

<b>Institution:</b> Edge Hill University
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 30 - History
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Enhancing public understanding of the origins of the Israel-Palestine conflict by extending the range and improving the quality of argumentation and evidence in public discourse.</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> Renton used his research on the origins of the Israel-Palestine conflict to enhance public understanding by extending the quality and range of evidence and argumentation in public discourse on a major issue of historical importance with present day consequences. This was achieved through a range of collaborations, media, engagement with public campaigns, and synergies with the international news cycle.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> In August 2007 Renton was appointed as a Senior Lecturer in History at Edge Hill University, where he is now a Reader. He was employed continuously throughout the assessment period. Renton has focused a significant part of his research on the British Empire's contribution to the origins of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The underpinning research – undertaken since 2008 - dealt with two separate aspects of this question: the political framework and aims of British rule in Palestine, from 1917 to 1948; and the impact of the British administration on the political aspirations of Palestinians and Zionists.</p> <p>The first issue was explored in the book chapter 'Flawed Foundations: The Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate'. The terms of Britain's League of Nations Mandate for ruling Palestine were based on the Balfour Declaration, the British Government's promise in November 1917 to facilitate the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people. Based on extensive research in the UK and Israel, 'Flawed Foundations' was the first published research to show systematically that the Declaration did not promise the creation of a Jewish State, and that the Government did not, in fact, define its meaning or expected outcome. The declared aim of British rule in Palestine, Renton argues, thus had no real meaning, and there was no planned endgame for Palestine. Indeed, the British intended to remain for the foreseeable future, due to Palestine's strategic importance. Their policy was based on a series of incorrect assumptions: that the Palestinian Arabs were not a national community and would eventually accept Zionism, that Zionist leaders did not want a state, and that both groups could be controlled by effective colonial rule. British policy was thus fundamentally flawed, and the policy vacuum on the future of Palestine greatly exacerbated the conflict.</p> <p>The second issue—the British Government's impact on the political aspirations of Palestinians and Zionists— was addressed by Renton in an article 'The Age of Nationality and the Origins of the Zionist-Palestinian Conflict' published in the journal <i>The International History Review</i>. This piece broke new ground with an entirely new interpretation of the origins of the conflict, based on research in the UK and Israel. For the first time, the article argues that the conflict for national sovereignty in Israel-Palestine began in 1918 as a result of British propaganda among Palestinians and Jews in the Holy Land. The wider transformation in world politics during the Great War, away from imperialism to the principle of self-determination, prompted the British to justify their rule in Palestine via the cause of national freedom. Renton contends that the British promotion of the idea of national liberty among both Zionists and Palestinians led to a new expectation of national independence among both communities, and a conflict between two statist nationalist movements. British policy, and its unforeseen consequences, derived from profound miscalculations by British policy-makers regarding the aspirations of Zionists and Palestinians.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b> <b>Chapter in Book:</b> Renton, J. (2010) 'Flawed Foundations: The Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate', in R. Miller, ed., <i>Britain, Palestine and Empire: The Mandate Years</i> (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 15-37. <b>Journal Article:</b> Renton, J. (2013) 'The Age of Nationality and the Origins of the Zionist-Palestinian Conflict', <i>The International History Review</i>, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2013), pp. 576-599. DOI:10.1080/07075332.2013.795495 Both outputs above are listed in REF 2 and are available on request. They meet the threshold of 2* quality in originality, significance and rigour. As explained in section 2, 'Flawed Foundations' constitutes a significant advance in the scholarship on the meaning of the Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate, based on wide-ranging, original archival research in Israel and the UK. In</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

the leading journal *Middle Eastern Studies* (Vol. 47, No. 4, 2011), Dr Saul Kelly, King's College London, praised its 'controversial but much-needed reassessment of the Balfour Declaration'. In *H-Diplo* (Feb. 2011), Professor Janice J. Terry, Eastern Michigan University, wrote that Renton 'offers a highly nuanced analysis'. The article published in *The International History Review* (IHR) is a significant piece of research that provides a new explanation of the origins of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, and is based on extensive research in Israel and the UK. The article was subject to a rigorous peer-review process at IHR, which is one of the preeminent journals on the history of international relations. The article was an outcome of a research project on the post-Ottoman Middle East for which Renton was awarded a prestigious Early Career Research Fellowship by the Arts and Humanities Research Council: 'The Middle East: The Rise and Fall of an Idea', £37,654, awarded Feb.-July 2012.

#### 4. Details of the impact

Renton's impact activity enhanced public understanding of the origins of the Israel-Palestine conflict. This was achieved by extending the range and improving the quality of argument and evidence on this major issue in public discourse. He developed a variety of media and organisational collaborations, engaged with public campaigns, and drew on synergies with the international news cycle to engage local and international audiences in order to maximise the reach and significance of impact. The beneficiaries of the impact consisted of those who commissioned and/or collaborated with Renton, including press commissioning editors, television producers, organisers in societies and campaign groups, and an artist, and those who consumed and were affected by the end product of these research-based collaborations.

