertainment is not likely to be troubled about its truthfulness as long as it tells a good yarn. But what of the reader who hopes to learn something about the ways of the world and how one individual responded to them? He may follow a method discerning critics have used for centuries: when you start reading an autobiography, think of it as a person to whom you have just been introduced. Size up as best you can the personality of the man or woman who is talking and take it constantly into consideration as you judge the truthfulness of what he has to say.50

Another common approach in examinations of autobiographical sources is the micro-to-macro approach where the small unit of analysis (the diary, for example), is used to represent a larger-scale phenomenon (negotiations of identity, for example).51 Abigail Jacobson’s work offers an example of the value of and trouble with this approach. In her article, she examined the different debates of allegiance and identity that she argued characterized the Jerusalem elite social scene in the period of transition during the First World War. She took the diary of Ihsan Tourjman (aka, Muhammad ‘Adil al-Salih), an educated, young, Muslim Jerusalemite who served as a soldier in the Ottoman army during the War, as well as excerpts from Sakakini’s diary, and through a comparison of the two, applied them to the broader debate on “the process of transformation that took place at the time, both in people’s affiliation to a larger collective and with regard to future dramatic political developments.”52 For Jacobson, Tourjman and Sakakini’s growing resentment of the Ottoman authorities coupled with their nascent support for the Arab cause, as evinced in their diaries, demonstrated how in the elite Jerusalem circles of this period, “people’s affiliation to the Ottoman collective

51 I return to Peter Burke’s discussion of this approach in the conclusion.  
allowed for multilayered, blurry, and flexible foci of identity to exist side by side.”

This observation supports the contention that this period witnessed tremendous moments of change in and conceptualization of identities, and moreover, it provides evidence for the idea that the transition from Ottoman to British governance was not abrupt or uniformly felt, and that it did, in fact, elicit varying levels of social negotiation.

Jacobson argued that the approach of examining the small-scale unit in order to comprehend the larger unit of analysis “gives the historian a sense of what is was like to live in the reality of the larger unit of analysis.” Yet, while Jacobson’s approach is certainly recognized in the historiography, her goal of linking small-scale to larger units to demonstrate the radical changes in affiliation unfolding during this period comes at the cost of a much deeper acquaintance with the individual diarist. Indeed, Jacobson made several problematic generalizations in her article in order to buttress her argument, such as when she argued that the cause for the difference between the level of resentment and frustration toward the Ottoman government in Tourjman and Sakakini’s diaries is attributable to their respective confessional identities. She contended that Sakakini’s frustration was “less explicit and less firm” than Tourjman’s because Sakakini, “a Christian intellectual, belonged to a religious minority, and Tourjman, a young Muslim, fell in the majority.”

While this distinction is not false, Sakakini’s proud anti-confessionalism evident in the diary, as well as his intellectual reclusiveness and sense of non-belonging, should not be overlooked in her analysis if the point is to comprehend the individual micro-narrative. Indeed, the argument could be made that Sakakini’s diary

53 Jacobson, 83.
54 Ibid, 72.
55 Ibid, 82.
demonstrates the extent to which confessional identity was secondary to the more urgent realities of filling the legal and structural void created after the War.

The diary of Isabelle Eberhardt, edited and compiled for publication by Elizabeth Kershaw into a concisely titled book, *The Nomad*, is also worth considering for comparative purposes. Annette Kobak provided a moving introduction to the diary, extracting a thematic truth, as it were, from the several journals left by Eberhardt. For Kobak, the common denominator for the journals was the melancholy with which Eberhardt wrote. Kobak explained:

> Certainly, through her courageously forged life, she was on her way to marrying the selves she had at first found so hard to reconcile. It was her tragedy that she didn’t live long enough to see this through a more rewarding fulfillment. But then her many selves served her writing well, and she was above all a writer, not a polemicist.  

This introduction is then tempered with the editor’s foreword on the following pages.

Elizabeth Kershaw described Eberhardt as

> a fascinating subject: elusive, frustrating, multiple, awkward; at once an editor’s dream and nightmare. A vivid character, yet comprised of shadows, each of which purports to be the ‘true’ Isabelle, and each of which in a way is, as much as the next.

Kershaw’s recognition of Eberhardt’s complex and multileveled character, as evinced in “the written work most intimate to her: her diaries,” is a fundamental acknowledgment when dealing with a diary. Whereas Musallam, Jacobson, Kedourie, Peled, and Nasir may conclude with certainty truths about the Christian Orthodox intelligentsia in the early twentieth century, about the humanism and paternal instinct of Khalil al-Sakakini, or

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56 Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904) was a Swiss-born traveler and writer. She traveled extensively in North Africa, mainly in Algeria, to which she had a passionate and complicated attachment. She died in a flash flood in the desert at the age of 27.


58 Eberhardt, 18.

59 Ibid, 18.
about the place of this individual in nostalgic Palestinian literature, Kershaw reminds us that diaries cannot and should not be interpreted to these ends.

As with Sakakini, Eberhardt “wrote with an erratic selectivity.” While this observation may not be surprising in a diary, it is a crucial one to acknowledge when approaching this primary source. As Kershaw confessed: “I have left alone Isabelle’s changeability and contradictions […]. In attempting to provide a framework to her words and filling in some of the ellipses, I have tried to maintain a neutral tone so as not to interfere with Isabelle’s voice.” Kedourie, rather than recognizing Sakakini’s capriciousness and fluctuation as components of his persona that may have been influenced by psychological or sociological pressures, interpreted them as symbols of the Greek Orthodox condition during that period. While Sakakini’s dissonant character, at once denouncing nationalism and suddenly impelling his son to “Power!” or at once opposing the Mandate and suddenly confessing his love and admiration to his British superior, could be reflective of a broader condition, or “truth,” in which Greek Orthodox Jerusalemites found themselves in the early twentieth century, a more tenable conclusion would be limited to, as Walters argued in 1960, a deeper acquaintance with the person behind the diary. At the end of her foreword, Kershaw concluded:

Isabelle could not avoid being political, but neither could she depersonalize, and the deeper I have delved into her life, the more I am struck by her individuality, her capacity to confound and surprise. Do I, though, know the real Isabelle any better after all this research? Perhaps tellingly not, but I remain intrigued, lastingly impressed by this incredible woman.

And perhaps this is all one can hope to accomplish with a diary: a deeper appreciation for the person behind the words. With this, I turn to the diary of Khalil al-Sakakini.

60 Ibid, 18.
61 Ibid, 18.
62 Ibid, 19. [Emphasis in original].
Alternative “Truths” about Sakakini

Before delving into the diary, a discussion of Kimberly Katz’s latest work, *A Young Palestinian’s Diary, 1941-1945; The Life of Sami ‘Amr* will explain more clearly the approach I am adopting with Sakakini and his diary. In an impressive introduction to the diary of Sami ‘Amr (a young, “ordinary” Muslim Palestinian moving from Hebron to Jerusalem to seek employment), Katz provided substantial context – social, political, and personal – for the author and for the diary itself. Consistently throughout her introduction, Katz stressed that her interpretations of ‘Amr’s thoughts, feelings, and concerns were based on educated conjectures; her observations therefore remained limited to the individual diarist, and not to the political, social, or confessional groups to which he may have developed affiliations. Following a thorough examination of the use of the diary as a source “to probe more closely the social workings of individuals who make up a society,” Katz contended that “Sami’s diary emerges into a limited but growing body of Palestinian writings to offer a view of the very typical, the particularly ordinary life of a young man trying to make his way in the world.” In order to substantiate this claim, Katz convincingly argued that, “diaries can serve as a form of self-awareness of an individual, of his place in society or in the world, or as a mark of resistance to perceived destruction or displacement.” Nonetheless, she remained wary of extracting generalizations about the World War II Jerusalem mentality from the diary. For her, then, the diaries of individuals in history “offer thoughts and feelings as well as

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64 Katz, 47.
65 Ibid, 49.
perceptions and reportage ‘of a particular moment’ and serve […] as a source for writing history.”

Avoiding generalizations while maintaining the historical significance of the diary, Katz concluded that ‘Amr’s diary “makes him an active subject in history.” Accordingly, and while it may be difficult to generalize from the exact circumstances – political, social, personal or otherwise – that influenced each of ‘Amr’s reactions to them, the significance of his activity as an individual recording his thoughts and feelings at different moments renders the pursuit of generalizability obsolete. As Katz said: “One thing is quite certain about the diary: Sami processed situations, relationships, and obstacles in his life by writing them down.” The particular circumstances of the British Mandate or the impending Zionist take-over are therefore irrelevant insofar as their impact was felt beyond the individual reporting on them; instead, these situations are more valuable as forces of change “from the perspective of a young Palestinian man.” Consequently, our reading of Sami ‘Amr’s diary becomes limited to a reading of a diary written by Sami ‘Amr, an individual who felt, reacted, and wrote.

Perhaps the most appropriate way to start our investigation of Sakakini’s diary is by posing the question: why did Khalil al-Sakakini choose to record a diary? In his New Yorker article, Mendelsohn explained that authors normally make this decision with the intention to record their experiences, as they remember or live them, with an air of self-importance. Did Sakakini hope to be remembered for his thoughts and actions over the

66 Ibid, 52.
67 Ibid, 51.
68 Ibid, 67.
69 Ibid, 67.
many years he kept his diary? On 21 April 1918, while in exile in Damascus, Sakakini explained why he decided to record his yawmiyyāt:

I have chosen to keep them for any reasons. Firstly, to make use of my time. To sit at my desk and to write what comes to me is more enjoyable than to walk the streets or sit at a coffee shop or visit people who do not understand me and whom I do not understand; secondly, to record my experiences and impressions as they occur in order to comprehend the lessons and morals by which I pass; thirdly, and this is the most important reason, to keep this diary as a family book in which I describe to them my days while in exile day by day. There is nothing sweeter than to sit together one day in the future on a winter night as I read to my loved ones my stories and then receive theirs in return, which I hope that Sultana has been recording day by day. Fourthly, perhaps one day I will be so inclined to write an autobiography for which I will have much material with these diaries, God-willing.  

These reasons might explain the impression the reader would come away with from Sakakini’s diaries: the unfailing thoroughness and detail with which he wrote. Thoughts and expressions are consistently explained and warranted with principles and anecdotes. The last reason may also lead the reader to conclude Sakakini’s self-aggrandisement and moreover, his adherence to a set of beliefs and opinions that he would naturally find absent in those around him.

