

Susan Silsby Boyle

BETRAYAL OF

PALESTINE

The Story of
George Antonius

Betrayal of Palestine



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Betrayal of Palestine: The Story of George Antonius

Susan Silsby Boyle

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To Neil

*We hold these truths to be self-evident,
that all men are created equal. . . .*

—The Unanimous Declaration of the
Thirteen United States of America, In Congress, 4 July 1776

Since we know memories will persist for a long time—we aim to acknowledge those memories. This is critical if we are to build a democracy of self-respecting citizens. As a victim of injustice and oppression, you lose your sense of worth as a person, your dignity. Restorative justice is focused on restoring the personhood that is damaged or lost. But restoring that sense of self means restoring memory—a recognition that what happened to you happened. You are not crazy. Something seriously evil happened to you. That acknowledgement is crucial if healing is to go on and the undercurrents of conflict are not to be left simmering, as they have been so many times in so many parts of the world.

—Archbishop Desmond Tutu
(in “The World Is Hungry for Goodness”)

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Preface

Biography is a wonderful way to learn history, because it makes stories personal, and historical events more accessible and less abstract. This book is about a unique individual who lived during a dramatic period of history and amid a challenge that remains unresolved: the Palestinian-Zionist conflict. Although this is a personal story, its writing was motivated by the desire to rediscover the meaning of Antonius's personal life in the public context, and not by any prurient interest in private affairs. It therefore focuses on the part of Antonius's life that is most closely intertwined with the Palestinian question: his public service. It retraces his work and his thought, his analyses of the problems of his day—particularly those pertaining to Palestine—and his recommendations for solving them. In so doing, it shows that the solutions have been there all along, in the people and traditions of the Middle East.

Antonius's portrait reveals a powerful mind that refused to sacrifice a world of faith and a traditional way of life, and that was at the same time very modern. Antonius was an Arab intellectual whose European education, transposed onto an Arab heritage, never stunted his ability to see the complex reality of his nation. He was brilliant, multilingual, curious, passionate, and above all, committed to leading a meaningful and moral life devoted to truth, justice, and the protection of the weak and vulnerable.

Antonius was not born a Palestinian. When he moved to Jerusalem in 1921—just a year after Greater Syria was split into two, with French forces occupying the north, and British forces in the southern portion, which was called Palestine—most residents of the territory did not yet identify themselves as Palestinians. Antonius had been born in the village of Dair al-Qamar, in the *Chouf* (mountains) of Lebanon, at the time a part of Greater Syria. Palestine was situated within the Fertile Triangle and was also a part of the Greater Syrian administrative division under the Ottoman Empire. Pre-World War I Palestine included three districts (*sanjaqs*)—Acre (corresponding to Galilee and Haifa), Nablus, and Jerusalem—and with the exception of Jerusalem (which reported directly to Ottoman authorities in Constantinople), was subsumed under the province of Beirut. Its territory was home to hundreds of villages and

towns with centuries-old histories and families that could trace their lineage back to the great civilizations and the early in-migrations from East and West. Before World War I, Palestinians identified themselves according to the area, town or village where they lived—for Haifa, Nablus, and other parts of Palestine had their own distinct characteristics, with their own prominent families and local leaders.¹ Despite the different factions and hierarchies, despite the competition and the inequality among the three districts, beneath the surface Antonius sensed a unity of language and culture, a shared sense of morality due to ancient faiths, and a common devotion to family that encompassed all of the Arab nation.

For Antonius, Palestine—separated from Syria—became a microcosm of the Arab national movement, which sought to sustain an authentic voice and integrity of language, custom, and culture amid great change and adaptation. Antonius arrived as an outsider. Some might never consider him Palestinian, for he was not born there; he had no local roots, family, or connections to the parochial world of elite notables. Still, he became rooted in Palestine, found meaning in it, and devoted himself as an Arab patriot to a world he knew was part of his own. For Palestine was in spirit and fact part of Antonius's Arab nation. Through his devotion and public service, he became a Palestinian, sacrificing his career to stand for principle, and preferring to abstain from membership in political parties and associations or organization that he saw as weakening the body social by serving as vehicles for petty personal and partisan disputes. He did not romanticize reality; by speaking plainly against an immature political reality of corrupt elections, factionalism, and self-centered leaders, he hoped to secure good governance for the public good and the good of the nation. He was perhaps best known as a public servant, open to the world yet discriminating and powerful in his perception of injustice and his demand for institutions and organizations that could empower and enable his nation. The simplicity of his words should not lead us to underestimate their import, for the message he shared was powerful and far ahead of its time. It is a message as compelling today as it was then.