In early 2010, Renton began a collaboration with the online political magazine *openDemocracy*, (OD) with a piece 'Forgotten Lessons: Palestine and the British Empire' (19/3/10) published in the section *openSecurity* (Other Source 1, Section 5), which drew on the article 'Flawed Foundations'. It provided the readership with significant new argumentation and evidence about the part played by the British Government in the evolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict, with an emphasis on the policy vacuum at the heart of the Mandate and their mistaken assumptions about Zionism and the Palestinians. 3,897 people read the piece, which became the fifth most viewed article in *openSecurity* since it began publication (Other Source 2, Section 5). The article led to a sustained engagement with OD. In 2010 and 2011, Renton published two front-page articles, including one on WikiLeaks, and another on the Palestinian campaign for statehood recognition at the United Nations (21/9/11), which drew on Renton's research into how Zionists understood and used the Balfour Declaration. The Editor of OD has commented that Renton's articles 'gave a new kind of gravitas to what have remained key openDemocracy debates', 'complicate the discussion' and 'add nuance to readings of contemporary events and counter knee-jerk, one-dimensional responses'.

With the two front-page articles in OD, Renton began a strategy of writing journalism based on his research that tied in with prominent stories in the international news, so as to maximise the impact on public discourse. To ensure the sustainability and development of his high-level public engagement, Renton obtained specialist media training, funded by his AHRC Fellowship.

Based on his research expertise, Renton was invited at the end of 2010 to be on an expert panel for a documentary on the Palestinian leader Muhammed Amin al-Husseini. Following discussions with many individuals, the production company chose only to feature Renton, who was viewed as authoritative and balanced on this highly sensitive subject, and Professor Gilbert Achcar (SOAS). Drawing on his conclusions and approach in 'Flawed Foundations' and 'The Age of Nationality', Renton discussed in the programme the rationale for British involvement in Palestine, British attitudes during the Mandate towards al-Husseini and the Palestinians and Zionism, and challenges that faced the Palestinian Arab leadership. Episode 8 of a series on 'Nazi Collaborators', the programme was watched by some 250,000 on its first viewing on the UK Yesterday Channel, which the production company's Creative Director (Factual Statement 1, Section 5) states was 'about 100,000 above slot average'. The documentary has since been sold to over thirty channels around the world. The Creative Director says that Renton's significant pre-recording discussions with the Director regarding his research and the context 'facilitated the scoping of the programme', and his on-screen contribution was 'useful and very pertinent'. 'From our point of view', he remarks, the documentary 'has done a fantastic job in terms of correcting misunderstanding. This episode has been particularly well received, successful and popular in the United States because it does not

present any misconceptions.'

In addition to his media work, Renton used his research to enhance public understanding of the conflict by engaging with an additional type of beneficiary, a prominent artist, and producing an additional type of impact: generating new ways of thinking that influence creative practice. Renton acted as a consultant for the artist when the latter was invited to contribute to a group show 'Viewpoint' in Tel Aviv, Israel, from 27 October to 6 December 2012, for which he drew a map of Israel-Palestine. Renton used the findings of his research on the conflict to explain its historical political geography, which, according to the artist, provided 'a knowledge platform on which the map would be based.' He states, 'The information that James Renton provided me with was of great use and interest to me, it was clear, concise and insightful. For a country with such a complicated history, such historical knowledge was extremely important to grasp the situation there from both sides of the wall. Mr Renton's historical insight provided a strong framework to build my project around.' (Factual Statement 4, Section 5).

In the month that the artist's exhibition opened, a public campaign was launched that became a central focus of Renton's impact activity for the rest of the REF census period: a five year international campaign for an apology from the British Government for the Balfour Declaration, led by the Palestinian Return Centre in London, an independent consultancy and accredited United Nations NGO, specialising in the question of the Palestinian refugees.

On 29 April 2013, following the news story that the Israeli Government had asked the British Library to loan the original text of the Declaration for public display, Renton published an op-ed article in the English web edition of the leading Israeli daily newspaper, *Ha'aretz* ([Ha'aretz.com](http://Ha'aretz.com)): 'Should Britain Apologize for the Balfour Declaration?' (Other Source 3, Section 5). It was the only article in the Israeli media to deal with the apology campaign, and opened a new debate. Drawing on the 'Flawed Foundations' and 'Age of Nationality' articles, Renton presented new argumentation and evidence as to why the government should issue an apology. Instead of the popular critical view of the Declaration, which holds that it represented Britain's collusion with statist political Zionism, Renton argued that British miscalculation and propaganda led to and exacerbated the conflict.

