

In the Eyes of the Beholder - Aspects of Early Palestinian Photography*

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The essay opens with two photographs from approximately the same period, one (image 1) by the Jerusalem born, Christian-Palestinian photographer, Hanna Safieh (1910-1979), and the second (image 2) by the Jewish Hungarian photographer, Zoltan Kluger (1895- 1977). The first, by Safieh, is of a young Palestinian boy wrapped in a kaffiyeh and wearing a jellabiya, his arms hugging a large sheaf of wheat that almost hides his upper body. Photographed in a close-up of his upper torso and inclined slightly from left to right, he smiles for the camera. The boy and the bundle of wheat fill the entire frame, which has no other visual information. The boy looks straight ahead, his eyes not meeting those of the photographer or the camera. The photograph, probably taken in the early 1940s in the Jerusalem area, is from Safieh's private archive held by his son. Most of Safieh's archive was looted in 1967.

The second photograph, by Kluger, shows a young Jewish girl in a similar pose, her body turned slightly from right to left. She too is photographed in a closeup of her upper torso, one hand holding a bundle of wheat, smiling, a headscarf in the style of an Eastern European peasant tied around her head, and wearing a western style blouse. The girl and the wheat occupy the whole frame, with no other visual information. Her pensive, secretive gaze looks into the far distance. The image, photographed at Bnei-Brit [a Jewish settlement in the lower Galilee] in 1938, is called "One of the Settlers" and is from the Keren Kayemeth Le Israel Archive (Jewish National Fund).¹

* The original text was published in *Photography in Palestine in the 1930s & 1940s* (Sela 2000, Hakibbutz Hameuchad publishing House (2000, in Hebrew, hereafter: *Photography in Palestine*). See also: <http://www.ronasela.com/en/details.asp?listid=6>. *Photography in Palestine* was my first extensive research/publication about local photography (Jewish and Palestinian). Almost two decades passed since its publication and it was necessary to update the text. I tried to minimize the alterations and keep it as faithful to the original as possible. New/updated comments are usually marked in quadrangle brackets. Originally, I used "Arabs" and "Palestinians" to describe the local inhabitants. In the English translation I unified it to Palestinians.

¹ About the Jewish National Fund Archive, see my essay: "Jewish -Public Photography Archives in Palestine in the 1930s & 1940s, the Institutional Issue" in *Photography in Palestine*, pages 17-71.



(L) 1. Hanna Safieh, *Harvesting of Grain*, Late 1930s, Courtesy of Rafi Safieh
 (R) 2. Zoltan Kluger, *Bnei Brith, One of the Settlers*, 1938, Jewish National Fund Photography Archive, Israel

Hanna Safieh² was born in Musrarra, Jerusalem, and started photographing landscapes, religious ceremonies and portraits by the age of 14. In 1936 he began working for the American Colony, in the beginning as an apprentice to Eric Matson. During the Second World War he photographed for foreign agencies, for the British in the Public Information Office and collaborated regularly with the editorial staffs of the National Geographic Magazine, the London News and the Associated Press Services. In the early 1950s Safieh opened a photography studio and gallery in East Jerusalem, where he exhibited his photographs. In the 1950s and 1960s he worked for the Jordanian government and was active until 1967. In the wake of the 1967 War, after most of his negatives were looted from his gallery and studio, he stopped working as a photographer.³ The gallery continued to be active and exhibited the best of his remaining photographs. Safieh died in Jerusalem and his son continued to manage the gallery.

² Safieh's biographical details from the exhibition *Printemps Palestinien, 1997, exposition photographiques*, Michket Krifa (Catalogue realize sous la direction) AFAA, 1997, pp. 24-25, 93 and from talks with his son Rafi Safieh, March and October - November 1999. Thanks to Ami Steinitz [an Israeli curator] and Fadwa Shaher from the Orient House in Jerusalem [who I met before it was confiscated in 2001] for the initial help they gave me in my research on early Palestinian photography.

³ According to Rafi Safieh only 500 of his father's 5000 negatives remained. Other photographers who had parts of their archives looted, were Chalil Raad (the part of his archive remaining in his possession was transferred to Lebanon in 1948) and Hrant Nakshian (photographs from 1945-1948).

Zoltan Kluger⁴ was born at the end of the 19th Century in Hungary and received his education there as a photographer. In the 1920s he immigrated to Germany where he worked for the newspaper *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*. In Berlin, after meeting Nachman Schiffrin, owner of The Press Photo Company, he photographed for the company and his photographs were published in Europe and America. In 1933 following Shiffrin's application to the National Funds to establish in "an Eretz Israel publicity project via photographs in the general press" (kh4b/5385, 6.8.33) and the agreement of the National Funds to work with them, the two immigrated to Palestine where they founded the Orient Press Photo Company. The Funds arranged papers for Kluger and his family. Until the late 1940s, Kluger was enlisted to work for the Funds, for the purposes of Zionist propaganda. His staged style, influenced by the national institutions, was channeled into creating an enlisted Zionist terminology depicting a utopian actuality of the proud Jewish pioneer making the "desert bloom. It did not document the hardships of the existing reality and the varied communities who lived in the land. Jewish photography was enlisted, initiated, organized and controlled by the information departments of the national institutions, mainly the Funds, from the 1920s until the establishment of the State, taking an active role in promoting Zionist goals. In contrast, early Palestinian photography at the time was not institutional or initiated and was rarely used [as I found up-to-date] for propaganda purposes by the Palestinian people in their national struggle. Contrary to the prevailing opinion, during the same period, Palestinian photographers produced photographs with national characteristics. However, they were not channeled into the Palestinian information system. The essay raises the likelihood that early Palestinian photography developed following the crystallization of Palestinian national consciousness, possibly in response/opposition to Jewish photography that was dominant then in Palestine (see pages 164, 176, 177 in *Photography in Palestine*). I have chosen to discuss these two remarkably similar photographs in order to examine Palestinian