Some have described Antonius as a bridge. He made it his mission to introduce his nation to the world that existed beyond the stereotypes of empire. He sought to facilitate a shift in cultural paradigms—from that of empire, rooted to a conqueror's code, to that of nation. The real culture clash was between a code that yielded to greed and ignorance, to plunder and abuse of power; and one that compelled restraint, common concern, and social conscience. The warrior code no longer compelled trust and legitimated leadership. The moral code of caring for family, community, and nation required new skills, different virtues, and the exercise of creativity, courage, faith, and intellect far more than sheer force. To Antonius, a culture that was hospitable, that elevated men to work hard and

care for their family and community, was far superior to any culture claiming superiority based on abstract symbols of wealth and power. Antonius remained aware of the elusive wealth of his society and nation, a wealth far beyond material assets; it was this underlying culture of morality and shared meaning that sustained his hope, despite the tragedies of a lifetime. His story is that of betrayal by empires and individuals—betrayal not only of promises made to Arabs but also of the universal moral code of fairness, justice, and truth. The struggle that ensued continues to this day, as an age-old conqueror's code battles an ancient web of culture and humanity in the Arab world that was then—and remains—very modern in its promotion of a moral community.

Notes

1. Salim Tamari, "Factionalism and Class Formation in Recent Palestinian History," in *Studies in the Economic and Social History of Palestine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Roger Owen (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), pp. 177–202.



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Acknowledgments

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For use of the Gilbert Clayton Papers and for permission to reproduce quotations from various letters and documents, I am indebted to the Sudan Archives of the University of Durham; and to the Middle East Center at St. Antony's College, Oxford for use of various collections including the papers of Humphrey Bowman, Sir John Chancellor, Thomas Hodgkin, Sir Miles Lampson, Harry St. John Philby, and Lionel Smith. My appreciation goes to the provost and scholars at King's College, Cambridge and to the Society of Authors (the literary representatives of the E. M. Forster Estate) for permission to quote from E. M. Forster correspondence. I also wish to thank the Richmond family for permission to quote from Ernest Richmond material. I thank Penguin U.K. for permission to quote from Antonius's book *The Arab Awakening*, and Oxford University Press for permission to quote from Arnold Toynbee's *Acquaintances*. For photographs I am indebted to *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876–1948*, by Walid Khalidi, Institute for Palestine Studies.

Some of my best insights into the person Antonius was, and what he was up against, came through personal meetings, interviews, and correspondence. I am indebted to Diana Vincent Forbes Sheean, Sir Harold Beeley, Sally Chilvers, Stewart Perowne, Sir John Richmond, Sir Hugh Mackintosh Foot, Edward Hodgkin, Albert Hourani, Stephen Nimr, Soraya Antonius, and Samuel and Lady Mary Clayton for the time they spent with me.

Many others have helped indirectly to shape my understanding of the subject: I am especially grateful to the seminal work by Carlton Hayes on nation and nationalism, and by Douglass North, Robert Putnam, and Kenneth Arrow on institutions, social capital, and the role of government in protecting that which cannot be priced. Ammiel Alcalay's *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture*; and Robert Ilbert, Ilios Yannakakis, and Jacques Hassoun's *Alexandrie, 1860–1960: Un modèle éphémère de convivialité: Communautés et identité cosmopolite*, devoted to Alexandria, are wonderfully compelling narratives that enhanced my understanding of Antonius. The early writing about George Antonius by Albert Hourani and Thomas Hodgkin was also especially insightful and helpful, as were the works on colonialism and empire by Partha Chatterjee and Eric Hobsbawm, and David Fromkin's *A Peace to End All Peace*.

I thank all whose comments and questions helped me probe further. For their much-appreciated contributions of reference and archival materials, and/or their critical comments and insights on various drafts, I especially thank Neil Boyle, Lawrence Davidson, the late Albert Hourani, Yusuf Ibish, Ibrahim Ibrahim, Tarif Khalidi, Roger Owen, Edward Said, Hisham Sharabi, Salim Tamari, Judith Tucker, and Albert Wight.

My efforts to supplement primary sources in English with Arabic-language sources—especially with personal correspondence between Antonius and his Arab friends and colleagues, as well as articles he might have written for the Arabic press—proved disappointing; the turmoil in the region during two world wars and protracted civil strife left few such remnants. Nevertheless, I thank those who assisted me in these attempts: George Irani, whom I employed for the last search; and many others who responded to my queries—at the Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee and at the Institute of Palestine Studies in Beirut and Washington, D.C., especially Mona Nsouli, and members of the al-Alami, Abd al-Hadi, Abd al-Shoman, Haidar, Hannano, Hussein, Jabiri, Kayyali, Khalidi, Mardam, Nashashibi, Sleiman, and Sohl families.

I am deeply grateful to Nahed Wasfi, Fulbright scholar at UCLA (2000) and assistant professor in linguistics and translation at al-Azhar University, for her generous assistance in correlating the meanings of English words used by Antonius with Arabic equivalents.

The complexities of working with sources in several languages—and with various styles of transliteration—were many. I thank my readers, past, present, and future, for their tolerance of the resultant inconsistencies in the spelling of Arabic words and names; for although I have done my best to standardize them, variations inevitably remain.