The article, and the sustained activity that followed, had two principal impacts. The first related to policy engagement: the article, and ensuing activity, significantly raised the profile of the PRC campaign in the Israeli and UK Jewish public sphere, and led directly to changes in that campaign. The second related to the enhancement of public understanding of the origins of the conflict. Due to the reputation and extensive readership of *Ha'aretz* as an organ focused on Israeli politics, the op-ed enabled Renton to have a significant impact on the international public discourse about the conflict.

The article was read by at least 6,500 readers - 'a substantial audience' according to the opinion editor (Factual Statement 3, Section 5) - and was in *Ha'aretz.com*'s top ten op-eds for April and May 2013. It fostered a great deal of debate, with 82 comments, a high number for opinion pieces, 40 tweets and 166 Facebook recommendations. The opinion editor described the article as 'a significant contribution to the debate about a key historical event and its present-day consequences ... [with a] successful performance in terms of reader numbers, social sharing and 'buzz'.' Such was the interest in the article that *Ha'aretz* translated it into Hebrew and published it in the opinion section of the print edition in Israel on 20 May 2013, something that the newspaper only does with a small proportion of online op-eds.

In the UK, Renton was invited by the campaign group Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JJP) to give a talk based on his *Ha'aretz* article, which took place in London on 25 June 2013. The JJP talk in London provoked significant reflection and debate after the event. It was attended by the PRC's Senior Researcher, who had read the *Ha'aretz* article and was, as a result, interested in hearing Renton speak. Regarding the impact of the article and the talk, the Senior Researcher comments that Renton's work 'consolidated our argument and strengthened our own belief in our campaign'. The talk, he says, 'led us to refine our argument ... [W]e now place more emphasis on the Mandate period ... in our overall argument and our communications going forward. ... The talk has informed, corroborated and focused the thinking of the PRC campaign group, and has certainly had an influence on a debate on policy/practice.' (Factual Statement 2, Section 5). The talk was also the subject of an article by a columnist in *The Jewish Chronicle* on 8 July 2013 (Other Source 4, Section 5).

In addition to the JJP event and the impact that followed, Renton's *Ha'aretz* article

## Impact case study (REF3b)

contributed to a collaboration with Al-Jazeera English television. An Assistant Producer at the channel, who had read the *Ha'aretz* piece, invited Renton, due to his expertise, to feature in a discussion programme on Britain's contribution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, 'Al-Nakba: The Debate', broadcast in June 2013. Renton contributed to the shaping of the programme through lengthy discussion with the Associate Producer prior to broadcast, in which he introduced the findings of his articles 'Flawed Foundations' and 'The Age of Nationality'. He appeared in the programme alongside Professor Emeritus Avi Shlaim, University of Oxford, and the former Director of the Middle East programme at Chatham House, Professor Rosemary Hollis, City University. In the televised debate, he conveyed the arguments made in 'Flawed Foundations' and 'The Age of Nationality'. On Renton's impact on the programme, the Producer (Other Source 2, Section 5) commented, 'Dr Renton's contribution included detailed, preliminary telephone discussions about the subject matter which greatly informed the parameters of debate for the recording, and allowed for insightful juxtaposition of varying perspectives between the three guests. During the recorded discussion, Dr Renton's analyses of British motivations in Mandate Palestine provided both historical context and political insight. His contributions were complementary and expansive additions to those of the other guests.' The Associate Producer (Other Source 2, Section 5) states that, 'as a result of the diverse panel that was invited to contribute', the programme received a significant level of feedback from the audience, with, 'rather uniquely', viewers 'calling in to say how much they enjoyed the programme and to comment on how informative it was.' Renton, she says, 'put forward a well-balanced argument which stimulated a lot of debate'.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact****Factual Statements:**

- 1) Creative Director, World Media Rights – states documentary viewing figures, addresses Renton's contribution to documentary scoping and on-screen contribution, audience reception.
- 2) Senior Researcher, the Palestinian Return Centre – impact on debate, policy of campaign group.
- 3) Opinion Editor, Ha'aretz.com – readership numbers, reader comments, social media reaction, contribution to debate of a historical issue and present day consequences.
- 4) Artist who consulted Renton – impact on work of artist.

**Other Sources:**

- 1) openDemocracy, 2010. *Forgotten lessons: Palestine and the British empire*. [online] Available at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/james-renton/forgotten-lessons-palestine-and-british-empire> [Accessed 19 November 2013].
- 2) The Innovation Partnership, November 2013, *Research Impact Report – Dr James Renton 2008-13*
- 3) Ha'aretz.com, 29 April 2013, *Should Britain apologize for the Balfour Declaration?* [online] Available at <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/should-britain-apologize-for-the-balfour-declaration.premium-1.518145> [Accessed 19 November 2013]
- 4) *The Jewish Chronicle*, 8 July 2013, *When history is in a sorry state*. [online] Available at <http://www.thejc.com/comment-and-debate/columnists/109276/when-history-a-sorry-state> [Accessed 19 November 2013].