⁴ Kluger's biographical details were researched and taken from the archives of Keren Hayesod (United Israel Appeal) and Keren Kayemeth (Jewish National Fund) and Oded Yedaya's "On the Road to Social Functioning: The Zionist Photography of Zoltan Kluger from the Period of the Tower and Stockade," *Kav* 10 (1990), pp13-19.

photography and its political implications at the time, as opposed to Jewish photography of the same period.

The photographs of Safieh and Kluger convey optimism, communicating the subjects' closeness to the soil and their deep connection to the land, its grain crops, and landscapes. Kluger's photograph for the Jewish National Fund is one of many photographs taken as part of the official information system and sought to represent the pioneering generation who "redeemed" and settled the land, worked the soil and led normal, productive, active lives, contrary to Jewish life in the diaspora. Safieh's photograph was created under private circumstances, and reflects national identification, perhaps in answer to Zionist photography.⁵ However, it was probably not intended to be used as nationalist propaganda but photographed out of personal awareness.⁶ Among the photographs preserved in Safieh's archive, I found additional images that can be interpreted in national contexts and could have been photographed as such. For example, in one photograph from the same series, the same Palestinian boy is seen harvesting wheat (see page 183 in *Photography in Palestine*). On the right is a field of wheat with a sheaf previously cut by the boy, and on the left the boy himself, sickle in hand, cutting wheat diligently and joyously, a view of the landscape in the background. In another photograph from the 1940s, a beautiful, young Palestinian girl is seen drinking water from a jar, against a background of the town of Bethlehem (image 3, see page 199 in *Photography in Palestine*). The girl is photographed in closeup, drinking from the land's life-giving water. On her right are smiling children and in the background vestiges of the country's glorious past. The connection between the flowing life in the country to its history and past is made concrete in this picture, serving to reinforce a national image of a present rich with symbolic significance (water equals life) while connecting with its roots. Additional photographs show a procession in Nabi Musa, which became politically significant (see pages 204 & 205 in *Photography in Palestine*, image 4). One photograph

⁵ It is known that Safieh had connections with Jewish photographers for example, Schweig.

⁶ Safieh was sent on assignments on behalf of British and foreign agencies and at times suggested photographs on his own initiative, but he hardly did any work for Palestinian establishment bodies and others (from talks with his son Rafi Safieh during the year 1999). Also in an article by Issam Nassar on Safieh, Nassar claims that until 1948, Safieh's photography related to political events, indicating his personal political involvement and his desire to influence the documentation of the Palestinian experience see Nassar Issam, "Hanna Safieh: A Witness to History", in: *A Jerusalem Photographer: The Life and Work of Hanna Safieh*, Jerusalem, published by Raffi Safieh, 1999, pp. 8-12.

shows the procession itself, and another, a close-up of proud fighters, swords in hands, against a background of the American Colony School of Handcrafts and Dressmaking. Although the Palestinian leadership was organized in its opposition to Jewish settlement, its information system made little use of photography as a tool in marketing Palestinian issues and in depicting the conflict between the two peoples, and the reason for this needs to be researched.⁷ A conscious information campaign would possibly have used photography in the information struggle, depicting the existence of the Palestinians and their rich life, in contrast to the Jewish campaign that sought to present the land as empty and the small community of inhabitants as undeveloped.⁸



(L) 3. Hanna Safieh, *Bethlehem*, 1940s, courtesy of Rafi Safieh
 (R) 4. Hanna Safieh, *Nabi- Musa Procession in Sheikh Jarrah*, Jerusalem, 1930s, courtesy of Rafi Safieh

One of the few books dealing with the photographed Arab-Palestinian experience before 1948 is Walid Khalidi's book *Before their Diaspora*.⁹ Danny Rubinstein, in his essay "It has two colors"¹⁰ relating to Walid Khalidi's book, examines the Zionist myth - a ruined and desolate land redeemed and built by pioneering Jews - alongside the

⁷ It is especially noticeable considering the Zionist leadership's massive image marketing campaign. See footnote 1 above.

⁸ Nassar and Steinitz present several additional examples of documenting events in a national-political context. At least in regard to one photograph - Palestinian women demonstrating in Jerusalem in the 1930s - Nassar claims it had political influence in the British parliament. See footnote 6 above. I encountered few photographs in this context. It's possible these photographs disappeared together with the looted archive.