For their help in bringing this book to publication, I am grateful to Westview Press—especially to Barbara Greer for overseeing the entire production, to Rebecca Ritke for her masterful editing, and to Karl Yam-

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Most of all, I thank my parents for their example, and my mother, for her steadfast support; my husband, for a love that emboldens and for being so much a part of this journey; and finally, our two wonderful daughters, for the great joy and laughter that balanced the telling of this tale.



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Author's Note on Transliteration

The transliteration of Arabic words into English in this book was guided by common usage and omits diacritical marks. Arabic name spellings vary due to my use of multiple sources in different languages and my desire to respect quoted materials.



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Chronology of Events in the Life of George Antonius (1891–1942)

- October 19, 1891—Born in Dair al-Qamar, Lebanon
- 1902–1910—Victoria College, Alexandria
- 1910–1913—King’s College, Cambridge University
- 1914—Public Works Department, Egypt, until the outbreak of war
- 1914–1916—Press censor with Egyptian Expeditionary Force
- 1915–1916—McMahon-Hussein correspondence: British pledge of support for Arab national goal of independence from Ottoman Empire
- 1916—Arab military revolt against Ottoman forces contributes substantially to British/Allied campaign
- 1917—Antonius is promoted to deputy press censor
- November 2, 1917—Balfour Declaration: letter from A. J. Balfour, then British secretary of state for foreign affairs, to Lord Rothschild, expressing the government’s support for a Jewish national home in Palestine
- 1918—Antonius attempts (unsuccessfully) to enter public service in Palestine; his brother dies in flu epidemic
- June 28, 1919—Treaty of Versailles is signed, including Articles of Covenant of the League of Nations, with implicit promise of Palestinian self-determination
- April 25, 1920—European representatives gather in San Remo; the supreme council of the Peace Conference gives Britain the mandate for Palestine
- 1920—France crushes resistance in Syria and assumes the mandate in Syria and Lebanon; demonstrations take place against European actions throughout Syria
- 1919, 1920, 1921—Antonius takes periodic leave; meets up with Faisal’s team in Europe, keeping in close, daily contact with Haidar; and begins to establish a reputation in western Europe, particularly in England, where he lectures before a parliamentary group interested in Middle Eastern affairs
- 1921—Winston Churchill goes to Cairo and Transjordan and enthrones Faisal and Abdullah in Iraq and Transjordan, respectively

- 1921—Antonius is appointed senior inspector of education, with the Department of Education in Palestine
- 1923, 1924, and 1926—Acting director of education
- 1923–1925—Works on Commission for Local Government and Education; drafts preliminary reports and final report, with recommendations for reforms; finds “loss of confidence” from British high commissioner
- 1925–1927—Participates in missions with Sir Gilbert Clayton for territorial boundary negotiations in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Transjordan; seeks long-delayed promotion
- 1927—Transferred under protest from the Department of Education to the Secretariat
- 1927—Receives award as commander of the British Empire
- 1929—Disturbances occur in Palestine
- 1930—Antonius resigns from British mandatory government, accepts work at the Institute of Current World Affairs (ICWA); is hopeful about commissions investigating the 1929 disturbances and the land and immigration issue
- October 30, 1930—The John Hope-Simpson Report and the White Paper are published with the aim of aiding the Palestinian cause
- February 14, 1931—Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald sends a letter to Zionist representative Chaim Weizmann, repudiating the White Paper of 1930; Palestinians call it the “Black Letter”
- 1931—Antonius’s father, Habib, dies; with the White Paper overturned, Palestinians feel the British have capitulated to the Zionists; Antonius becomes informal adviser to the British high commissioner and others concerning local problems and the need for representative government; begins active schedule of writing, lecturing, and preparing a book for publication, to inform officials and public about events and realities in Palestine and the region
- 1932–1933—Major Jewish immigration; Antonius sees shift in public opinion from anti-Zionist to anti-British; landlessness and lack of representation continue
- 1935—Antonius lectures in the United States and Canada and warns of Palestinian revolt; gets favorable feedback on first draft chapters of book
- 1936–1937—Continues to write his book; witnesses Palestine Revolt; participates in the Peel Commission; criticizes the partition plan
- 1938—Completes book in Egypt and arranges for first publication with Hamish Hamilton, London; travels to United States for lectures; sees degenerating conditions in Palestine leading to violence

- 1939—Participates in St. James's Palace Conference on Palestine; with the outbreak of war, Palestinian hopes are dashed; Charles Crane, his friend and patron, dies
- 1940—Tries to adjust to force majeure; collects materials about the current war and Arab public opinion on it; having agreed to a divorce from his wife, relocates to Beirut but travels frequently to Egypt and Palestine; begins to have trouble with ICWA over lack of regular reports
- 1941—Visits Iraq; returns ill to Beirut two weeks before Iraq Revolt, and spends summer in hospital during Allied campaign in Syria; saved from Vichy French imprisonment by U.S. Consul in Beirut
- 1942—Dies unexpectedly



Portrait of George Antonius. SOURCE: Reprinted with permission from Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876–1948, by Walid Khalidi, Institute of Palestine Studies.