Sakakini’s life experiences, though not entirely unconventional at the time, were nonetheless central to his persona. In her memoir, Hala Sakakini, youngest of Sakakini’s three children, described her father as follows:

Father was well traveled. He had been to the Greek islands of Samos and Rhodes (where, I suppose, he picked up all those lovely Greek songs that he used to sing so often at home). He had also been to Istanbul and to Paris. He had spent the summer of 1906 in England staying as houseguest with several English families. Being intelligent and observant, he had come back from that long trip richer in experience and broader in outlook. He had been to public libraries, to museums, to art galleries; he had attended many private parties; he had met interesting people; he had seen the English in their natural environment.  

70 Sakakini (a), 145.
In his diary, Sakakini often returned to these and other experiences, experiences that he felt were instrumental in shaping his personality, the same personality he believed others would never comprehend, and due to his sense of uniqueness, the same personality he felt he alone possessed.

Sakakini would use his definition of himself and his akhlāq to set himself apart from his Palestinian cohorts and consequently, to justify his own ambitions. In January 1914, while rationalizing his choice to remove himself from the Orthodox Church, he elaborated:

If I were to stay in the Church working for this nahda with people who do not understand me nor whom I understand, people who do not agree with my principles and morals, and whose principles and morals I do not agree with, this would draw me backwards and condemn me to immorality and degradation, and it would cause me great mental anguish for which I have no energy.  

Intermittently in his diaries, Sakakini’s feeling that he was ethically at odds with his counterparts would lead him to express a condition most akin to a sense of out-of-placeness. On 1 May 1912, while in Jerusalem, Sakakini confessed:

Since the first day I joined the working world, I have been working with the motivation of the courageous, unfamiliar with laziness or boredom, but this was to no avail. I am still concerned for my future, not because I am deprived of success, as they say, but because success in this country requires morals that are not mine. I should have lived in a different country, or been one of those people who lives off his father and grandfather’s inheritance.

These sentiments of isolation from, and consequently, uniqueness within, his community might explain his hope to one day compile these thoughts and feelings into an autobiography for the world to read. In a letter to his son, Sari, in America dated 6 October 1931, Sakakini intimated:

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72 Sakakini (a), 58.
73 Ibid, 53.
Forgive me, Sari, for this is the first time I confess this truth. I have mentioned some names, and I mention but a few in a sea of names, but am I not free, with all this, to isolate myself, to not visit or be visited? [...] If it were not for a small number of ahl al-fadl, and if it were not for the hope in you and in the likes of you in this new generation, I would have withdrawn completely from life.74

But what are these morals and principles that so starkly differentiate Sakakini from his native Jerusalem? Moreover, why did Sakakini feel burdened with a sense of alienation?

Several entries during this period suggest why Sakakini felt misunderstood and different. As mentioned above, in 1914, Sakakini renounced his connection to the Greek Orthodox Church as well as to the Orthodox nahda, a decision, he explained, that stirred some reactions among members of his community. On 14 January 1914, Sakakini was visited by several of his cohorts in the nahda movement, as well as by several notable Muslims. What they said to him, Sakakini said, caused him remorse and embarrassment:

They said: ‘You broke the hearts of the Orthodox millah in its entirety and caused it great sorrow on this day (the Eastern New Year). If you leave the milla, it does not leave you, for you are its son and leader. You have worked and struggled tirelessly and courageously for its revival [...]. Where are the meetings that you used to hold and the speeches that were inspired by your nationalism and inscribed by your precious pen?! If you are tired, then work but two or three months until the work has picked up, then rest.’75

Yet for Sakakini, these individuals, and as heartfelt as he may have found their reactions, would never understand him. Over a month later, on 17 February 1914, Sakakini confessed his disapproval of the fervor for al-umma al-‘arabiyya, implying its futility.

After expressing his concern for the course of the cause, he admitted cynically: “But if I were of a more sophisticated nationality, like the British or French or American nationality, then I would devote my life to the service of al-umma al-‘arabiyya and do all

74 Ibid, 60.
75 Ibid, 60-61.
I could to revive it and strengthen it to catch up to other nationalities.”

This backhanded support for the nationalist movement is intriguing. Sakakini’s obsession with things western, indeed, his conviction that another space existed in which he could fulfill his imaginings of sophisticated nationality, would warrant his desire to seclude himself, at least intellectually, from his colleagues.

His participation in the proto-nationalist movement of his time, therefore, would be peculiar. While in prison in Damascus, Sakakini confessions, perhaps most explicitly, his dreams of reaching that western place. On 4 April 1918, and in desperation, Sakakini intimated:

What would prison matter if my family were close to me and if I could see them daily and if they could see me?! And what would Jerusalem matter if I left it with my family […]?! Bring me back my family, or bring me to them, then condemn me to exile from my country forever. Rather, if I survive, I will condemn myself to exile from Jerusalem to America where I would put my son in the best schools to acquire their morals and learn their virtues. […] Oh how happy I would be sitting with my family for tea in a small, elegant house in New York or Brooklyn or one of those neighboring towns. How happy I would be if we were to rise from dinner, enter our salon, and watch Sari at the piano, watch him sing, or watch him play the flute or violin […]. These are my dreams and the source of my joy.

This excerpt indicates Sakakini’s cultural reclusiveness and his struggle with a reality with which he felt dissatisfied. Bearing in mind his prison experience, the depth of his certainty in the superiority of European and American culture, as it is repeated over the years and entries, is unmistakable.

Hala Sakakini’s memoir may add some insight to this observation. Her description is telling of the type of man her father was. While an intellectual hermit of sorts, Sakakini loved to host friends and entertain; yet hosting and entertaining would fulfill more than Arab hospitality. Indeed, by greeting his friends and, as Hala said,

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76 Ibid, 63.
77 Ibid, 124-5.
sometimes strangers, Sakakini would affirm his sentiments of importance and
uniqueness. Hala explained:

   Father was self-educated. He never went to college and had no university
degree. But he was widely read. As a free thinker, Father was a great admirer of
Bertrand Russel [sic] and Julian Huxley [sic] [...] With the young intellectuals
who frequented our house – graduates of Cambridge, Oxford, London University,
Harvard, mostly former students of his – Father loved to discuss the books he was
reading at the time [...].

   In those years Father’s library was growing steadily. He was reading
extensively and voraciously. Almost every week he bought new books from the
Palestine Educational Library on Jaffa Road. The proprietor of this bookshop,
Mr. Boulos Said, sometimes ordered books from England especially for him.78

Then, during visits:

   With close friends Father invariably started his welcome by performing
the traditional Turkish salutation. He would bend low to touch the floor with his
hand, then with a swift flourish he would touch his heart, his lips and his forehead
as he straightened up. Of course, all this was done with exaggerated mock
courtesy. In his exuberance he would often break into French: ‘Comment ça va?
Comment allez-vous? Comment va la santé?’ and for good measure he would add ‘accent circonflex’ [sic] (just for the sound of it!)

   Father’s friends usually arrived in the late afternoon. [...] After supper, the
sahra would continue into the night. [...] On other evenings, the subject would
be more philosophical. Father would come up with new and stimulating ideas and
there would follow an animated and interesting discussion.79

Perhaps it was due to his love for teaching that Sakakini seemed to enjoy having an
audience. Indeed, his diary entries are interspersed with sections imparting lessons on
life, such as “The Philosophy of Power”80 and “The Philosophy of Happiness”81 in which
he shared revolutionary and almost melancholic thoughts on realities the way he saw
them. Yet this audience would somehow never fully comprehend Sakakini, according to
Sakakini, because he would regularly convince himself that this was not possible. While
this behavior suggests that Sakakini may have been taken by his thoughts and oratory and

78 Hala Sakakini, 29. Incidentally, Boulos Said was my great-grandfather.
79 Ibid, 29-30. [Emphases in original].
80 Sakakini (a), 116.
81 Ibid, 141.
that he was an individual in need of constant attention, it also indicates a certain level of anguish within Sakakini. It would therefore not be surprising that Sakakini, constantly sharing his thoughts and perpetually feeling troubled in an uncomfortable reality, would often contradict himself.

These contradictions were most pronounced during the first years of the British Mandate over Palestine. In March 1919, Sakakini was assigned to the Educational Authority of Palestine in Jerusalem as head of the Jerusalem Teachers’ College. Shortly after, he was appointed inspector for education by the British authorities. Joining the contingent of Palestinians who worked for the Mandate authorities, Sakakini’s position was precarious: he was to simultaneously defend the rights of Palestinians to self-determination while working for the very Mandate that would preclude its occurrence. Bernard Wasserstein explained how these Palestinians operated within a fraught space. In his 1977 article, Wasserstein argued that: “Indigenous collaborators with imperial power usually face conflicting tugs of loyalty,” with the Palestinian official confronting a specifically “complicated and severe” situation. The severity, said Wasserstein, was located in the Arab official’s confrontation with his dual loyalties, first to “his duty as a

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82 Others have observed Sakakini’s arrogance. In his memoir, *Day of the Long Night*, Jamil Toubbeh, son of Issa Toubbeh, Sakakini’s friend, described his impressions of Sakakini during their families’ many visits together. He said: “I was never fond of [Khalil] Sakakini; arrogant and often pompous, he was, however, a model for many Palestinian youths, and I relished his biting humor and double entendres.” See Jamil Toubbeh, *Day of the Long Night* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1998), 68. Another interesting excerpt from Toubbeh’s memoir is when he first introduces Sakakini. Contrary to others whom I have critiqued throughout this paper, Toubbeh described Sakakini as “educator, author, and poet” (page 66), with no mention of his nationalist or political activity. I tend to find this description more appropriate than the others I have critiqued.

83 This resonates with Philippe Lejeune’s argument that the decision to record a diary is “marked by distress” and therefore requires a degree of struggle on the part of the diarist. Philippe Lejeune, “The Practice of the Private Journal” in *Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms*, eds. Rachel Langford and Russell West (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1999), 185.
government servant” and more deeply, to “his family, his religion, his society, and his nation.”