⁹ Walid Khalidi, *Before their Diaspora*, Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington D.C. 1991 (2nd ed)

¹⁰ *Haaretz*, 6.12.1991.

opposing Arab-Palestinian myth. According to Rubinstein, when Khalidi first published his book in 1984, he intended to show in retrospect that the country was not as Zionist propaganda wished to portray it, but was flourishing and rich in trade, industry, agriculture and culture, its Palestinian inhabitants living normal and productive lives. The book contains many photographs describing a bucolic countryside - portraits taken in fields and houses, of workers cutting stone, working in flourmills, fishing, picking olives, in the port, harvesting grapes, bananas and oranges. Various tradespeople are photographed in Palestinian towns and many images reveal a bustling urban life - commerce, public rallies, and professional conventions. The book includes images of soccer teams, boy scouts, school and college graduates, and youth orchestras, as well as photographs of public buildings - municipalities, hospitals, clubs and others. By including photographs in the book, Khalidi aimed to give a contemporary answer regarding historical claims over the country, a correction of historical distortion. Yet, Khalidi does not deal with why the Palestinians made little use of these images in the information battle. The book includes photographs of Armenian, European and Jewish photographers, and one Arab/Palestinian photographer, Chalil [Khalil] Raad.¹¹ Raad is recognized as the first and most well-known Arab-Christian photographer to operate in Jerusalem, where he worked from 1891 to 1948.¹² Before that, and also during his time there, many photographers in the Arab community were Armenian. Raad himself studied photography with Garabed Krikorian,¹³ an Armenian photographer active in Jerusalem. Raad opened a photography store on Jaffa Street and in the 1910s was joined by Krikorian's son (Raad photographed out in the field while Krikorian's son was the studio photographer and in

¹¹ Khalidi, pp.117-124, 150. The editor mentions the photographer's name in a few instances. He mainly brings the photographs as evidence of events that took place or as proof of the nature of life in the country and relates less to questions such as who the photographer was, under what circumstances he acted or what his assignment was.

¹² Raad escaped in 1948 to Lebanon, living there in the mountains. He died in the mid-1957 Thanks to Fouad Debbas for information about Raad. [in 2010 I curated an extensive exhibition and published a book entitled: *Chalil Raad Photographs 1891-1948*: <http://www.ronasela.com/en/details.asp?listid=50>. See also: Al-Hajj, Badr, "Khalil Raad - Jerusalem Photographer," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 34 (11-12), 2001, pp. 34-39 and Tamari, Vera, *Palestine Before 1948 – Not Just Memory, Khalil Raad (1854-1957)*, Ramallah: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2013. Raad wrote his name with C (Chalil) although according to the Arabic transcript it should be Khalil. The same issue is raised with the Hebrew transcription of his name. I always use the photographer's choice].

¹³ According to another source, Raad also studied photography in Basel See Walid Khalidi, *ibid*, p 71.

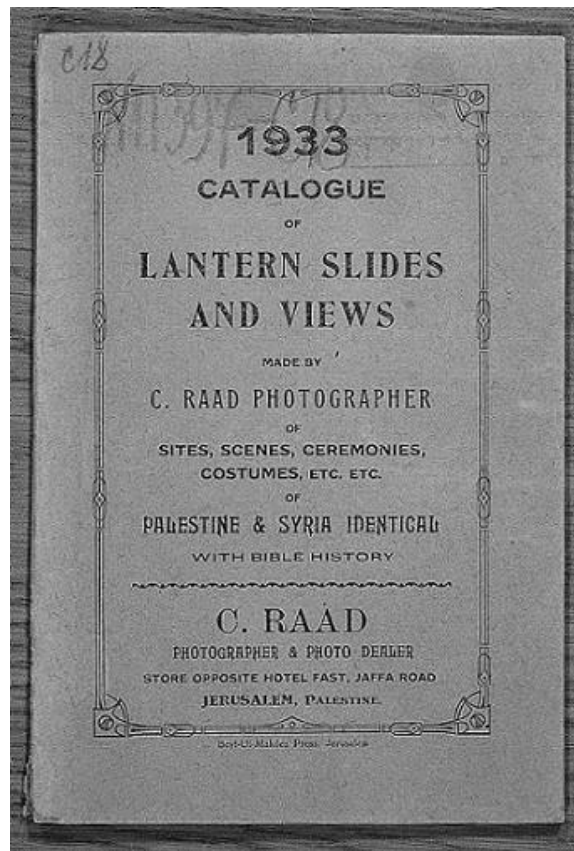
charge of sales), a partnership that ended close to 1933.¹⁴ The store was destroyed in the battles of 1948 and a part of his archive was looted. Another part that was rescued was held by his daughter and later donated to the Institute for Palestinian Studies' photography archives in Beirut. Raad's photographs, mainly documentary in character, cover the years 1918 - 1935 in Khalidi's book, and generally describe everyday village life: fisherman, carpenters, a woman against a background of spring blossoms, a village school and others. Some of Raad's albums containing the best of his archive up until the mid-30s are today in the hands of a private collector. The albums, holding approximately 2000 photographs, are organized according to subjects: Jaffa and its surroundings, the Sharon region, the Via Delarosa, the Damascus Gate area, Bethlehem, archeological excavations, the Galilee, Petra, Amman, Tel Aviv, maps and plans. The albums serve as catalogues of the photographer's finest works and were apparently displayed in the store for potential clients as a sales tool. Each album is composed of a large number of black cardboard pages and glued to each page are four to six of Raad's original photographs relating to the chapter's subject matter (image 5). Textual catalogues listing the photographs (image 6) were published as well and distributed throughout the western world, chiefly to arouse the interest of potential buyers.¹⁵

¹⁴ See Eli Shiller and Menachem Levin, *First Photographs of Eretz Israel, a Journey in the Footsteps of the Early Photographers*, Ariel, Jerusalem, 1989, p. 153.