1

Facing the Truth, 1939

History matters. It matters not just because we can learn from the past, but because the present and the future are connected to the past by the continuity of society's institutions. Today's and tomorrow's choices are shaped by the past. And the past can only be made intelligible as a story of institutional evolution.

—*Douglass North, Institutions,
Institutional Change and Economic Performance*

The Arab Awakening and the St. James's Palace Conference

In February 1939, Arabs and Palestine's British overlords gathered behind closed doors in London's St. James's Palace to decide the fate of the troubled land. The Arab side was led by 48-year-old George Antonius, whose highly acclaimed book, *The Arab Awakening*, published the previous year, offered conclusive proof that the British had promised Palestinians an independence in exchange for an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire in World War I.

This was one of the high points in Antonius's life: After nearly 20 years of Palestinian anguish, he was helping bring his people's story to a broader public and was at last confronting the British government with its pledges to support Arab independence and self-rule. Antonius was not alone in pushing Britain to relinquish its colonial grip on Palestine and to cease implementing Zionist policy there. The unrelenting Palestinian resistance pressed home the unsustainability of British policy at a time when the ominous signs of war in Europe were demanding a shift of British military forces from Palestine to the home front. By 1939, according to historian Albert Hourani, the British government seemed to have abandoned its earlier partition plan and to be moving toward a different solution.¹ The timing of the book's publication must have heart-

ened Antonius, as it gave his ideas an opportunity for influence in the months leading up to the conference on Palestine that would take place in February 1939 at St. James's Palace. Antonius led the Palestinian and Arab delegation to this conference, and his book was the focal point of the first official hearing ever given to British wartime promises to support Palestinian independence. An erudite speaker of unyielding principle, Antonius dominated the conference, serving in several capacities and unceasingly championing Palestinian independence.² He stood his ground, refusing to compromise the fundamental democratic principles of majority rule and of "one man, one vote." He had the courage to hold the British government accountable to universal standards and democratic values for the good of civil society and toward a more inclusive diversity.

Officials, academics, and critics throughout the Arab world, in England, and in the United States praised *The Arab Awakening*. It was recognized as an outstanding historical work, masterfully written and with a grasp of psychological dimensions and political dynamics rarely found in analyses of the Middle East. It was regarded as significant and original for its unprecedented research into the Arab National Movement and its comprehensive analysis of British wartime pledges to the Arabs. Through painstaking research Antonius had unearthed documents the existence of which the British had long denied, which helped greatly to clarify the incomplete and confused story of British dealings in and about Palestine. Antonius's book was regarded not solely as a historical work destined to become a classic among scholars but also as a critical and timely piece on postwar events for diplomats and the public at large. The U.S. consul general in Jerusalem, George Wadsworth, and the principal U.S. diplomats in Cairo and Baghdad considered it the epitome of "all that is known about the Arab World"; consuls general ordered additional copies, and newly arrived American diplomats were told, "If you read the book of Antonius you will need nothing more to guide you in your work in the Near East."³

More than half a century after its publication, the book remains a classic in the history of the modern Middle East. A number of academic historians have explored in depth Antonius's historical interpretations. As Hourani noted, Antonius and Arnold Toynbee were the only two historians during the interwar period who transcended the conventional colonialist interpretation of subject peoples.⁴ Paul Monroe, professor of history at Columbia University, found Antonius's story "so fair and convincing," that "I believe it to be very important for the American public to get the straight of this discussion." He continued, "We are so moved now by injustice done the Jews that we are apt to overlook the injustice which may be done and is being done to the Arabs in their own land."⁵

Harry Snyder, executive board member of American Friends of the Arabs, gave this resounding endorsement to the book:

To Christians of the Western world this book may be disquieting in its revelations but refreshing nevertheless. To Jews it may provide for the first time an appreciation of the reasons why the Arab strives so desperately to preserve his homeland. To students of Near Eastern affairs this is an indispensable volume. . . . To all readers this is a brilliantly presented story of a neglected aspect of world history. This is truly a masterpiece from the pen of one who has had no small part in the renaissance that is sweeping the Arab world.⁶

British officials hastened to purchase the book in order to study the little-known and hitherto unpublished documents pertaining to Palestinian claims to independence. One internal memorandum noted, “[Antonius’s] views and arguments will no doubt figure prominently in any exposition of the legal case which Arab delegates may put forward.”⁷ Because of the documents and the force of Antonius’s analysis and arguments, British officials in the foreign and colonial offices were forced to restructure entirely their arguments for the denial of Palestinian independence.