For this Palestinian official operating within a space devoid of “civil institutions of any kind (apart from municipalities),” the alternative was to be “pushed willy-nilly into the role of ersatz representatives of their community within the Government of Palestine.” Wasserstein explicated:

Given the failure of the [British] government to draw the Arabs of Palestine into the political community, and the continuous and fundamental hostility of Arab nationalists to the very basis of the mandatory authority, Arab officials were placed in an invidious position. Other pressures rendered their situation even more difficult. There was, first, the endemic state of unease between Christians and Muslims, which had not been wholly eliminated by the nationalist union against Zionism, and which manifested itself in Muslim disquiet about the disproportionate number of Christians in government service. More important were the effects of the gradual crystallisation of Palestinian Arab society during the ‘twenties into two mutually hostile coalitions of notable families. Arab officials inevitably became the cat's-paws of these contending factions.

While Wasserstein returned to the issue of anti-Zionism (and these Palestinian officials’ uneasy role therein), and while his argument that there was an “endemic state of unease between Christians and Muslims” during this time is problematic and perhaps no longer tenable, his following point rings true for Sakakini:

But almost all Arab officials, from the highest to the lowest ranks, and including those in the most (ostensibly) 'non-political' and 'technical' positions, ultimately confronted problems of loyalty - problems which in times of political crisis could often be resolved only by resignation or by the leading of a double life, one of collaboration with authority, the other (sometimes contradictory, often complementary) of collusion with the enemies of the established order.

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84 Wasserstein, 171.
85 Ibid, 171.
86 Ibid, 171.
87 Ibid, 171. In June 1920, Sakakini resigned from his post as education inspector for a period of two years due to the assignment of Herbert Samuel as High Field Commissioner for Palestine that year. He spent those two years working in Cairo, Egypt as headmaster of the Arabic section of a Syrian Greek Orthodox school, Al-‘Ubaydiyyah.
Wasserstein offered social context for an analysis of Sakakini’s inharmonious thoughts and behaviors, which allows for an investigation of the subjectivities of his dual loyalties during this period. In the first years of the Mandate, Sakakini met frequently with his Palestinian counterparts, namely, Ragheb Bek Nashashibi and Omar ‘Izzat Darwazah. On 26 March 1919, Nashashibi visited Sakakini and Sakakini recounted that they “pondered whether the country could rule itself. Do we have among our men he who could qualify as a public leader, a financial, educational, or mail and telegraph inspector, or police director?”

Sakakini and Nashashibi then acknowledged the shortage of such men, and argued that: “We may accomplish independence if we were mandated, but which of the two would guarantee better success: if we were the leaders and they the advisors, or vice versa?” In conclusion, said Sakakini, they decided that:

There are still many things we need to study, so we agreed to meet more often […] We acknowledge, for example, that the country is to have its independence, so we study the form that independence will take and the form its government will take […] Then we acknowledge, for example, that perhaps occupation is necessary, so we study the conditions that we must impose on the occupying country and what our necessary plan would look like with that country.

Alongside this concern for the future of Palestinian sovereignty, Sakakini also engaged in activity that served the cause of the Mandate. He often attended lunches, dinners, and tea visits with several of his British superiors. For example, while visiting with head of the Education Office, Major Tedman, on the afternoon of 19 January 1919, the Major inquired Sakakini about the school curricula in Palestine and whether the Egyptian model would be worth emulating. In response, Sakakini declared that: “If we wish to improve our educational system in this country, we should emulate Europe

88 Sakakini (a), 173.
89 Ibid, 173.
directly.”90 At the end of their meeting, Sakakini accepted the Major’s offer to work in the Education Authority as soon as an educational committee was formed.91 This tacit acceptance of British sovereignty would serve to propel the Mandate – insofar as Sakakini’s position was of clout – hence weakening the possibility of Palestinian independence hinged on local leadership and simultaneously obfuscating Sakakini’s nationalist activity.

Sakakini’s vision for Palestinian independence was indeed curious. Although he was determined to never divide Palestine (and this has often been interpreted as his Arab nationalism), Sakakini criticized other nationalists for their divided loyalties while holding on to his own pursuit of western-influenced modernity. On 26 January 1919, Sakakini resolved to share his critical impressions of Palestinian Muslims:

Muslims in this country or in Jerusalem still live by their old ways [taqālīd]. Every Muslim family in Jerusalem has its ways, centered in their nature, inherited from grandfather to father. One does not say a word or take a step without being aware of his ways before everything; his family’s interest is before all other interests […] Ask him who has the most honest nationalism, the most sophisticated values, the widest knowledge, or the most respectable opinions, he would mention his father, brother, or cousin [ibn ‘ammuhu] […] Each one of them [Muslims] represents his family and not his country […].92

Three days later, on 29 January, Sakakini returned from a tutoring lesson to find several guests awaiting him at his home: Hajj Amin al-Husseini, Isaaf al-Nashashi, Aziz al-Khalidi, and several other notable Muslim Jerusalemites.93 Sakakini recounted that he expressed to them with urgency the need to “shake the ummah violently”94 in order to wake it from its slumber that has lasted for generations. As part of that awakening,

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90 Ibid, 160.
91 This position was offered to Sakakini in March of 1919.
92 Sakakini (a), 166.
93 The other visitors were Jawdat al-Qandus, Muhammad Yousef al-Khatib, Omar al-Zo’ni, and Abd al-Samad al-‘Alami.
94 Sakakini (a), 167.
Sakakini said that he championed “remedying the nationalist sentiment, […] working towards unanimity in opinion, doing away with old ways and removing old rivalries.”

At the end of this entry, Sakakini confessed that he had had the desire to isolate himself from the movement, but “circumstances try to remove me from my isolation […]. In short, I joined the chaos and was swept by the current.”

The following day, 30 January, Sakakini proclaimed his superiority, highlighting his moral rectitude and honesty, his attachment to the moral new [al-jadīd al-sahīh], and his refusal of the outdated: “for I am the son of my self [ibn nafsī], and he who is the son of his self is able to value his destiny.”

Collectively, these three episodes suggest inconsistencies in Sakakini’s behavior. He privately denigrated Muslim notables whom he then adjured to action in the name of new nationalism while holding to the belief that he alone was capable of achieving his own standards of morality and modernity. These standards were most apparent in his exchanges with his British superiors. On 2 March 1919, Sakakini visited Major Tedman and discussed the inclusion of foreign languages into Palestinian schools. Sakakini shared the following opinion:

As for city schools, it is imperative that we teach in them foreign languages, and we should start in kindergarten in order to guarantee the students’ proficiency in higher levels. A superficial knowledge of these languages is not sufficient, because we will need to depend on European languages in our new roles, and this is only achievable with a complete knowledge of the language. Then it is unavoidable that we – like the rest of the Eastern world, and indeed like many countries of the West – send a number of our children from each year to Europe’s elegant schools to graduate there. We cannot do this unless they speak European languages like Europeans.

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95 Ibid, 167.
96 Ibid, 167.
97 Ibid, 167.
98 Ibid, 169.
Sakakini’s perplexing version of Palestinian independence and nationhood, his discrepant behavior depending on his audience, and his conviction in his superiority over his cohorts all combine to form a precarious situation embodied in this one self. Wasserstein’s observation that Palestinian officials working for the British Government of Palestine were caught in a tug of loyalties certainly explains Sakakini’s behavior. Indeed, the appeal of attracting his British superiors’ approval, beacons of sophisticated nationality and superior education, was a powerful one for Sakakini; yet simultaneously, his loyalty to his Palestinian colleagues and his determination to bring Palestine to the ranks of the sophisticated also preoccupied him. The result, which took the form of diary entries proclaiming self-worth and uniqueness, was an attempt to reduce this tension: “I only say what I believe and I do not believe anything unless it is with sincerity and integrity.”

But the desire to gain favor with the British officers and his admiration for things western influenced Sakakini’s behavior to an arguably extreme level. On 13 April 1919, Sakakini and Sultana visited Military-General Ronald Storrs for lunch. During this conversation in which Sakakini explained to Storrs the general opinion of Palestinians about the Mandate, we find Sakakini accepting colonial domination:

I will not deny that the general opinion in the country is such that most people would prefer an American Mandate because they see that England has promised the Jews a national home in Palestine. Then they see from their actions that the English support the Zionist movement […]. Additionally, if England took Palestine, it would drive the French to take Syria, and this does not agree with our interests, for we do not want to be divided and ruled by different rulers. If the Mandate were inevitable, then we prefer that the country be under the rule of one country to secure our unity. And since England and France compete for executive power over our country, we are forced to choose the Americans.

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100 Ibid, 176.
Later that day, Sakakini joined Ragheb Bek Nashashibi, Sakakini’s cousin Ya’qoub, and several others in visiting Colonel Waters-Tyler at his home. They drank through the night, enough to experience “English inebriation.” At the end of that entry, Sakakini said excitedly: “As for me, I consider this day to be a political day. I lunched with General Storrs and dined with Colonel Waters-Tyler!!” It is clearer from these examples the extent to which Sakakini faced conflicting allegiances that would cause tension in his diary. While these divided loyalties were not uncommon among Arab notables in the different Mandates of the Near East, the case of Sakakini adds to our understanding of the level of subjectivity involved in this phenomenon.

Championing a revived and modern independence for Palestine with fellow Palestinians while simultaneously conferring, at least symbolically, the right to rule Palestine on his English superiors created a mental perturbation in Sakakini that manifested itself in instances of defensiveness. On 9 May 1919, Arab Independence Day, Sakakini confessed trouble with his loyalties:

Independence! Independence! Every human and every nation must have its own existence. I love the English ummah and I admire its morals, principles, power, and greatness. I admire Shakespeare, Darwin, Herbert, Spencer, and others from England, but I am not English. I love France, that great, intelligent, and noble nation, but I am not French. I love Italy, country of beautiful art […], but I am not Italian. I love America, that free, energetic, and noble country, but I am not American. I love Europe and America but I do not like to abandon my Easternness […]. I may get sick of my life as an Easterner; I may grow sad for my condition and feel humiliated by my shame and despair over not accomplishing my dreams and goals; I may even want to be freed of my Easternness, but I cannot but be an Easterner.

This excerpt indicates the extent of Sakakini’s confrontation with contending loyalties.