¹⁵ 1930 *Catalogue of Lantern Slides and Views made by C. Raad & J. Krikorian of Sites, Scenes, Ceremonies, Costumes, etc. of Palestine & Syria Identical with Bible History*, C. Raad & J. Krikorian Photographers, Jerusalem, Palestine, The Commercial Press, Jerusalem, 1930. 1933 *Catalogue of Lantern Slides and Views made by C. Raad Photographer of Sites, Scenes, Ceremonies, Costumes, etc. etc. of Palestine & Syria Identical with Bible History*, C Raad Photographer and Photo Dealer, Store Opposite Hotel Fast, Jaffa Road, Jerusalem, Palestine, Beyt-Ul-Makdes, Jerusalem, 1933 (image 6). [The catalogue was published for the first time in *Photography in Palestine* (Sela 2000) and re-published in Sela 2010, pp.227-254].



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6.

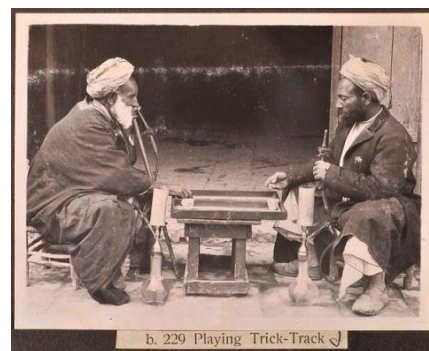
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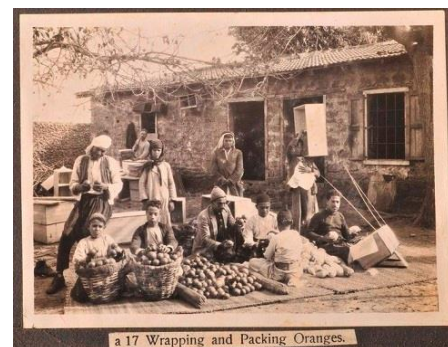
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9.



10.



Images 7-10 are by Chalil Raad

From left to right: *Native Children of Baniyas*; *Women of Ramallah embroidering*;
Wrapping and Packing Oranges, Jaffa and *Playing Trick-Track*, Courtesy of Raad family

Raad - the first Arab/Palestinian photographer to photograph Palestine - described the everyday life of the people, the landscapes in their length and breadth, the holy places, and the neighboring countries. He travelled the country and its surroundings, capturing with his camera local existence from the late 19th century until the mid 20th century. From the perspective of its Palestinian inhabitants, and as seen by Walid Khalidi, the country appears as a place with a regular, normal and rich life of productivity, trade, and a vibrant existence (images 7-10). According to Khalidi, Raad acted as a documentary photographer, recording the dynamic life of the local Palestinian population with his camera, both urban (Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jaffa, Jerusalem) and rural (picking oranges, plowing and more). On the other hand, I claim that the influence of 19th century European tradition of photography of the Holy Land intended for a European audience, is

clearly present in Raad's other photographs [as described in other parts of *Photography in Palestine*]. The captions in his albums and the accompanying catalogues are printed not in Arabic but in English, and directed at tourists and foreigners.¹⁶ Moreover, part of the title of the 1930 catalogue reads: "*Sites, Scenes, Ceremonies, Costumes... of Palestine & Syria Identical with Bible History*," (image 6) describes the land as biblical and markets it as such. The reverse side of the catalogue details the studio services available: "*Depot for Kodak & Films*", "*Artistic Coloring*" and "*Tourists Photographed in Native Costumes*," marketing the Holy Land as a place whose oriental and biblical characteristics are the basis of its existence. Numerous photographs recall scenes and places from the old or New Testament, which Raad being a Christian found easy to provide, such as Miriam and the boy in Bethlehem or Nazareth, Ruth the gleaner, Joseph's pit (images 11-13), or captions alluding to the New Testament, such as that of a "Camel looking through the eye of a needle"(image no. 805 in Raad's catalogue) hinting at "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Gospels, Matthew 19:24),¹⁷ or "Follow me... and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19, image 14). These photographs were probably made out of commercial considerations - to satisfy the European demand for images of holy places and scenes of the biblical Holy Land.

¹⁶ See *ibid.*

¹⁷ With thanks to Dr. Isam Nassar for drawing my attention to these captions after I showed him my findings.

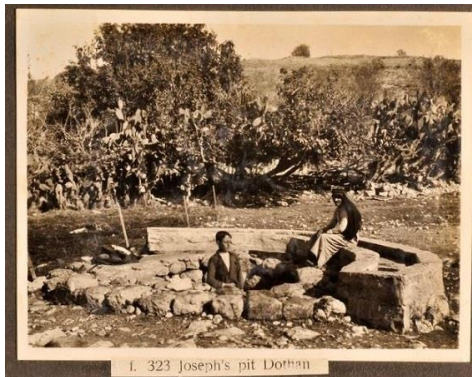
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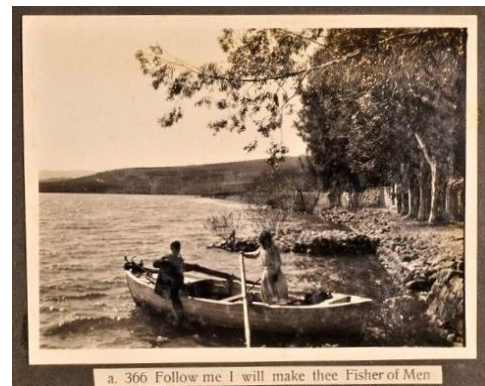
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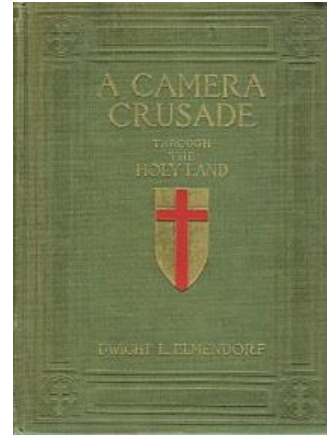
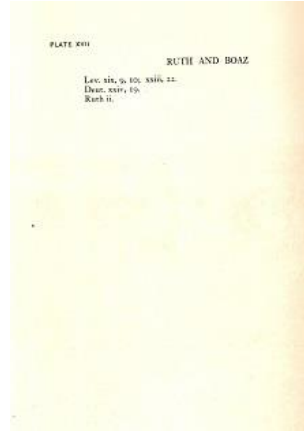