Britain previously had claimed that Palestine was excluded from the British pledge of Arab independence that Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner in Egypt, had communicated to Sherif Hussein ibn Ali, the emir of Mecca and guardian of Moslem holy places, on October 24, 1915. Antonius noted that although the pledge contained no explicit reference to Palestine, the only areas of Greater Syria specifically excluded from the pledge were “portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo”—all of which were north of Palestine.⁸ As Palestine did not lie west of those districts, it was within the territory promised independence. The British government claimed that Palestine was excluded by implication because the phrase *district of Damascus* referred to the *vilayet* (province) of Syria, a large administrative unit that in the British interpretation included Palestine.⁹ This southwest portion of territory was to be reserved for France. Antonius refuted the government’s claim, arguing that the phrase used in McMahon’s pledge was never intended to refer to the whole province of Syria but simply referred to the town of Damascus and its immediate vicinity. A. L. Tibawi notes that some of the British, including Gilbert Clayton, director of British intelligence in Cairo and architect of the British pledges to Hussein, included Palestine in the pledge of independence and that McMahon recopied Clayton’s phrase, inserting the word *district*, which was erroneously translated to *wilaya*, the word on which the British government later based its case that the reference to Damascus

meant the province of Syria. Although the Arabic word *wilaya* and the Turkish derivative *vilayet* referred to a province under the Ottoman system of administration, Antonius grasped the misuse of the term *wilaya* in McMahon's pledge and argued that since there were, in fact, no provinces of Damascus, Homs, or Hama, the terms used referred to the district in general, meaning the town and its immediate vicinity.¹⁰ Toynbee, who as a British officer had attended the postwar peace conference in Paris, had long agreed with Antonius, noting as early as 1922:

Two points deserve notice. In the first place, no Zionist claim to Palestine was yet in question, and the formula agreed upon arose purely out of a conflict between Arab claims and those of France in Syria. In the second place, while Palestine was not mentioned by name, any more than were Syria, Hejaz, Yemen or other individual provinces, it was included in the boundaries of the area laid down by Hussein . . . and was therefore included in the British promise, unless otherwise excepted. . . . The upshot is that Palestine was not excepted from the area in which the British government promised in 1915 to recognize and uphold Arab independence, and that the Balfour Declaration of 1917 was therefore incompatible with a previous commitment.¹¹

Antonius's arguments forced the British to recognize that the argument "upon which Winston Churchill relied in the White Paper of 1922 and which has been the main plank of the British case until now" was untenable.¹² Lord Chancellor Maugham found it "straw," and Malcolm MacDonald, secretary of state for the colonies, considered it "tricky"—two adjectives that H. L. Baggallay, first secretary of the Foreign Office, regarded as "thoroughly deserved."¹³ Thus, in preparation for the conference, British officials formulated counterarguments to renewed claims for Palestinian independence that they knew Antonius and his book would provoke.

The Arab Delegation

After completing the manuscript of *The Arab Awakening* during summer 1938 in Egypt, Antonius traveled to England in September, met with his publisher, and began the grinding task of proofreading the galleys. By November 21, 1938, assured of the book's publication before year's end, Antonius sailed for the United States to meet with his American publisher and officials such as Rives Childs of the U.S. Department of State's Near East Division, and to present several lectures, including one with Rabbi Judah Magnes, an early critic of political Zionism, in Cambridge, Massachusetts.¹⁴

Invitations to the St. James's Palace conference were sent to Arab delegates from Palestine and to Arab representatives from Iraq, Egypt, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. In early January 1939, former members of the Arab Higher Committee, a multiparty committee formed on April 26, 1936 to coordinate the Palestine Revolt, and other Palestinians in exile or recently released from detention in the Seychelles, gathered in the mufti's home in Jounieh, near Beirut,¹⁵ to discuss the conference and nominate their representatives: Jamal Husseini, Awni Abd al-Hadi, Musa Alami, Hussein Khalidi, Amin Tamimi, Alfred Roch, and Antonius, the last of whom was also elected secretary of the Palestine delegation. Palestinian and Arab delegates then assembled in Egypt to agree on fundamentals before departing for London. Musa Alami, a close friend of Antonius's and a former lawyer in the mandatory government, sent an urgent telegram to New York to inform Antonius of his unanimous election and to urge him to hasten to London.¹⁶

Since Antonius's arrival in New York, he had been giving lectures on problems in the Arab world and the likelihood of conflict arising over Italy's actions in the Mediterranean. On receiving Alami's telegram, Antonius canceled his remaining lectures and meetings and embarked on the first ship bound for England. Antonius had aimed for autumn 1938 publication of his book, to coincide with the possible conference on Palestine.¹⁷ At this point, however, he was uncertain of the purpose of the conference and unsure whether the invitation he received would "offer the scope and opportunity for constructive work in the interest of all parties concerned."¹⁸ On January 28, the day after his arrival in London, he called on officials in the Colonial Office to learn about the details.