Moreover, his rationalization can be understood as an attempt to relieve the

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101 Ibid, 177.
102 See introduction for different scholars who have addressed this issue.
103 Sakakini (a), 182.
contradictoriness that emerges from these conflicting thoughts. What may therefore appear to Kedourie as capriciousness and disorganization can be interpreted as reduction of cognitive dissonance, a psychological phenomenon that underscores the complexity of the internal dilemmas afflicting Sakakini. Wasserstein provided a contextual and generalizable image of the tension of Sakakini’s social position during this period, but an analysis of his subjective internalization and projection of his thoughts and feelings reflects the ornate nature of the experience of self during this period.  

104 I return to the different phases of the diary, the middle and later years, later in this discussion.
Explaining Sakakini

While it may suffice to conclude Sakakini’s contradictory character, different psychosocial theories, specifically, cognitive dissonance and habitus, might elucidate the complexities of his diary. The motive behind using these interdisciplinary theories is not to direct the focus of the analysis away from the more fundamental phenomena of power structures and hierarchies that have become tropes in postcolonial literature; rather, the purpose is to contribute areas of analysis which can add to our understanding of the individual under investigation, and to expand our understanding of the components involved in the broader historical trends, namely, colonial modernity and nationalism, that intersect in this one person. The remainder of this paper will examine these theories in conjunction with the diary in order to gain new insights regarding Sakakini, his character, and the intricacies of the colonial experience.

Cognitive Dissonance

The first theory is a psychological one. In 1957, Leon Festinger postulated that an “individual strives toward consistency within himself. His opinions and attitudes […] tend to exist in clusters that are internally consistent.” Therefore, when inconsistencies exist, they capture our interest “primarily because they stand out in sharp contrast against a background of consistency.” More importantly, Festinger argued that the pursuit of consistency also exists between an individual’s thoughts and beliefs and his or her actions. When an inconsistency arises here, “there is a psychological discomfort” that

105 Salim Tamari called Sakakini “a man of contradiction” and “a man of the moment” during a lecture entitled “War as a Vehicle of Modernity: The Experience of WWI in the Middle East” delivered at Georgetown University, Washington D.C., on 11 November 2009.
107 Festinger, 1.
Festinger termed dissonance. This dissonance is present between cognitions, which refers to “knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one’s behavior.” Festinger’s basic argument is that when a psychologically uncomfortable dissonance occurs, the person “will try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance.” One of the ways of achieving this reduction of dissonance, as we have seen with Sakakini, is through rationalization, a process that may not always be successful. In the event of unsuccessful rationalization, and/or, as Festinger explained, in the event that the environment within which and due to which the dissonance occurs is not avoided(able) or controlled(able), the discomfort will continue. This environment, moreover, is a social reality that exerts pressures on its individuals in order to bring the cognitive elements causing the dissonance to correspond to it. Consequently, said Festinger, “if the cognitive elements do not correspond with a certain reality which impinges [on a person], certain pressures must exist” that manifest themselves in observable behaviors.

Sakakini’s cognitions have appeared dissonant in his diary. Though he rationalized this dissonance repeatedly by declaring his “Easternness” or his withdrawal from divisive confessional and national politics, his psychological discomfort persisted. The most salient example of Sakakini’s ongoing and uncomfortable dissonance is evident in the letters he sent to his son, Sari, while in America starting in 1931. I have analyzed these letters in previous research, but the theoretical frameworks I used were masculinity and binary theories. I discovered that in the letters, Sakakini frequently referred to modern selfhood (as opposed to the backwardness he perceived in Palestine) in terms of rujuliyya, or manliness, as
the diary entries discussed above with these letters reveals the extent to which Sakakini grappled with discordant ambitions frequently in these diaries. Sakakini sent Sari to America for five years at the age of 18 in order to pursue a college degree. For Sakakini, however, there were other reasons: he sent Sari to America “to receive a wide and sophisticated culture; to acquire a free skill; to practice independence; to see the world.”\textsuperscript{115} The decision to send him to America, therefore, would serve a dual function: while Sari would benefit from education and experience, it would also satisfy Sakakini’s own dreams of gaining in sophistication and traveling abroad; Sakakini would live vicariously through Sari. Indeed, Sakakini often shared these ambitions with his son in the letters. On 25 September 1931, and in response to Sari’s expression of nostalgia for Palestine, Sakakini explained that he understood that Sari missed home, and that he was resentful of America:

    for I have traveled to America before you and I was even older than you; indeed, I was a man of complete manhood, but I was unable to keep myself from longing for my people and weeping over my having left them. America, with its greatness and marvels could not attract my attention. But when I remember this I feel ridiculous, for I have said it before that he who has the opportunity to visit America and does not is crazy.\textsuperscript{116}

In a letter dated 29 November 1931, Sakakini regretfully remembered:

    I went to America and it led me to adopt a black philosophy with which I felt I was marching rapidly towards old age. I did not greet the days without a frowning face, tight chest, and narrow disposition […] but to this day, I remain living on what I gained in America in activity, joy, and hope, and so thanks be to God first, and to America second.\textsuperscript{117}

well as in terms of an East-West divide. I did not, however, investigate instances of dissonance in the letters (Nadim Bawalsa, “The Letters of Khalil al-Sakakini to his Son: \textit{Rujiliyya} and the Binaries of Imagined Modern Selfhood,” Master’s research paper, Georgetown University, 2009).

\textsuperscript{115} Sakakini (c), 29.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 106. Sakakini’s reactions to his factory work in Maine signify this black philosophy.
This cognition where America held a special place in Sakakini’s mind and memory would be maintained by a reality which Sakakini refused to accept: Palestine. Sakakini would often express to his son his disapproval and frustration with what has become of Palestine, a cognition that would have him impel his son to forget his roots and embrace America. In a letter dated 13 September 1931, Sakakini mentioned other Palestinian fathers who had sent their sons abroad and concluded:

It pains me that many ask for knowledge in Europe and America, so they study medicine and law, not for knowledge itself, not for the service of humanity, but so that the doctor can perform a surgery and earn from it 100 or 200 pounds. Similarly, the lawyer undertakes a serious case not to set things right and put a stop to injustice, but to earn 100,000 pounds, and this may even be too little! I hope that your pursuit of knowledge, Sari, will be for the sake of knowledge, for the service of humanity.\textsuperscript{118}

In the same letter, and as a consequence of his disappointment with other Palestinian fathers, Sakakini told Sari to become an American, though he recognized as well the difficulty with renouncing one’s origin:

I do not deny that it is a great sacrifice!! [i.e.] Renouncing one’s Arab nationalism and adopting an American nationality. Which sacrifice is greater than this, to become an American after you have been an Arab? This is a serious issue, but how often does a human, in life, meet with seriousness? So let your renunciation be the serious issue in your life […]. Be American, Sari […].\textsuperscript{119}

This example is significant. We observe Sakakini rationalizing his personal desire to renounce his own nationality by deeming it a great sacrifice for his son. The reduction of dissonance in this instance would be partially fulfilled, however, since Sakakini’s reality (Palestine) and his reaction to it would not have changed.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, 35.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid, 34.
Living in this reality, now with two daughters, Dumia and Hala, Sakakini would strive to adjust, or control, his environment to create consistency with his private cognitions. His daughters were both enrolled in German and (later) British schools in Jerusalem, and were both subjected to music and language lessons at home. On 1 October 1931, Sultana, Sari’s mother, wrote to Sari:

How happy I am with [Dumia and Hala]; they are doing very well at their school. Dumia is diligent at her piano lessons. Frau Rührer [sic] gives her two lessons a week, and if you come across a beginner’s music book in America, buy it for her, because now she studies from a book I bought her from her teacher. But it seems that Frau is having difficulty teaching the both of them at the same time [...] so I will help with teaching Hala some notes.

Dumia and Hala were taught in the ways of sophisticated culture to which Sakakini, and presumably Sultana as well, ascribed. In addition to refining his daughters’ sophistication, Sakakini engaged Sari in debates about philosophy and the latest in western literature and science. In the letters, he would often mention different western authors and books, and solicit Sari’s views; Sakakini even wrote many of these book titles and authors’ names in English. This form of control over his reality by introducing new cognitions that would be consonant with his own desires would serve to reduce the dissonance he felt with his external reality. Yet his external reality, dominated by social, political, and economic forces, would consistently suppress his ability to control his environment and leave him psychologically uncomfortable. As a result, we find interspersed between Sakakini’s letters statements such as these:

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120 Dumia was born in 1923 and Hala in 1924.
121 Sakakini (c), 49.
122 Example: 10 October 1931, Sakakini (c), 72.
123 In his memoir, Jamil Toubbeh described the oppressive presence of the British Mandate: “During the 1930s and 1940s, the British had a firm grip on all facets of our lives” (page 81). On the subsequent pages, Toubbeh painted a picture of the mood around Jerusalem in the years leading up to WWII period as a tense and uneasy one.
And then I must remind you of the foreigner’s responsibility to not praise his own country, for in this praise, there is an implicit hatred of the country in which he is. It does not suit you while you are in America to praise Palestine, the people of Palestine, the food of Palestine, and all that has to do with Palestine. Rather you should appreciate America, and if you adopt this principle of appreciation for the country in which you are, then you will have no choice but to love it and its ways. You must love America.  

It is significant that Tanya Nasir noticed this dissonance and commented on it in her introduction to the book. Nasir observed that Sakakini’s opinion on emigration westward had changed since his earlier diary entries. She explained that in his letters to Sari, “we see [Sakakini], the proud nationalist, encouraging his son to emigrate, impelling him to stay in America, and urging him to detach from his *watan.*” Nasir used *Kadha ana ya dunya* as well, and in her commentary on the dissonance, she concluded that it was the broader socioeconomic and political pressures of the times that produced this contradiction. She explained that in 1908, when Sakakini chose to return from America, it was because of economic troubles; he was unable to make enough money. In 1931, she said, “the situation had changed and America and Europe were at the epitome of social and scientific sophistication, while the East was collapsing under tension and instability.” While this may explain Sakakini’s dissonance at a practical level, it still does not explain why Sakakini would urge Sari to forget his past and become an American. Moreover, Nasir did not account for inconsistencies in Sakakini’s diary in the earlier years; she compared American cultural and scientific sophistication in 1931 to the East’s political and economic turmoil during the same period when Sakakini’s diary from the earlier years shows that he thought America to be culturally and scientifically

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124 Sakakini (c), 74.
125 Ibid, 24.
126 Ibid, 25.
superior even then. Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance may offer more insight into this contradiction.

