

Stein, Kenneth, "One Hundred Years of Social Change: The Creation of the Palestinian Refugee Problem," in Laurence Silberstein, (ed.) *New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State*, New York University Press, 1991, pp. 57-81.

On 29 November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 181. It called for the partition of Palestine into independent Arab and Jewish states, the termination of the Mandate no later than August 1948, and the establishment of a special international regime for Jerusalem. Shortly after the United Nations vote, the final and most dramatic phases of the Palestinian Arab refugee problem began. A small migration turned into a steady exodus.

From November 1947 until April 1948, an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 Arabs left Palestine, representing more than a quarter of the ultimate number of Palestinian Arab refugees. Their departure was apparently not due to a generally predetermined and explicitly stated Jewish policy of forced expulsion from the areas which were to become the Jewish state.¹ Arabs who fled Palestine before April 1948 left for a combination of reasons, best summarized as a sense of individual fear and collective impotence in the face of events beyond their control and influence. The first wave of refugees came from urban middle and upper classes (particularly from Haifa, Jerusalem, and Jaffa) as well as from the rural Arab peasant population (from the coastal plain and from the Jezreel and Jordan valleys).² After April 1948, a massive proportion of the Palestinian Arab population followed.

There were multiple and varied reasons for the increased numbers of Palestinian Arab refugees.³ Among them were the physical ravages of war, breakdown of law and order, elimination of employment opportunities, growing panic fed by real and perceived tales of Zionist atrocities, a definite intent by Israeli leaders to minimize the number of Arabs who would ultimately be present in a Jewish state, and a Palestinian desire to protect self and family. Homes were evacuated, businesses closed, and lands abandoned. By the time Israel signed the last armistice agreement with Syria in July 1949, approximately 700,000 Arabs had become refugees from Palestine. More than 40 percent (370) of the more than 850 Arab villages had been abandoned. Less than 15 percent of the total Palestinian Arab population remained in the area that became Israel.

By November 1947, Palestinian Arabs had no international ally, no regional patron, and virtually no national leadership capable of arresting Arab flight from Palestine. Palestinian urban and rural masses were left hopelessly abandoned, without sincere, articulate, or forceful advocates. A defenseless and simple populace faced an aggressive, dynamic, and already established Jewish national movement which had ploddingly developed since the 1880s. The

November 1917 Balfour Declaration not only gave the Zionists international recognition of their right to create a Jewish national home, but it also provided for a mere defense of the civil and religious rights of the existing "non-Jewish" population in Palestine.

The successes of Jewish settlement in the late Ottoman period influenced positively His Majesty's Government's (HMG) attitude toward Zionist political aspirations. During the Palestine Mandate, HMG nurtured Zionist demographic and physical presence, while *volte face* in May 1939, partly because Palestine had been racked by three years of civil rebellion and general strike, HMG issued its 1939 White Paper aimed at mollifying a discontented Arab population. Growth of the Jewish national home was to be conditionally limited with the imposition of immigration and land acquisition restrictions.

At the end of World War II, Palestinians dejectedly faced the decision advocated by the United States President to compensate the Jews for the suffering endured as a consequence of the Holocaust. The decision to admit 100,000 European Jewish refugees into Palestine emotionally drained a politically floundering Palestinian Arab community. In 1882 there were a mere 24,000 Jews in Palestine. By early 1946, Palestine's Jewish population had grown to 500,000; then, more Jewish immigrants were permitted to enter Palestine.

In April 1947, HMG announced its intent to terminate its responsibility for the Mandate, and Palestine's political future was turned over to the newly created United Nations. After being Palestine's umpire and unchallenged executive authority for three decades, HMG retired, leaving Palestine's future to be determined by international politics, the collective strengths and weaknesses of the Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine, and their respective supporters abroad.

From their Arab brethren in surrounding states, the Palestinian Arabs received little more than verbal support. In the late 1940s, the inter-Arab system was rife with personal and national jealousies. No Arab country stepped forward to promote exclusively the Palestinian Arab cause, and the new confront successfully the Zionist challenge. None of the Arab states made a serious effort to stem the massive Arab flight from Palestine.

From 1947 to 1949 the Arab refugee problem emerged. The preponderance of historical evidence suggests that all the above factors contributed to the emergence of the Palestinian refugee problem in the months and years between 1947 and 1949. Socially and politically, the Palestinian Arab community was inverted and introverted. Feeling wronged and forsaken, Palestinians endured shock and exodus.