During these meetings, Antonius discovered that British officials had attempted to contact him during his ocean voyage because they wanted him to assume the role of secretary-general of the united Arab delegations. This appointment included "the important and somewhat onerous duties of coordinating their work, acting as a channel between them and the United Kingdom delegation, and eventually [taking charge] of the custody of the archives, with all that would mean of translation to and from one language into the other."¹⁹ Given his professional background and his formidable grasp of the issues, Antonius was a natural choice for the leadership role: In many ways, his whole life had prepared him for the task. Yet Antonius seems to have doubted his own qualifications. When his friend Prime Minister Nuri Said, Iraq's chief delegate to the conference, arrived in London with the other Arab delegates on January 29, Antonius suggested that he might "perhaps render [himself] just as useful in an advisory capacity." Said encouraged him to proceed, stating that "this was an opportunity to do a useful piece of work and that [Antonius] could not under any circumstances decline the invitation, which

the Arab states backed by the British government wished [him] to accept."²⁰ Another friend, Egyptian delegate Ali Maher, and other Arab delegates who met in Amir Faisal's suite that evening dispelled Antonius's remaining doubts by expressing their unanimous support for his appointment.²¹ Empowered by their trust, Antonius spent the week before the conference "hastily improving the organization of the secretariat," meeting and discussing the issues with other delegates, and drafting the opening statements to be presented by Jamal Husseini and other heads of the Arab delegations.²²

After a week of work, Antonius's participation as member of the Palestine Arab delegation was temporarily thrown into question with the belated arrival of Raghīb Nashashibi and his Palestinian colleagues from the National Defense Party, who were bitter opponents of Mufti Haj Amin Husseini.²³ After the conference was formally opened at St. James's Palace in London, Nashashibi tried to change the composition of the Palestine delegation. As the mufti had approved all the members, Nashashibi first sought to gain an equal number of seats for his group. Failing this, he tried at least to replace Antonius and Musa Alami, Palestinian lawyer and mandatory government official, because they had never been members of the Arab Higher Committee.²⁴ After a day of discussions with British Secretary of State for the Colonies Malcolm MacDonald and with Said, Nashashibi agreed to accept two seats for his party; he realized that he could not obtain more without splitting the ranks, and that such a scenario could weaken Palestine's case.

Antonius had always given priority to Arab unity both in terms of the Arab national movement as a whole and with regard to particular efforts such as the Egyptian or Syrian negotiations for new treaties with Britain or France or the work of the All-Muslim Congress in Jerusalem. He recognized the importance of unity for the realization of Palestinian aspirations and had struggled during the 1930s to persuade the Arabs to forge a front transcending political differences and personal feuds. Antonius believed the British roadblocks to Palestinian independence were surmountable through Arab unity and by virtue of the moral weight of Palestine's arguments for democratic self-governance. The Palestinian claim for independence and self-governance was the same as that of the Arab nation as a whole. Convinced of the need for unity, Antonius devoted himself to forging consensus through meetings and telephone calls before and during the conference.

When the conference opened on February 9, Antonius's hard work paid off in the clear and compelling opening statements presented by Said of Iraq, Amir Faisal of Saudi Arabia, Taufiq Pasha Abd al-Huda of Transjordan, and Prince Saif al-Din of Yemen. During the first week of Anglo-Arab meetings, Arab presentations buttressed the Palestinian del-

egation's demands articulated by Jamal Husseini. These demands, which served as the platform for all further discussions, included the cessation of Jewish immigration and land purchases, termination of the mandate, and the creation of an independent Palestinian state possessing treaty relations with Britain comparable to Iraq's. The demands themselves were not new; but what was novel was that all of the heads of delegations not only supported them but also defended them by reference to Britain's pledges during World War I, which Antonius had so thoroughly investigated and made public in his book.²⁵

Working feverishly behind the scenes—even from his hotel bed, after he fell ill (most likely from ulcers, though it may also have been cancer)—Antonius played a decisive role in the plenary sessions. On February 10, the day after Jamal Husseini's opening remarks, Antonius took on MacDonald, criticizing him for his denial of the Palestinian claim to independence. As this claim was bound to be raised throughout the conference, he advised that the question be taken seriously through an investigation of past British pledges. On the following day, Antonius's physical stamina ebbed. Although he was too ill to get out of bed, he continued to dictate messages and to hold telephone conversations and meetings. On February 15, the fifth day of the conference, despite his illness Antonius attended the plenary session and heard MacDonald announce that the British government agreed to establish a special committee to investigate the Hussein-McMahon correspondence of 1915–1916.²⁶ For Antonius, this review was central to the resolution of the Palestine problem. "Until the fullest light is thrown on [the real nature and extent of Britain's commitments] and the significant facts are brought into their true perspective it is idle to hope for a return to sanity."²⁷ For the British, facing the truth that promises had been made to their Arab allies during the war and that Britain had broken its promise to support Arab, including Palestinian, independence after the war was most unsettling. Antonius countered MacDonald's subsequent attempt to belittle the proposed investigation as simply "an honest difference of opinion."²⁸ "The difference," Antonius stated on February 15, is "not one of points of view, but of fact." And were they to engage in serious study of these facts, Antonius told MacDonald, "there could be no room for difference of opinion."²⁹