Sakakini’s different behaviors and opinions are symptomatic of cognitive dissonance reduction. One way in which Sakakini attempted this was through controlling his own behavior in the dissonant environment. Festinger explained:

When the dissonance under consideration is between an element corresponding to some knowledge concerning environment […] and a behavioral element, the dissonance can, of course, be eliminated by changing the behavioral cognitive element in such a way that it is consonant with the environmental element. The simplest and easiest way in which this may be accomplished is to change the action or feeling which the behavioral element represents.127

In this sense, we find Sakakini attempting to adjust his behavioral cognitive element (by sending his daughters to colonial schools and his son to America, for example) in the event that the environmental element (continuing pressures to balance the reality that is Mandate Palestine with his own desires for modern, western selfhood) is uncontrollable. Festinger elaborated, however, that this condition may not alleviate the dissonance:

It may not always be possible […] to eliminate dissonance or even to reduce it materially by changing one’s action or feeling. The difficulty of changing the behavior may be too great, or the change, while eliminating some dissonances, may create a whole host of new ones.128

A second method, therefore, is to change the environmental cognitive element: “This, of course, is much more difficult than changing one’s behavior, for one must have a sufficient degree of control over one’s environment – a relatively rare occurrence.”129

One way to deal with this, said Festinger, is to ultimately ignore or counteract the environment. In a social setting, a counteraction often takes the form of establishing an

127 Festinger, 19.
128 Ibid., 19.
129 Ibid., 20.
alternate social reality “by gaining the agreement and support of other people.”" Hence, we find Sakakini preaching new ideologies of nationalism to different Jerusalem notables, for example.

Connected to these two processes is a third one that Festinger contended may contribute further to reducing the dissonance: introducing new cognitive elements. In this process, the individual aims to reduce the total dissonance by adding “a new cognitive element which, in a sense, ‘reconciles’ two elements that are dissonant.” In the diaries, we observe that Sakakini faced dissonance with his own ambitions and the realities that were Palestine and Palestinians at the time. By sending his son to America, Sakakini sought to reduce dissonance by changing his behavior in response to his uncontrollable environment. Yet this decision created new dissonance, evident when Sakakini repeatedly urged his son to embrace American nationality. In turn, this behavior created further dissonance, since Sakakini’s environment in Palestine was still further from the reality that he wished it to be. As a result, we observe him introducing new cognitive elements to reconcile the dissonant elements, for example, when he justified his decision to send Sari to America by denouncing other Palestinian fathers’ decisions to send their sons abroad for material gain. For Sakakini, Sari’s journey to America would be different: Sari would become a sophisticated, educated, and manly

130 Ibid, 20.
131 Ibid, 22. Festinger provided an example from anthropology of this process. As he explained, M. Spiro’s research on the Ifaluk, “a nonliterate society” on an eastern Pacific atoll that is part of the Caroline Islands, reveals that these people have a firm belief in the essential goodness of humans. However, “for one reason or another, young children in this culture go through a period of particularly strong overt aggression, hostility, and destructiveness.” We therefore have a situation of dissonant cognitive elements. To reduce this dissonance, Festinger showed how this society introduced a third cognitive element, or, a third belief: “they believe in the existence of malevolent ghosts which enter into persons and cause them to do bad things.” Consequently, “it is not the children who behave aggressively – it’s the malevolent ghosts.” Therefore, the dissonance is alleviated and the essential belief in human goodness is preserved (Festinger, 1957, 22-23). For more information on this work, see M. Spiro, “Ghosts: An anthropological inquiry into learning and perception,” *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 48 (1953): 376-82.
individual. But again, it is important to remember that, “the presence of pressures to reduce dissonance, or even activity directed toward such reduction, does not guarantee that the dissonance will be reduced.”\textsuperscript{132} Other variables enter the equation, namely, the question of the source of the dissonance.

In a chapter titled “The Effects of Forced Compliance: Theory,” Festinger explicated the conditions in which an individual is forced to “behave in a manner counter to their convictions.”\textsuperscript{133} While it may be difficult to determine precisely to what extent Sakakini felt forced to comply with his British superiors’ orders or his Palestinian counterparts’ nationalist agendas, there should now be little doubt that, for one reason or another, he did experience conflicting loyalties whose reconciliation in different instances was problematic. In this section, however, I will focus on Sakakini’s inability to achieve consonance between his beliefs and behavior with respect to his British superiors. The different instances where we observe Sakakini behaving sycophantically with different British officials while remaining active in the nationalist scene may be explained by Festinger’s theory of forced compliance. Festinger postulated that, “dissonance is to some degree an inevitable consequence of forced compliance” since, after all, “the overt expression or behavior [in a situation of forced compliance] would certainly not follow from the private opinion considered alone.”\textsuperscript{134} Therefore, and in order to reduce the consonance, we observe the individual complying publicly with (or without) an accompanying change in private opinion or belief.

The compliance with accompanying change in private opinion or belief, explained Festinger, will occur when the following conditions exist:

\textsuperscript{132} Festinger, 23.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 89.
1. The compliance is brought about mainly through the exertion of a threat of punishment for noncompliance, the individual against whom the threat is directed being sufficiently restrained from leaving the situation. Under such circumstances the person is faced with the alternatives of complying or of suffering the threatened punishment. […]

2. The compliance is brought about mainly through the offer of a special reward for complying. Under these circumstances, if the reward is sufficiently attractive to overcome the existing resistance, the individual may comply in order to obtain the promised reward.\(^\text{135}\)

Sakakini’s behavior around his British superiors, namely Waters-Tyler, Tedman, and Richmond, may therefore be explained as an underlying fear of punishment for noncompliance. Moreover, – the material reward for compliance being obvious – the immaterial reward (the approval of these culturally sophisticated Englishmen) was arguably of equal appeal. Consequently, we observe Sakakini fluctuating in his beliefs about his loyalties and ideals, and acting capriciously in public. But in order to better comprehend the extent to which Sakakini’s behavior was being performed in an environment where relational instances were causing dissonance, we must investigate the impact of the broader ideological and epistemological structures within which this behavior unfolded. With this, I turn to Partha Chatterjee’s treatise on nationalism and Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus*.

*Derivative Discourses and the Formation of a Subject*

While Chatterjee’s critique of nationalist discourse in India is primarily concerned with debunking the post-Enlightenment rhetoric of rational, scientific, and liberal thought so often associated with the construction of nationalism in the colonial setting, his account does contribute to a broader discursive understanding of Sakakini’s cognitive dissonance. The implication, however, should not be misconstrued as another categorical

\(^{135}\) Ibid, 85. Festinger continued his analysis of forced compliance with sections on the magnitude of dissonance, magnitude of the reward, and manifestations of pressure. I leave the reader to consult Festinger (1957) for further investigations of this theory.
fitting of Sakakini’s diary – the very approach I am arguing against in this research. Indeed, I am not proposing an alternative label of “contradictory nationalist” through this examination; rather, the significance of this discussion should help us comprehend the peculiarities in Sakakini’s account relationally and contextually.

Chatterjee argued that the existence of a discourse of dichotomy between pure (Western) and deviant (Eastern) nationalisms has contributed to the idea that the former is natural while the latter “disturbing.” Therefore, Eastern nationalism, being a special type of nationalism, is not inherently illiberal; rather, and by virtue of it “operating in unfavorable circumstances, it can often be so.” Chatterjee continued:

the very fact that nationalists of the ‘eastern’ type accept and value the ideal of progress – and strive to transform their inherited cultures in order to make them better suited for the conditions of the modern world – means that archaic forms of authority are destroyed, conditions are created for the growth of a certain degree of individual initiative and choice, and for the introduction of science and modern education. All this cannot but be liberating in a fundamental historical sense.138

Yet what this situation presents in consequence is a dilemma for the eastern nationalist. The eastern individual, said Chatterjee, will face “a choice between imitation and identity,” but for Chatterjee, this condition is less tense than it appears; the intellectual may superficially appear to be conflicted between westernizing and remaining true to his national identity, but “ultimately the [nationalist] movements invariably contain both elements, a genuine modernism and a more or less spurious concern for local culture.”139

In a concrete way, then,

The problem of nationalist thought becomes the particular manifestation of a much more general problem, namely, the problem of the bourgeois-rationalist

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137 Chatterjee, 3.
138 Ibid, 3.
139 Ibid, 3.
conception of knowledge, established in the post-Enlightenment period of European intellectual history, as the moral and epistemic foundation for a supposedly universal framework of thought which perpetuates, in a real and not merely a metaphorical sense, a colonial domination.\textsuperscript{140}

The individual facing this problem, then, and by agreeing to become “modern,” accepts the claim that modern thought is universally true, and accepts, \textit{ipso facto}, “the dominance, both epistemic and moral, of an alien culture.”\textsuperscript{141} These facts compiled demonstrate that: “sentiments of nationality [flow] out of an unconcealed faith in the basic goodness of the colonial order and the progressive support of the colonial state.”\textsuperscript{142} Sakakini’s admiration for the modern and the scientific, for the liberal and the progressive, therefore, may be understood as a function of his bourgeois-rationalist conception of nationalism. In other words, his nationalism – being a product of an alien discourse that would determine the parameters of his nationalism – would inevitably serve to propel that alien discourse and in turn create a disturbing situation that would manifest itself in instances of cognitive dissonance.

The foundations of the nationalism being inevitably contradictory, its rhetoric also appears confusing. In the diary, the instances where Sakakini proclaimed his nationalism while simultaneously criticizing the backwardness of his society may thus be explained by the very nature of the discourse within which he was operating. Chatterjee explained:

Nationalism denied the alleged inferiority of the colonized people; it also asserted that a backward nation could ‘modernize’ itself while retaining its cultural identity. It thus produced a discourse in which, even as it challenged the colonial claim to political domination, it also accepted the very intellectual premises of ‘modernity’ on which colonial domination was based.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid, 11.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, 11.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid, 25.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, 30.
As a result, therefore, Chatterjee explained that nationalist discourse was itself Orientalist, accepting “the same ‘objectifying’ procedures of knowledge constructed in the post-Enlightenment age of Western science.” Briefly:

There is, consequently, an inherent contradictoriness in nationalist thinking, because it reasons within a framework of knowledge whose representational structure corresponds to the very structure of power nationalist thought seeks to repudiate. 