Images 11-14 are by Chalil Raad

From left to right: *Ruth the Gleaner*; *Bethlehem woman nursing her Baby*; *Joseph's pit, Dotan* and *Follow me and I will make thee Fisher of Men*, Courtesy of Raad family

It appears that Raad, unconsciously, was influenced by the 19th Century – early 20th Century European style of colonial photography in the Holy Land - a style that portrays the land as backward, empty or biblical and the local Palestinian inhabitants as the people of the bible. The western photographers posed them in a way that recalls biblical scenes and biblical texts were attached to the photographs (image 15). These images were largely distributed at the time. They served as justification for European imperialist intentions and the desire to occupy and bring apparently "progress and modernity" to the local inhabitants that lived like in ancient periods. Safieh too, according to Issam Nassar, was exposed to the influence of European photography, and many of his

15.



"Ruth and Boaz", *Ruth 2*, from the book *A Camera Crusade through The Holy Land*, by Dwight Elmendorf, 1912, New York: Scribner's Sons

photographs are reminiscent of images from the Holy Scriptures (the girl carrying a jug on her head -Miriam the Moabite? - and the woman from Nazareth with her baby). Nassar who sees them in an ethnographic context, hardly discusses their political significance, arguing that they don't teach about Safieh's work as a whole.¹⁸ I maintain that Safieh, like Raad, was unaware that these photographs could be used to strengthen the Zionist perception of redeeming a desolate/biblical and undeveloped land. Their works were affected by the 19th century colonial perception imposed by the West placed over the East without being aware of its implications.¹⁹ Moreover, Raad photographed new Jewish settlements, like Rechovot and Tel Aviv displaying them in his albums as well. The first Hebrew city with its wealth of activities is shown at its finest - the Levant Fair, cinemas, commercial life, the seashore, hotels, and port. Allenby, Bialik and Ben Yehuda are some of the streets that appear in the albums (image 16). Numerous interior and exterior photographs of the Agricultural Experimental Station in Rehovot, as well as the Rotenberg Power Station on the Jordan and the Ben Shemen Youth Village (image 17) with its various activities are also included. Raad frequently used the Hebrew-biblical names of places as well: Arnon River, Massada, Mizpah (near Tiberias), Gath, Dothan,

¹⁸ See Nassar, pp. 11-12. I found a large group of images in Safieh's archive photographed in this style.

¹⁹ Moreover, and perhaps out of a desire to live in coexistence, Raad's relations with the Jewish establishment seemed reciprocal. In 1914 he offered his services to Rupin, and later was approached by the Funds who were looking for color photographs. See Vivienne Silver-Brody, *Documentors of the Dream*, page 73.

Plain of Sharon, Beersheba and the like.²⁰ This suggests that Raad in light of the Zionist awakening, viewed the Jews in the country and the Diaspora as a potential target audience, and probably out of commercial considerations published photographs in his albums that he believed might interest Jewish buyers. The captions accompanying the photographs of the Jewish communities are neutral and give factual descriptions: "Agricultural experimental station, Rehovot; Jewish Colony Beit Ghan; Main Building of the Levant Fare, Tel Aviv" and the like. Raad apparently wished to take a neutral stand and sought to document the country in a direct and factual manner [or maybe believed in the potential of having shared life of Palestinians and Jews or was motivated by other causes]. At the same time, it is difficult to ignore the contexts raised by his work. In the political reality of Palestine during that period, every step had its implications and political ramifications.



(L) 16. Chalil Raad, *Allenby St.*, Courtesy of Raad family

(R) 17. Chalil Raad, *Ben Shemen Youth Village*, Courtesy of Raad family

Karimeh Abbud (1893-1940) from Bethlehem is regarded as the first female Palestinian photographer. Although not many details of her life are known, it is recognized that she was active in Jerusalem since 1914, and in the 1920s and 1930s was active mainly in Nazareth and Haifa.²¹ Abbud toured mainly in the northern part of the

²⁰ With thanks to Dr. Dani Rabinowitz who drew my attention to this point.

²¹ With thanks to David Perlman who drew my attention to Abbud's work. [the research about Abbud was largely developed in recent years and I mention here only few: Mrowat, Ahmad, "Karimeh Abbud: Early Woman Photographer (1896-1955)." *Jerusalem Quarterly* 31, 2007, pp.72-78; Raheb, Matri, *Karimeh Abbud: Pioneer Female Photographer of Palestine*. Bethlehem: Diyar Consortium. Print, 2011 and Mahasen Nasser-Eldin, *Restored Pictures*, 2012 (film). Abbud is considered the first photographer to define herself as a patriotic/nationalist photographer, *Al-Karmel*, 7.2.1924]. Another photographer active in Nazareth at

country for purposes of photography. Generally, she printed her photographs as postcards, which was common at the time. In contrast to traditional 19th century Western photography of the country, Abbud documented the country and its inhabitants with an emphasis on their lives in towns and villages, treating them as a homogeneous part of the settled country and not as extras placed in the landscape to be photographed. At times, when the landscape was photographed without people, Abbud "planted" images of normal daily life in the printed postcard (image 18).