The Examination of British Promises and Pledges

Despite his illness, Antonius led the Arab side in the investigation of British promises. He prepared statements and memoranda and worked with Baggallay to draft the final report.³⁰ On February 23, Antonius opened his analysis of British pledges with a rebuttal of the newly formulated British argument that Palestine was excluded from independence

because it was deemed to have been among the territories reserved for France in 1915. Although he made various points supporting his refutation of the British claim, Antonius concentrated on one: the strategic significance of Palestine, which would have precluded British support for French control. Palestine had been determined to be of indispensable political and strategic importance to British imperial interests before 1915. As British policy determined the content of British pledges in 1915, Antonius argued, Britain never intended to allow Palestine to fall within the French sphere of influence.³¹

Antonius then turned to an analysis of the Hussein-McMahon correspondence. He argued that Palestine had not been part of the area McMahon excluded from the British pledges of independence, and that it was never intended to be included in the territory McMahon listed as part of the French sphere of interest in his letters to Sheriff Hussein. Antonius told the committee that after he had corrected a misleading British translation of McMahon's December 13, 1915 letter to Hussein and had studied McMahon's letters of November 5, 1915 and of January 1, 1916, it was evident that when referring to the area of French interest McMahon meant the area to the north of Palestine—the *vilayets* of Aleppo and Beirut and their maritime coasts. In McMahon's letter of January 1, 1916, for example, the only regions reserved for France were "the northern parts and their coastal regions" and "Beirut and its coastal regions, which we will overlook for the moment on account of France."³² Palestine was not a territory reserved for France and excluded from the British pledge, because "had [McMahon] had Palestine in mind, he would certainly have added 'and the *Sanjaq* [district] of Jerusalem."³³

However, even if Palestine at one time had been reserved for France, Antonius emphasized, Palestine was not included in the territory turned over to France after the war. Thus, Antonius said, Palestine "must, in default of any specific agreement to the contrary, necessarily remain within the area of Arab independence proposed by the sheriff and accepted by Great Britain."³⁴ Although the delegate chairing this meeting, Lord High Chancellor Maugham, was unwilling to concede this point, Baggallay and other British legal experts, including the attorney general, agreed with Antonius: Britain's pledge to respect a French sphere of interest meant that "His Majesty's government would carry out their promises to the Arabs in any territory in which French claims were found not to have prevailed when a final territorial settlement had been reached."³⁵

Following Antonius's initial rebuttal, the British tried a different tack on February 23. Maugham argued that since Palestine was of such strategic value to the British Empire, Britain would never have pledged to support its independence. In this Maugham might have been close to the truth—at least as it was reflected by the prevailing sentiment in White-

hall and the corridors of the Colonial Office in London. Maugham also suggested that Britain had an altruistic motive for withholding Palestinian independence: the need—presumably, for the British—to safeguard Christian holy places as well as the ports and other British interests. Antonius challenged Maugham's reference to security needs. The former British Supreme Court Justice in Palestine, Sir Michael McDonnell, who was serving as legal adviser to the Arabs during the conference, remarked that the British case was so weak that Maugham was resorting to tenuous circumstantial evidence and unsupported, absolutist statements. Indeed, McDonnell noted that there was no argument in simply saying, as Maugham did, that "it was 'inconceivable' that [Britain] intended to include Palestine [in territory promised independence] and that it must have been 'regarded as automatically and obviously excluded.'" The issue was not a matter of who conceived or did not conceive, and what some might believe or not, but rather of what McMahon's texts specifically stated. There was no ambiguity in them, and the British had no case. As McDonnell put it, "It is not legitimate to consider any surrounding circumstances to modify" the McMahon pledge supporting Palestine's independence.³⁶

In addition to the McMahon pledge, Antonius also resurrected and discussed two largely forgotten messages: the January 1918 message of David Hogarth, one of the heads of the Arab Bureau in Cairo, and the Foreign Office's June 16, 1918 statement of British policy entitled "Declaration to the Seven."³⁷ These were two of the clearest articulations of British support for Palestine's cause. Hogarth's message to Sheriff Hussein assured him that political and economic freedom would be guaranteed to the Arab population in Palestine. British officials discovered that the Hogarth message could not be denied, as it was based on instructions that leading British Middle East policy makers—Sir Mark Sykes, Lord Hardinge, and Lord Robert Cecil—gave Hogarth.³⁸