In many ways, then, Sakakini’s contradictions were natural products of a discourse – nationalism – that would not have it any other way. Chatterjee’s propositions thus inaugurate a new line of thinking: Sakakini, as an individual inhabiting a relational space, operated through an internalized and structured reality that would both determine and limit his ability to achieve consonance, a phenomenon best described by Bourdieu in his theory of habitus.

In the diaries, the reality surrounding Sakakini was consistently structured. Whether due to the socially systematized and ideologically imbued facts of the Ottoman Empire, the Arab revolt, or the British Mandate, Sakakini was perpetually writing his diary within a condition which determined the “system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” that would be manifested in his persona. This is habitus: the set of acquired dispositions, schemata, and sensibilities constituting the individual. Yet these acquired components of the individual are the result of objectifications of the structural social reality at an individual level; the habitus, therefore, as a system of “cognitive and motivating structures, is a world of already realized ends – procedures to follow, paths to take – and

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144 Ibid, 38.
145 Ibid, 38.
of objects endowed with a ‘permanent teleological character,’ […] for example, tools or institutions.”

In this sense, the individual habitus is isomorphic with the structural conditions in which it emerged, and consequently, it operates in a predetermined (structured) logic. If we were to take the Mandate as the socially structured reality in the case of Sakakini’s habitus, the tools and institutions put in place to ensure the Mandate’s viability would elicit cognitions and behaviors from Sakakini’s habitus whose ends are already realized. These cognitions and behaviors would ultimately complement the social structure in place, a condition similar to Chatterjee’s discussion of nationalism ultimately propelling the discourse of the alien presence.

Bourdieu explained that this takes place because the “regularities inherent in an arbitrary condition,” such as the Mandate, “tend to appear as necessary, even natural, since they are the basis of the schemes of perception and appreciation through which they are apprehended,”

the habitus. For Sakakini, therefore, his conviction that science, education, and modernity were necessary and natural ends in an urban space of increasingly disenfranchised traditional ways was produced and reinforced by a social structure that had already established them as schemes of regular operation and perception; indeed, the British Mandate, through its tools and institutions, implemented norms of perception and of thought (a logic defined by cultural sophistication, science, education, etc.) without which the Mandate could not be apprehended. In conjunction with Chatterjee’s analysis of the bourgeois-rationalist class attracted to the discourse of nationalism in the colonial space, this theory explains why an individual like Sakakini would appear as a champion of Arab nationalism, a norm whose perception and

147 Bourdieu, 108.
apprehension were also contingent upon the existence of the cultural and political logic of the Mandate.

The notion that Sakakini operated within a predetermined scheme of thinking and perceiving is an intriguing one; it begs the question: why bother understanding individuals in history if their thoughts and behaviors are invariably realized by a *habitus* that is isomorphic with the existing social structure? Indeed, why not simply study the social structure? A key component to the theory of *habitus*, as mentioned above, is that the process through which objectified social logics are internalized is subjective, a fact that leads us to appreciate the individual. While the *habitus* generates “all the ‘reasonable’, ‘common-sense’ behaviours (and only these) which are possible within the limits of these regularities, and which are likely to be positively sanctioned because they are objectively adjusted to the logic characteristic of a particular field,”¹⁴⁹ it is compelling to observe how the individual internalizes and projects these common-sense behaviors in private and public spaces. In the case of Sakakini, the hope for a modern, culturally sophisticated life westward was a positively sanctioned motivating cognition that would receive the “common-sense” stamp from the social structures and institutions reflected in his *habitus*. His behavior would therefore serve to complement his *habitus*’s desire to be incorporated into the social structure.

The capacity to exploit the individual’s body and mind in such a way that he or she ends up seeking positively sanctioned motivating cognitions that will mirror the social structure is characteristic of *habitus*. As Bourdieu explained: “the *habitus* is what enables the institution to attain full realization: it is through the capacity for

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 110.
incorporation, which exploits the body’s readiness to take seriously the performative magic of the social,”\(^{150}\) that ideologies like modernity prevail. In other words,

An institution […] is complete and fully viable only if it is durably objectified not only in things, that is, in the logic, transcending individual agents, of a particular field, but also in bodies, in durable dispositions to recognize and comply with the demands immanent in the field.\(^{151}\)

Therefore, Sakakini’s body, his free and liberal thought, his belief in the transcendence of confessional identity, and his admiration for self-betterment and manhood – in a word, Sakakini’s *habitus* – were cognitions whose acquisition depended on the social structuring of the Mandate. In essence, individuals with unique and progressive thoughts in the colonial space exist as a function of their *habitus*’s ability to exploit their individual bodies’ desires to be incorporated into a social reality that defined the uniqueness and progressiveness to begin with.

Paradoxically, and while Sakakini may have felt entitled to that modern, sophisticated life, the very structured reality which afforded him that *habitus* also predisposed him, as a colonial subject, to a disadvantaged position.\(^{152}\) Bourdieu explained: “Agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible

\(^{150}\) Ibid, 112.

\(^{151}\) Ibid, 112.

\(^{152}\) In previous research (Nadim Bawalsa, “The British in Palestine: Imaginings of Masculinity in Colonial Memoirs,” paper presented at MESA Conference, Boston, MA, November 2009), I applied Judith Butler’s theory of subjection to explain Sakakini’s dissonant behavior, at once exclaiming his independence and pride and simultaneously acting as a sycophant with his British superiors. Subjection, according to Butler, is the idea that the subject, due to a lack of alternatives, ends up desiring the subjugation to which he or she is subjected, therefore developing a relationship of dependency on his or her subjugator. The framework for my analysis was masculinity theory, and the argument was that as a colonial subject, Sakakini ended up desiring his status as a subjugated male. Butler explained: “No subject emerges without a passionate attachment to those on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent (even if that passion is ‘negative’ in the psychoanalytic sense). Although the dependency of the child is not *political* subordination in any usual sense, the formation of primary passion in dependency renders the child vulnerable to subordination and exploitation. Moreover, this situation of primary dependency conditions the political formation and regulation of subjects and becomes the means of their subjection. If there is not formation of the subject without a passionate attachment to those by whom she or he is subordinated, then subordination proves central to the becoming of the subject.” See Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 8.
and the inaccessible, of what is and is not ‘for us’. Consequently, the individual’s performance within that structured reality and his relation to a future with his habitus is defined in the relationship between:

on the one hand, his habitus with its temporal structures and dispositions towards the future, constituted in the course of a particular relationship to a particular universe of probabilities, and on the other hand a certain state of the chances objectively offered to him by the social world.

Sakakini’s relationships to his future and to his social reality were therefore determined by the structures put in place by the Mandate and by the accessibility of the possibilities offered in the Mandate within his social reality: a precarious situation. Ultimately, then, the relation to what is possible is a relation to power; and the sense of the probable future is constituted in the prolonged relationship with a world structured according to the categories of the possible (for us) and the impossible (for us), of what is appropriated in advance by and for others and what one can reasonably expect for oneself.

Sakakini’s operation within a social system that delimited the realm of the socially possible was a result of that system’s power structure. The irony, however, is Sakakini’s possession of a habitus that would guarantee that limitation. As Bourdieu explained, the agent functioning with his habitus is not conscious of the structures of his social reality because his viable existence within that reality precludes his perception outside of it; in other words, the individual habitus is not cognizant of its isomorphism with the structural conditions in which it emerged. Yet by being incorporated within this structure, and by perceiving it through the schemes it established, the agents “cut their coats according to their cloth’, and so to become the accomplices of the processes that

153 Bourdieu, 117.
154 Ibid., 117.
155 Ibid., 117.
tend to make the probable [and improbable] a reality.” In a way, then, Sakakini’s acceptance of and involvement in a discriminatory Mandate that also afforded the possibility of satisfying his desire for a different reality (that was also made possible with the Mandate) paradoxically moved him farther from attaining that desire. In effect, Sakakini becomes an accomplice in the perpetual dissatisfaction and caprice with which he wrote.

The following excerpts from the diary offer examples of Sakakini’s paradoxical disillusionment with his environment, and moreover, of his attempt to reduce dissonance by gaining the support of his son (one component of Festinger’s second mechanism for the reduction of dissonance). In a letter to Sari dated 17 January 1932, Sakakini informed Sari of their dual heritage, Arab and Greek: “For my paternal grandmother was Greek of the Greeks of Constantinople.” In what appears as a justification for his desire to adopt his Greek heritage and consequently, establish his biological link to a West that he has thus far been unable to attain, Sakakini told his son:

I have lived to this day as an Arab serving al-ummah al’arabiyyah, working with others for its revival and toward its satisfaction, and I have done justice by it. That is why I have decided to spend the remainder of my life living by my other heritage, for this heritage has just as much of a right over me as the other one.

For the remainder of the letter, Sakakini justified his connection to his Greek heritage:

I have begun to pick up on some Greek […] and there is something else that brings me closer to my Greek heritage, and that is those beautiful Greek songs you have no doubt heard me sing. As for my fascination with Greece’s philosophers, its poets, writers, and artists, my ancestors, I have no shame.

156 Ibid, 118.
157 Sakakini (a), 243.
158 Ibid, 243.
159 Ibid, 243.
At the end of his letter, Sakakini asked Sari for his opinion on his adoption of his Greek heritage, an attempt, it would seem, to gain favor with his son in order to reduce his own dissonant cognitions. The letter demonstrates Sakakini’s desire for a different life, yet it also reveals the extent to which the social structure in which he operated afforded him the possibility to perceive of what could be (and could not be) his. While he did not express a desire to move to Greece, the potential to adopt his Greek heritage and reconnect with his philosopher-poet ancestry within a social structure (the Mandate) that valued Western civilization would simultaneously justify his disaffection with a nationalist movement that was, conveniently, culturally unfulfilling, as Chatterjee explained. Concomitantly, Palestine and Palestinians would become the repository of Sakakini’s dissatisfaction with his reality. Indeed, over a year later, Sakakini sent Sari another letter in which he expressed his frustration with Palestinian culture. On 11 March 1933, Sakakini intimated:

I would love, Sari, for [my children] to live in a better place, a more sophisticated space, in a more beautiful country, and with people with whom we share a culture […] It is no small matter, Sari, that I would like to leave this place […] for we are not from it and it is not from us. Briefly, it has its culture and we have ours, and we cannot embrace a life here unless we sacrifice our minds and our culture.