Already in the second half of the 19th century, various Arab/Palestinian photographers were operating in Palestine, although most as mentioned were of Armenian descent.²² Many Palestinian photographers (like Chalil Raad) followed in the footsteps of Armenian photographers who starting from the mid -19th century, established a local photography tradition: Garabedian Yessayi from Jerusalem, one of the first Armenian photographers to operate in Palestine (active between the 1850s and 1860s and in 1859 founded a photography workshop in the Armenian monastery of St. James); J.H. Halladjian from Haifa (active in the 1890s); Kvorak (active in 1860s); H. Mardikian from Jerusalem (active 1894 - 1913); Garabed Krikorian from Jerusalem (active from the 1860s until the beginning of the 20th century); and Yosef Tumaian (began photographing at the start of the 20th century, image 19).²³

the time was Fadil Saba and apparently there was a connection between him and Abbud. Saba's father had a postcard printing business, whereas Saba opened a photography studio in Nazareth but like Abbud, printed his photographs as postcards.

²² Other Arab/Christian photographers active here at the end of the 19th Century in addition to Raad were T.J.Alley and Rev.Putnam Cady see Eyal Onne, *Photographic Heritage of the Holy Land, 1839-1914*, Institute of Advanced Studies, Manchester Polytechnic, England, p. 15, 1980. Daoud Sabounji was also active from the end of the 19th century (1892) in Jaffa and was apparently the first local photographer to operate in Jaffa [He was the brother of Louis and Jurji Sabounji who were photographers (the latter had a photography studio in Beirut and was the "first Arab studio owner"), See, Sheehi, Stephen, *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Portrait Photography, 1860–1910*, United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 28-31].

²³ The information is based primarily on Onne's book. See Onne, *ibid*. Photography held an important place in the activities of the Middle East's Armenian community. It is known that other Armenian photographers were active in the second half of the century for example Abraham Guiragossian, active in Beirut. See Onne, *ibid*. Onne gives the reasons why photography was an ethnic occupation for the Armenians. According to him, the Armenians acquired technical skills in photography in Turkey, and as Christians, were allowed to create visual images. Also as a persecuted and oppressed people photography provided an opportunity to start a new life anywhere they chose. About the first generation of Armenian photographers see also Eli Shiller and Menachem Levin, *ibid*, pp. 57-59, 108-112.



(L) 18. Karimeh Abbud, Karimeh Abbud, *Nazareth, the Walls of St. Mary's*, date unknown, courtesy of David Perlman

(R) 19. J. Tumaian, *photographer of the Royal Spanish Court, Studio adjacent to the New Gate, Jerusalem, Estab. 1907, Staged photographs and enlargements, photographs in native costume from Bethlehem and Ramallah, Bedouin (also in groups), pilgrim groups by order, 24 hour film and plate development, sale of films and plates of all companies. Native costumes are available for customers. Private Collection.*

This example illustrates that various Armenian photographers were also influenced by the 19th century European photographic tradition in its emphasis on local Orientalism.

Among the Armenian photographers active in Palestine in the 1930s, it is important to mention Elia Kahvedjian and Hrant Nakashian. Elia, born 1910 in Turkey, and a survivor of the Armenian genocide, immigrated to Jerusalem with the Armenian Near East Relief Association. He learned photography with Krikorian and Tumaian, and in 1924 began photoraphing in Jerusalem and around the country. Towards the late 1920s he began working for Hanania and in 1940 purchased his store. According to conversations I had with Elia's son, Kevork, and his grandson Eli Kahvedjian, the Armenians, although rooted in the local Palestinian society of the period and part of the local Palestinian community for centuries, consider themselves as neutral.²⁴ Kevork pointed out that his father lived among the Palestinian population yet did not consider himself politically committed to the fate of the country. In his photographs, as in life, he preferred not to take a stand. Yet his photographs have political implications, and his choice of what (or what not) to photograph opens-up another interpretation of his

²⁴ May 1998, September - December 1999.

political involvement. Elia mainly photographed the daily reality of the Palestinian inhabitants and their vibrant urban and rural life - games of chess (image 20), the water spring, the port in Jaffa, plowing, the Friday market, harvesting oranges, the baker, the carpenter - mostly in the area of Jerusalem, but from time to time he also photographed the old Jewish community in Jerusalem. While not photographing new Jewish settlements (a political decision?), his camera occasionally captured events describing the effects of the Arab/Palestinian struggle against the Jews (ransacked stores in Shama'a - the former Jewish shopping center or damaged Jewish vehicles by the roadside in Bab- Al-Wad, image 21, for example).



(L) 20 Elia Kahvedjian, *Playing Checkers*, 1935, Courtesy of Photo Elia
(R) 21. Elia Kahvedjian, Bab- Al-Wad, Courtesy of Photo Elia

Hrant Nakashian, born 1921 in Sebastia, West Armenia, followed his brother²⁵ to Jaffa in 1943 after graduating high school and studying to be a teacher in Cyprus. Like many other Armenians he linked his fate to the fate of the Palestinian people.²⁶ In 1945 he opened a photography studio *Photo Venus* in Jaffa on Jerusalem Avenue but in 1948 fled with Palestinian refugees to Jordan and from there to Gaza, where he settled. At first, he worked in the photography studio of his brother in Law Kegham in Gaza and later opened his own studio *Studio Hrant*. He began working for UNRWA and UNEF

²⁵ On arriving in Palestine in 1942, his brother opened a photography store in Jaffa. From talks with his son Saro Nakashian, in January, February 2000.