But Antonius considered the Declaration to the Seven the most important and least known of all Britain's policy statements on Arab independence. This was a message from the Foreign Office, delivered to Army headquarters in Egypt on June 16, 1918 by a senior member of the British intelligence service in Egypt, addressed to seven prominent Arab leaders. The message was penned shortly after the Balfour Declaration had been issued and details of the Sykes-Picot agreement had been revealed by the Russians. Antonius considered the declaration a critically significant and possibly even more decisive pledge than McMahon's, for it expressed Britain's official promise to support the principles of self-determination and of rule through consent of the governed without any territorial reservation. In Antonius's opinion, "Its significance lies in this, that it confirms England's previous pledges to the Arabs in plainer language than in any

former public utterance, and, more valuable still, provides an authoritative enunciation of the principles on which those pledges rested."³⁹ Promises clearly had been made that had yet to be honored.

The Foreign Office, in a confidential February 21 memorandum, found the revelation of these "promises made to the Arabs with regard to Palestine" to be "obviously embarrassing," as "in all essentials Mr. Antonius's assertion is perfectly correct."⁴⁰ The author of the memorandum did not "see that they can be explained away any more than any of the rest of the declarations made regarding Palestine in the year during and immediately after the war."⁴¹

The Anglo-Arab Meetings and Proposals

Throughout February, during his participation in the conference, Antonius also managed the Arab Center and continued his numerous informal meetings with Arab delegates and British officials. He was kept well informed of the informal and confidential meetings among Arab delegates, MacDonald, and Zionist representatives. Antonius did not attend these meetings himself because he, like others, understood that Zionists opposed Palestinian independence and self-governance.⁴² A few Arab delegates—notably, the Egyptians—tried but failed to persuade the Zionist representatives to scale down their ambitions and reduce their demands, principally regarding Jewish immigration into Palestine.

On February 16, after the Arab statements had been presented, the conference focused on Palestinian independence and constitutional development. In light of all that had transpired, MacDonald conceded the Palestinian case, stating that Britain recognized Palestine's right to independence and did not support the creation of a Jewish state. But he added a qualification: Britain wanted to consult with the United States and the League of Nations before finalizing its offer of independence. Antonius countered that Britain's decision should be made on the merits of the case rather than on political grounds connected with the positions of others.⁴³

Antonius was also concerned by MacDonald's remark that independence could only be granted to Palestine after a transitional period under a form of government comparable to India's system of parity. Parity, which theoretically promoted equality by placing pre-civil group formations on a par (as in the case of Muslim-Hindu representation in India under British rule), actually retarded nation building and democratic governance by denying the equality of individuals as citizens with a common civil and social goal of nation building. For Antonius there was no alternative to democracy. He had seen the damage done by confessionalism, with French preferential treatment of Christians in Lebanon

and discrimination against others in Greater Syria. Parity was a divisive tool that did not encourage people to transcend their differences and create a civil society of shared meaning based on a democratic system of governance in the public interest.⁴⁴ MacDonald had little ammunition with which to defend the parity scheme, for the notion that there should be “no domination by sheer voting power” flouted the fundamental democratic principle of majority rule.

Zionists who had been meeting informally with British and Arab representatives during the conference were concerned about sustaining their original goal of blocking democratic, representative government. They simply could “not accept the idea of an Arab majority voice in the government,” because majority rule would have blocked unpopular pro-Zionist policies supporting immigration and land acquisition.⁴⁵

Having witnessed the denial of majority rule for nearly two decades, Antonius tried to explain to MacDonald that his proposal reflected “misguided sympathy.”⁴⁶ Antonius believed that parity was a dangerous political tool that tended to impede the institutionalization of fundamental democratic principles, values, and attitudes protective of the rights of individuals over those of groups and to hinder the creation of a civil society. It was a shallow and dangerous mechanism that ran counter to the fundamental universal value and principle of “one man, one vote,” and it offered no institutional safeguards for civil society. Fears about Jewish minority status were inappropriate in Palestine, where—as Jamal Husseini and all the Arab delegates agreed—safeguards would be introduced to protect minority rights. Most importantly, parity was anachronistic at a time when the world had conceded that “it was right, proper and universal that the voice of the majority in any country should be the predominant voice, without any suggestion of undue domination by one side or another.”⁴⁷

Antonius agreed with Husseini and Khalidi that the constitutional proposal tendered by MacDonald was unacceptable also because it contradicted the League of Nations mandate of 1922, under which Britain was charged with facilitating Palestinian self-rule. It was particularly inappropriate because it was modeled after a system of government devised for the “Crown Colony of India.”⁴⁸ In concluding the meeting, Antonius suggested that the delegates should shift their attention from the realm of theory to a more constructive discussion of safeguards both for Jewish minority rights and for the development of a democratic system of government.

Again attempting to deflect Antonius’s promotion of democracy in Palestine, MacDonald opened the next session with a brief review of his proposal for parity and then shifted the discussion to other issues. Antonius would not let him get away with this, and brought him back to the