While Sakakini may very well have been a capricious person by nature, and while his frustration with Palestine and longing for a Western identity may have been personal dilemmas if not idiomatic expressions, it is worth considering that external and internal forces may have been acting on Sakakini at the same time as he was subjectively acting

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160 Sakakini even signs this letter, “Your Father, Socrates,” a name, he explains, that he chose immediately.  
161 Sakakini (a), 245.  
162 Indeed, the fact that other Palestinians were sending their children abroad to study signals the possibility that a broader emigration trend may have been taking place at the time. The phenomenon of early and mid twentieth-century Arab emigration to America is examined in Sarah Gualtieri’s Between Arab and White: Race and ethnicity in the early Syrian American diaspora (Berkeley, CA: University of CA Press, 2009).
on them. The rhetoric of nationalism in the colonial space, as Chatterjee shows us, emerges from a discourse that, at its core, objectifies “the East.” Consequently, instances of contradiction in Sakakini’s account when it comes to his nationalism or when he fabricates a connection to Greek ancestry are apprehensible as natural byproducts of a derivative discourse. Moreover, the epistemological and social logic systems imposed on Sakakini either explicitly through his exposure to the Mandate or implicitly in the very institutions and structures of modernity in which he operated predisposed him to seek consonance in his dispositions, sentiments, and schemata (habitus) with the Mandate’s reality, a reality that would preclude his participation in behavior inconsistent with its logic. In effect, we observe Sakakini’s fluctuating behavior and weighty thoughts. But Sakakini’s responses to the logic of modernity, to which he was exposed and which he internalized, were to impact his thoughts and behavior in more profound ways later in his life, namely, after the untimely death of his beloved wife, Sultana, in 1939. With this, I return to the last phase of the diary, Sakakini’s later years.

“Death” in “High Modernity”

Though she had been ill for quite some time, Sultana’s death came as a shock to the Sakakini family. Hala, only 15 at the time, recalled that while her mother was bedridden:

Father was constantly reading medical books – big, heavy volumes. He knew that Mother’s was a helpless case and he was deeply worried. […] A familiar picture I have in my mind of that period is my father carrying one of those heavy medical books and reading a description of symptoms to my mother – symptoms of some harmless disease that resembled the symptoms she had – in order to convince her that hers was a simple disorder from which she would soon recover.\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{163} Hala, 61.
Sultana passed away on Tuesday, 3 October 1939. Following her death, and “for several years, the atmosphere at home was melancholy. Father and Aunt Melia used to visit my mother’s grave daily. Dumia and I often went along.”\(^{164}\) For Sakakini, life quickly lost its value, and he increasingly turned to philosophy for consolation. Hala mentioned that Arthur Schopenhauer, the 18\(^{th}\)-century German philosopher known for his atheistic pessimism, became Sakakini’s main study:

> The purpose and meaning of life, or rather the futility of life, was often the subject of discussion at home. Naturally, the ideas Dumia and I heard at that sensitive age left a lasting impact on our thoughts. Already as adolescents we adopted a philosophic attitude to life.\(^{165}\)

But Sakakini’s adherence to this new philosophy on life did not seem to emerge in a vacuum, or entirely as a consequence of Sultana’s death. In the years leading up to 1939, Sakakini had been growing more and more disillusioned with his reality and with humanity, certainly as a consequence of continued British dominion over Palestinian politics.\(^{166}\) On 9 December 1933, Sakakini related to his son in a letter the similarities he observed between the British in Palestine and the Romans during the times of Christ:

> [The Romans] delivered Christ to the Jews who tortured him, tied him with rope, dragged him from place to place, spit on him, insulted him, and then crucified him […]. If this were the state of the world today, then how unruly and low humans are, how unfortunate their luck, and how far they are from the age of peace, brotherhood, love, equality, and justice. Humanists [al-insāniyyīn] should part with this world and leave the human wolves to inhabit it immorally.\(^{167}\)

\(^{164}\) Ibid, 61.  
\(^{165}\) Ibid, 61.  
\(^{166}\) In his memoir, Jamil Toubbeh described the general mood in Jerusalem during the WWII period as follows: “While honoring war-related emergency measures, some Palestinians began to regard Germany as less of a threat than England. As the war progressed and [Jewish] immigration increased, many more Palestinians […] began viewing the British presence as an impediment to independence. Quietly, some spoke of an alliance with Germany. Very cognizant of this undercurrent of discontent, the British were nonetheless, confident that still harsher measures would squelch it” (page 81).  
\(^{167}\) Sakakini (a), 259.
Again, on 4 May 1935, Sakakini expressed to his son his contempt for humans and for the world: “What is this world, who are these humans?! Every time I attempt to accept and love it, I find myself hating it and wanting to leave it. Every time I think positively of humans, I am faced with their cruelty and lowliness. I then wish I were not born.”

His disillusionment grew stronger during the 1936-1939 riots that swept the country. On 25 July 1936, Sakakini again shared with Sari his sorrow:

If this were your world, oh people, then the world’s sorrow is your world, and how difficult it is for the peace-lover to live with you, for he who considers people of different colors and types to be brothers. […] I sympathize with the calamities that have struck the Arabs, or those that have struck the English, or the Jews, and that is why you see me at one instance on the side of the Arabs, at another on the side of the English, and yet at another on the side of the Jews. […] So tell me! Tell me! How is one to enjoy life in this situation?! 

Following Sultana’s death, Sakakini’s anguish deepened and his attempts to accept the realities of life grew dimmer. For almost two years after her death, Sakakini began each diary entry with the same sentence, changing only depending on the weather and number of people present: “We went out, my sister Melia and I, to the cemetery, and we lay flowers and poured tears.”

Yet Sakakini’s mourning process also progressed in an interesting way; rather than partake in the traditional rituals of communal mourning and lamenting common to Palestinian culture, Sakakini distanced himself, even further, intellectually. At this stage in his life, however, his departure from reality was not (only) due to frustration with Palestinian politics or society, but also to an aversion arising from an increasing preoccupation with the meaningfulness of his own life. On 2 January 1940, Sakakini lamented his wife’s death: “I used to believe that I loved life […] but when you

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168 Ibid, 270.
169 Ibid, 289.
170 Ibid, 311. 19 January 1940.
left me, life to me became a silly, worthless thing.” Following this, Sakakini continued with his philosophy on life:

What is this life? We walk through it from childhood to old age, from health to sickness, from prosperity to withering, from energy to inertia, from hope to despair, from happiness to depression, from life to death. […] Would it not be better if there were no life, for there would be no death? Oh people, come, let us go extinct.

This philosophy developed into a treatise of sorts, and his newfound conviction in the meaninglessness of life and in the extinction of humanity brought about Sakakini’s metaphorical death:

Life is absurd. People should heed my advice and put a stop to this absurdity by abstaining from marriage; and if they were to marry, let them abstain from procreation. We do not anticipate that animals, insects, or plants put a stop to the absurdity of existence, but what drives the human, of thought and reason, to allow himself to continue in this absurdity? World War II erupted, and in it, Sakakini found more absurdity that led him to distance himself even further: “Every time I hear news of this horrible war, I wish I were never born, or that I would not have lived to this day. What is humanity if it accepts these calamities?! These thoughts continued to consume Sakakini, and on 29 July 1940, Sakakini described the new level of sadness he experienced. No longer was his simply natural human sadness; now, it was sadness of the mind: “If I were to add to it my aging, the fact that I have become faithless, I would realize that I am in a sadness that is not fit for mourning […] If people go unconscious before they die, then daily I die

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171 Ibid, 310.
172 Ibid, 310. Sakakini repeated his call for human extinction in several diary entries during the early 1940s. ayuhā-l-nās, ta’llū nangari.
173 Ibid, 316. 7 April 1940.
174 Ibid, 321. 1 June 1940.
awake.” Finally, and to consummate these thoughts, Sakakini laid out the terms of his death, as well as his obituary, in a lengthy diary entry dated 10 April 1941:

1 – I have decided from this day that I will greet death smiling, and that I would like for my loved ones to greet my death smiling. […]
2 – There will be no mourning and no crying.
3 – No one shall pray over me.\textsuperscript{176}

The last line of his premature obituary read: “He has parted with this life thankful for what he has found in you of generosity, kindness, and goodness, and he begs you to be with yourselves and to forget him.”\textsuperscript{177} The individuality in these entries is unmistakable; indeed, to write one’s own obituary and the terms of one’s death highlights the extent to which Sakakini viewed himself as an individual, and increasingly less as a member of a community, whether one he respected or otherwise.

As with Sakakini’s nationalism and dissonance, however, these death entries, as it were, must be analyzed contextually and discursively. Sakakini’s reactions to his wife’s death and the trajectory that his approach to life and existence took during this period – and for that matter, the very fact of questioning existence – were influenced by elements that were linked to his pursuit of modern selfhood. As Tamari argued, the increasing individualization of members of a community is a prominent feature of modern societies, and it is most evident, Philip Mellor contended, when that community confronts death.\textsuperscript{178} Mellor argued that the approach to death, metaphorical or literal, which we observe in many modern societies, is a result of what he called a phase of “high modernity.”

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid, 324. In a telling diary entry dating 19 January 1941, Sakakini provided his philosophy on history and time. He explained that his new belief is that things occur by chance and coincidence (\textit{sudfah}), and that there is nothing predestined to occur (Sakakini (a), 334-335). Two months later, on 18 March 1941, Sakakini wished for faith in order to accept life: “If only I were of the faithful.” \textit{Laytānī kuntu min al-mu’minīn} (Sakakini (a), 335).
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 336.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 337.
\textsuperscript{178} See introduction for Tamari’s discussion of the institutionalization of modernity during this period.
Mellor explicating the existential crisis that individuals in all societies inevitably encounter:

The existential confrontation with death, one’s own or the death of others, has the potential to open individuals up to dread, because it can cause them to call into question the meaningfulness and reality of the social frameworks in which they participate, shattering their ontological security. Death is therefore always a problem for all societies […].