²⁶ Saro Nakashian claims they accepted the Armenians living alongside them out of a genuine understanding of their needs while allowing them freedom of religion (establishing churches, preserving Armenian tradition and more). Thus, Armenians consider themselves to this day as part of Palestinian society, identifying with them and their demands.

photographing the lives of refugees, their poverty and suffering (image 22), and in 1962 organised an exhibition exposing their distress (image 23). The exhibition travelled to Kuwait, Egypt, and New York (the UN building). In 1967 Nakashian moved to the Old city of Jerusalem, ceased photographing and began trading in antiquities. He died in 1991. All his Jaffa work from 1945 until 1948 disappeared in the war. As regards the nature of the photography (journalistic, documentary, direct, uncompromising), and subject matter (the people's suffering and misery, and the human focus to introduce a critical dimension), his photographs have an affinity with photographs focusing on human aspects, a worldwide trend seen in 1955 in the exhibition *The Family of Man*.²⁷



(L) 22 Hrant Nakashian, Refugees, Gaza, late 1940s, Courtesy of Saro Nakashian
(R) 23. Hrant Nakashian's exhibitin in Gaza (?), 1962, Courtesy of Saro Nakashian

Unlike Jewish archives that were usually preserved by the family or the establishment even in difficult conditions, many collections of Palestinian photographers were lost mainly due to wars or looting, and only a few remained intact. Some are held in various collections/places and much research is still needed. From *Rissas' Studio* (Rassas) in Jerusalem a group of works from the late 1940s are in the Haganah History Archive (images 24, 25). Ibrahim Rissas and his son Chalil Rissas (of Muslim origin) worked for

²⁷ Israeli photographers such as Boris Carmi (a Moscow native, born 1914, immigrated to Palestine in 1939 and in 1947 began photographing in a journalistic, independent and direct style) were also influenced by this trend.

many years in Jerusalem, and it is not known what happened to their archive, or whether the collection of photographs in Jewish hands reflects the entire work of *Rissas Studio*.²⁸ However, unlike Jewish photography that rarely describes the Jewish-Arab conflict, this group of photographs portrays mainly Palestinian fighters, their national struggle for the land and the results of that struggle - destroyed houses, booty taken from Jewish sources, convoys to Mt. Scopus that were attacked, burning of the Jewish commercial center in Jerusalem and more. In this regard the photographs are unique because although local Palestinian photography was essentially factual and direct documentary in contrast to enlisted Jewish photography full of pathos, only a few focused on the Jewish-Arab/Palestinian conflict and the national struggle and all it entailed. Chalil Rissas (1926-1974) who studied photography and worked with his father Ibrahim Rissas (1900-1970) - a photographer and owner of a photography store next to the Damascus Gate - began photographing at the age of 18. Until 1957 he photographed in the Jerusalem area mainly for *Associated Press* and also for *Al Hillal* the Egyptian newspaper, focusing on events, the news, and depicting the Palestinian struggle, work that required risk taking and going out into the field. He then travelled to Saudi Arabia, working there as a photographer. In 1967 he returned to Jerusalem and opened a photography store on A-Zahara street (an area with many photography stores).

²⁸ [My ongoing research shows that it was looted and in the following years additional parts of his archive were declassified, Sela, Rona, *Made Public – Palestinian Photographs in Military Archives in Israel*, 2009 (hereafter *Made Public*). The information about Rissas is from conversations with Waheeb Rissas, 17.4.1999 and 3.3.2000. Later on, I interviewed additional members of the family, and the new findings will be published in *لمعينة الجمهور - الفلسطينيون في الأرشيفات العسكرية الإسرائيلية*, 2018]



(L) 24 Studio Rissas (Khalil [Chalil] and Ibrahim Rassas), "The store from where these images were photographed and 'pilfered'", late 1940s, Courtesy of Rassas Family

(R) 25. Studio Rissas (Khalil [Chalil] and Ibrahim Rassas), "Palestinian Gangs", 1947-1948, Courtesy of Rassas Family

The photography of Ali Za'arur, another Muslim photographer in Palestine, was political and rooted in the heart of the national conflict. Za'arur was born in 1901 in Azaryia, east of Jerusalem, learned photography from Hanania²⁹ in the late 1920s and since then was active as a photographer.³⁰ In the early years Za'arur photographed mainly for the British (in Gaza 1942-1945), and in the mid 1940s, when he returned to Jerusalem until his death in 1972, worked as a news photographer for the news agency Associated Press. Although Za'arur photographed in the 1930s and 1940s mainly for British and foreign news agencies,³¹ it seems his (and Rissas) photography, unlike that of most Palestinian photographers, was created out of a personal political awareness and commitment. From 1942 and until the end of the Second World War he photographed in Gaza, and on his return to Jerusalem (and the sale of his store) worked mainly as an independent photographer, photographing subjects related to the physical struggle between the two peoples over the land. He sent the material to the main office of Associated Press in Beirut. His earlier material from the end of the 1940s is held by his son – "Al-Aqsa Mosque hit by a shell", "Patients evacuated by truck during the 1948 battles", "Arab refugees in an olive grove"(image 26), "Jewish captives in the Old City",

²⁹ Hanania's photography store was located on Jaffa Street, Jerusalem, adjacent to the studios of Raad, Savvides and Krikorian

³⁰ Information about Ali Za'arur from talks with his son Zaki Za'arur, East Jerusalem, November - December, 1999, February, 2000 [About Za'arur, Rissas and Nakashian see *Made Public*, *للمعينة الجمهور*].

³¹ Until 1948 he photographed also for local newspapers such as *Al-Difa*, a daily newspaper that operated during the Mandate and was closed in 1948. For additional information on Za'arur see Ami Steinitz, *ibid*.

"Attack on Ben Yehuda Street". Most of the photographs were shot at the end of the 1940s and aim to illustrate the Arab/Palestinian struggle for the land from the perspective of a press photographer.

In general, it can be said that Palestinian photography was a photography of individuals, not organized, and was expressed in various ways also in relation to the national issue. Until the late 1940s Palestinian photography was commercial, mainly by request (studio, family portraits), or on assignment for local or foreign photography agencies. Towards the end of the 1940s chiefly with the intensification of the conflict in 1948, individual photographers developed an awareness and political commitment, especially Rissas, Za'arur and Nakashian (even if operating independently) who focused on documenting the conflict between the two peoples from a Palestinian perspective. Photographers in Palestine from an earlier period recorded the realities of everyday life and their photographs as well as those documenting the conflict could have been used for Palestinian informational purposes, but this, as far is known, rarely occurred until many years later, and especially during the [first] Intifada.³² Other photographers were influenced by the Western colonialist perspective, and the interpretive role their photographs might have provided arouse various theories today. Since little research has been done on the history of Palestinian photography, the essay offers an initial interpretation and an invitation for further discussion.

³² [Palestinian photography was developed outside Palestine- In Jordan and Lebanon, since the late 1960s. see: Sela, Rona, "Seized in Beirut - The Plundered Archives of the Palestinian Cinema Institution", *Anthropology of The Middle East* 12 (2), 2017; [المُعَايِنَةُ الجُمهُور].



Ali Za'arur, *Palestinian Refugees in an Olive Grove*, 1948, courtesy of Zaki Zaa'rur

Appendix

Little is written on the history of Palestinian photography regarding mapping the works of photographers and their analysis in cultural and political contexts, and in relation to photographers who were active in Palestine. The essay attempts to shed light on the subject, but a great deal of research is still required. Among the photographers working in the Palestinian sector in the 1930s and 1940s, whose work needs to be researched are Muhammad Salah al Kylie (Jaffa),³³ Studio Al- Hambra (Ramallah), Studio Roxy (Ramallah), Boudir Photo, Khaleel Cadoura (Ramallah), Samaan Sahar, (Samaan Bros., Bethlehem), Basil Photo (Bethlehem) Shameeyah Bros (Bethlehem) and Mikel Brothers Studio (Bethlehem).³⁴

³³ Muhammad Salah Al-Kylie was born 1918 in Jaffa and studied photography in Paris and Belgium in the early 1930s. In 1935 he produced the film *Working Hands*. He then travelled to Italy to study film and in 1946 returned to Jaffa to film *Land of Peace*. In 1948 he was exiled to Libya and then Egypt. In the 1950s in Gaza he made the film *The People Rebel*. He died in Egypt in the 1960s. Unfortunately to this day I was not able to bring his films to Israel. About Al-Kylie see: Jaffa Research Center, 1991, *Jaffa* (published in Hebrew).

³⁴ Khaleel Cadoura is probably the first local photographer to work in Ramallah. His studio opened around 1935, see Naseeb Shaheen, "Introduction," *A Pictorial History of Ramallah*, Arab Institute of Research and Publishing, Al-Oloum Press, Beirut, 1992, p.7. A large group of photographers, whose work still has to be researched, were active in Bethlehem. Basil the father apparently began photographing at the end of 19th century - beginning of the 20th century and was joined by his son in the mid/end of the 1920s. Mikel photographed in the 1930s, mainly official events. Sahar and Shameeyah began photographing in the late 1940s probably first in Jerusalem and then in Bethlehem. Especially important is Sahar's work from the 1950s, documenting the daily life of the Palestinian inhabitants: schools, cultural institutes, sporting events,

Even in the few books published on Palestinian history that made a substantial use of photography such as the books *Before their Diaspora* and the *Long Journey*,³⁵ the photographs, in general, are not associated with the name of the photographer. Many of the photographers presented in the book were foreigners and not Palestinian. Issam Nassar, a Palestinian researcher from Ramallah dealing in 19th century Jerusalem photographs,³⁶ in his book also relates to foreign photographers working in Palestine, but does not refer to early Palestinian photography.

On the website of the *Institute for Palestinian Studies* currently being built in Beirut and called *Foundation Arabe Pour L'Image*, a massive collection of family photos from the Near East and Africa is being carried out, aimed at locating, collecting and preserving the region's photographic heritage.³⁷ Among other things, they established a Palestinian branch that collects local photographs to document the experience in Palestine from the 19th century onwards.



Hrant Nakashian, Refugees, Gaza, late 1940s, Courtesy of Saro Nakashian

conferences, portraits and the like. With thanks to Munir Santor for information about the photographers of Bethlehem.

³⁵ The book describes the life of the Palestinian refugees and UNWRA's operations from 1948 to 1995. *The Long Journey*, UNWRA, Austria, 1995.

³⁶ See Nassar, *ibid* [after that he started researching Palestinian Photography too as I show here. An exception is the book about Safieh published by Raffi Safieh with an introduction by Nassar. See footnote 6.]

³⁷ See www.fai.org.lb