In this framework, the perceivable world is a structure that provides meaning, identity, and reality to the persons that inhabit it, in much the same way as Bourdieu’s habitus provides structures and dispositions that mirror the existing social structure. This self-serving, “real” world, however, affording its individuals the very tangible possibilities of (modern) living, is precarious because when the time comes, it cannot account for the plausibility of death since the meaning of death is opposed to its logic of living. At these points, said Mellor, “the social shield against anomie (the terror of meaninglessness) can collapse,” and

Since even an individual’s biography is the imposition of a socially constructed framework upon personal experiences in order to make them meaningful, the anomic potentiality of death reaches into the innermost depths of people’s self-identities.

The threat of the individual’s ontological security collapsing is located specifically in the type of society in which he or she lives. Mellor explained that this phenomenon is distinct to modern societies because:

modernity is characterized by a wholly unprecedented series of mechanisms which remove problems of meaning from public space, relocating them in the

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179 Philip A. Mellor, “Death in high modernity: the contemporary presence and absence of death” in The Sociology of Death, ed. David Clark (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 12. [Emphases in original]. The term “ontological security” […] refers to persons having a sense of order and continuity in relation to the events in which they participate, and the experiences they have, in their day-to-day lives. Ontological security therefore depends upon persons being able to find meaning in their lives” (Mellor, 12).

180 Mellor, 12.
privatized realm of individual life and experience, thereby creating historically unique threats of personal meaninglessness.\textsuperscript{181}

For the individual inhabiting this modern space, feelings of death or meaninglessness operate at a deeply subjective level that cannot be tempered by the promise of life in modernity. The reason for this, said Mellor, is because the “internal referentiality of modernity” cannot offer solutions to the moral and existential crises which humans experience individually during their lives.\textsuperscript{182} In other words, “we place our trust in the modern belief that ‘risks can in principle be assessed in terms of generalisable knowledge about potential dangers’,” risks that are promised to be small in the living modern space.\textsuperscript{183} For this reason, when these risks are not removed due to the inevitability of death or the “fundamental[ly] psychic” nature of individual existential crises in high modernity, “the finitude of human life” remains unanswered and the meaning of life continues to haunt the individual.\textsuperscript{184}

One of the main tensions that arise in this scenario is the question of self-identity in modern societies. When the individual finds himself unable to reconcile the “dominant reflexivity of high modernity with the brute fact of human finitude,” questions of self-identity emerge.\textsuperscript{185} As Mellor explained, issues of self-identity are “of central significance in contemporary society because modernity has purchased increased control over life at the expense of communally constructed values, values being sequestered from public space into the fragile sphere of the private.”\textsuperscript{186} Faced with this private

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid, 16.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid, 17.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid, 17.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, 17.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid, 18.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid, 18.
\end{footnotesize}
dilemma of life and death, the individual must create his own identity in order to construct meaning around his private life:

In this context, death is particularly disturbing because it signals a threatened ‘irreality’ of the self-projects which modernity encourages individuals to embark upon, an ultimate absence of meaning, the presence of death bringing home to them the existential isolation of the individual in high modernity.  

A possible interpretation of Sakakini’s dilemma, therefore, is that life and death after Sultana’s passing were irreconcilable due to his doctrine of modern selfhood. His life, spent secluded intellectually and philosophically, left him unsatisfied with existence and with the meaning of life so long as its inevitability was death. On 21 October 1941, Sakakini wrote:

I live in this world the life of the departed [al-rāhīlīn] after having lived in it the life of the immortal living. All that matters is preparing to depart, and I will depart from this world not sorry to leave it, for I no longer enjoy anything and nothing pleases me [...] If the world is how we see it, if people are these people, if minds are these minds, if pleasures are these pleasures, and if morals are these morals, then there is no pity for this world.  

Sakakini’s feeling that life lost its meaning was based on the belief that the life he had lived prior felt immortal, a condition which, as Mellor argued, is prevalent in modern societies. Indeed, the fervor of nationalism and the energy involved in partaking in modern colonial projects, including the energy he spent keeping a diary, sending letters to his son, and striving to be a proud father-husband-teacher, reflected Sakakini’s conviction in a life worth living, a life of promise: a modern life. The promise, whether realizable or not, of a life out West, or of his children’s sophistication, or of his ability to ensure an engaged audience to which he would lecture, seemed to motivate Sakakini to live as an individual capable of modern selfhood. But the untimely death of his wife and his

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188 Sakakini (a), 344.
continued disappointment with humanity and al-dunyā led him to grapple with the meaning of life, and, as Mellor explained, “because meaning has been so privatized” in modern societies, “any attempts to construct meaning around death are now inherently fragile.”\(^{189}\) Hence, the last phase of Sakakini’s diaries deepens our understanding of the extent to which modernity, in its most liberal usage, systematically constructs an individual to behave according to its “own principles of reflexively constituted knowledge, order and control,”\(^ {190}\) and furthermore, how the individual – whether due to a predisposition of his habitus, the inherently derivative nature of his political activity, or his ultimate disillusionment with life – seeks to locate and place himself within that space.

\(^{189}\) Mellor, 21.
\(^{190}\) Ibid, 26.
Conclusions

In her 2009 work, Katz defended the diary as a source for historical inquiry. She argued that, contrary to popular belief, the diary should not be a marginalized source:

When considering the diary as a historical text, the scholar is bound only by the demands of historical curiosity and thus may delve into the diary – not simply accepting it as a retracing of historical events – as a multifaceted text that stretches the boundaries of historical literature beyond the official or standard narrative.\(^\text{191}\)

The diary of Khalil al-Sakakini is a valuable historical source. In this paper, I have used the diary to investigate and contextualize the character of the man behind the words. Theories of psychology and sociology, as well as treatises on nationalist discourse, have proven to be effective tools with which to unpack some of Sakakini’s subjectivities. Fortunately, Sakakini wrote with an attention to detail and expressiveness that any historian would appreciate. Furthermore, the fact that he wrote almost daily bespeaks a contemplative man, indeed, a man of so many thoughts and feelings that contradictions were bound to emerge. Yet the ways in which Sakakini and his diaries have been approached in the historiography has left a lacuna in our understanding of this personage and of his interaction with his environment. While many authors have examined his writing, no one has argued that the peculiarities in his thought and behavior, and the confrontations he encountered with himself and his surroundings, between ideologies most conspicuously couched in the East/West divide, or between life and death, are worth exploring psychologically, sociologically, and otherwise.

As I have repeated throughout this thesis, the arguments I have put forth are not merely responses to the existing literature, but also novel interpretations, indeed, experimentations, in micro-history. The worth of this research, therefore, also lies in the

\(^{191}\) Katz, 51.
methodology employed. As I have argued, the autobiographical source should be used with caution. Methodologically, the diary is ill equipped to provide the historian with a single truth about the autobiographer or any of his realities, external or internal; conclusions must remain limited to a profound acquaintance with the individual as an individual. Hence, the interpretations I have presented from my own reading of the diary are intended to offer complexity to our understanding of a complex man. If I have added confusion where there was none, I hope that my reader will now appreciate the intricacy of the diary, and thus develop a critical eye for works citing autobiographies as primary sources.

Contextualizing Sakakini’s diary, several conclusions may be inferred about the nature of the environment to which he was reacting with his pen. The diary demonstrates that the very ideologies of nationalism, liberal thought, and modern selfhood with which Sakakini is often associated in the literature are products of a historical environment that was in flux and consequently, often unstable. Therefore, while Nasir and Musallam recognize Sakakini’s individual genius as the cause of his uniqueness, it is evident with a more nuanced reading that his distinctiveness was permissible because of his existence in a precarious reality that would implicate him in a state of dissonance and changeability apparent throughout his cathartic diary. Likewise, – and unlike Kedourie, Wasserstein, or Peled’s reduction of Sakakini’s subjectivities to communal or confessional syndromes emerging during formative moments in history – Sakakini’s peculiarities should signal to the reader his conflicting and convoluted ambitions during a time period where allegiances were in flux.
Ultimately, then, this micro-historical investigation offers an appreciation for the role of the individual narrative in the larger narrative on modern Palestinian history. Peter Burke has explained the rise of micro-history as a field of study since the 1970s and he outlined the debates that have emerged around the value of micro-history, highlighting both the proposed benefits and faults of the methodology. In the latter category, said Burke, micro-history has been accused of trivializing history “by studying the biographies of unimportant people” in an attempt to “draw general conclusions from local data.” 192 As for the justifications for the approach of micro-history, Burke explained that with it, “changes of scale illuminate social processes by allowing them to be viewed from different standpoints.” 193 But in order for a historian to produce contributive micro-narratives, he or she, said Burke, must be prepared to demonstrate the links between small communities or individuals, and “macro-historical trends.” 194

Since I have examined Sakakini’s abridged diaries from 1907 to 1952, it would be impractical to conclude historical trends throughout this lengthy period. The trends I point to in this conclusion, therefore, are limited to those that appear consistently in the literature, namely, nationalism and modernity, in the case of Palestine. The character of Khalil al-Sakakini, chronically troubled with compounded and often conflicting thoughts in his diary, provides one example of the elaborate processes that take place in the experience and construction of an individual identity, whether confessional, cultural, political, or otherwise, during periods of transience and flux. Consequently, Sakakini’s diary demonstrates that an individual constituent of one or several ideologies, consistently and subjectively thinking, feeling, and writing is rarely, if ever, unchanging.

193 Burke, 41.
194 Ibid., 43.
in his approach to the dogmas with which historians later define those ideologies, often anachronistically. Indeed, the diary signals that there is an ambiguity in the process of adopting and experiencing a given ideology at an individual level, and consequently, that historians will invariably face difficulty locating uniformity or regularity in these trends.

For a social history of Palestine, therefore, this excavation of Sakakini’s thoughts shows the difficulty with generalizing the experience of colonial modernity or nationalism. The diary portrays that a complex network of associations, cognitions, relations, and sentiments at the individual level muddled this experience. While Sakakini was a member of Jerusalem’s intellectual elite, the transparent individualism with which he wrote problematizes the notion that Palestinian nationalist, Christian, or modern sentiments are historically locatable and immutable actualities in the diary. Sakakini and his diary thus demonstrate that the experience of a political, confessional, or cultural identity is invariably complex and invariably linked to subjectivities that are, albeit indeterminable conclusively, unaccounted for in telescopic histories.

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195 See introduction for James Gelvin’s review of *The Origins of Arab Nationalism.*
Bibliography