A shared national trauma enveloped the Palestinian community. The establishment of

Israel was inextricably linked to the creation of a Palestinian diaspora. Either singularly or collectively, Palestinians and their supporters blamed Israel, the British, the international community, the United States, the Arab world, and the aftermath of the Holocaust for conspiring to deny Palestinian national rights.

It would be historically inaccurate to claim that these reasons were less than significant in creating the refugee problem. Yet, these causative factors notwithstanding, the apparent ease with which the Palestinian Arab community collapsed socially is particularly noticeable. Without detracting from the importance of the main causes of the refugee problem, the argument of this chapter is that more than one hundred years of social change tangibly facilitated Palestinian Arab bewilderment and expedited the community's social collapse.

Although some excellent research has focused on Palestinian social history as it developed from late Ottoman times to the establishment of Israel, little scholarly inquiry has concentrated on defining the structural cleavages within Palestinian Arab society that successfully withstand the formidable array of external pressures and forces which confronted it.

What caused the society's collapse? What created its internal fragmentation and disunity? What prevented it from being a collective authority? What effected the social divisiveness and animosities that precluded a firmer response to Zionism and British rule? What were the multiple administrative and communal changes which forcefully augmented social dissolution?

There is notable historical evidence from a variety of Arabic, German, Hebrew, and English sources to suggest that the Palestinian Arab community had been significantly prone to dispossession and dislocation before the mass exodus from Palestine began. Before the United Nations partition resolution was passed and before facing the direct causes for displaced refugee status, Palestinian Arab society was in an advanced stage of unraveling.

The Nature of Palestinian Arab Society: The Ottoman Legacy

Foundations for the Palestinian Arab refugee problem commenced in late Ottoman times. It began with the economic pauperization of the peasantry in Palestine and the simultaneous development of large landed estates. For centuries, the overwhelmingly illiterate rural Palestinian peasantry was engaged in primitive agriculture. It was defenseless against rapacious tax collectors and landowning interests. In addition, the peasantry was constantly eligible for military conscription, while suffering prolonged periods of insecurity due to foreign and Bedouin incursions.

The peasantry was skeptical of both its traditional leaders and government officials, who over centuries had handled them maliciously, using extortion and maladministration. In general,

the Palestinian Arab peasant was in a chronic state of poverty and indebtedness for a number of reasons: poor soil, lack of water, bad means of communication with the towns, unsuitable marketing arrangements, frequent crop season failures, an antiquated land system, insecurity of tenure, usurious debt commitments, and unscrupulous methods of levying and collecting taxes. Gradually the peasant became inexorably dependent upon those who would provide him with tem

Imposed by the Ottoman authorities after 1839, administrative changes reinforced rather than changed pre-existing traditional social relationships within the Palestinian Arab community. If anything, the Ottoman reform movement strengthened and benefited a relatively small, urban, landed life-style.

Landowning interests in Palestine became the collective patrons over their peasant-client population. Ottoman reforms formally put the peasantry into economically and socially addictive relationships before modern Zionism was even formulated in European capitals. Before the first modern Jewish settlement was established in 1855, Palestinian Arab society was already socially fragmented between the peasantry and landowning interests.

It has been authoritatively argued that the introduction of the 1858 Ottoman Land Law into Palestine, instead of fulfilling its intent of checking the growth of large private land ownership, had just the opposite effect. For centuries prior to the introduction of the Land Law and the subsequent introduction of land registers, or title deeds, peasants were compelled to pay fees and additional tax valuations if they wanted land registered in their names.

As a common alternative, most peasants preferred to have an urban notable, merchant, rural *shaykh*, or *mukhtar* register the land in his name, with the original "owning" peasant remaining on the land as a tenant. By resorting to this commonly used proxy system, peasants avoided the registration fees and, more importantly, eluded the conscription rolls, since land records were used to identify those eligible for military service. Furthermore, Ottoman law stated that land not cultivated for three years without a legally accepta

When these and other peasants suffered successively poor harvests, they habitually turned to moneylenders or mortgaged their lands for cash to obtain agricultural implements, seeds, or perhaps a new plow animal. Loans were computed in money, but given and paid in kind; they were calculated for annual repayment, but the peasant was usually required to repay the interest on the loan, not the capital, within a six- to seven-month period. Interest rates on such varied

between 30 to 60 percent per
y e a r
. When agricultural yields could not meet accrued tax, rent, living, and arrears payments, the peasantry

Inhabitants particularly of Palestine's coastal plain, who were reckoned as small proprietors in the country, strenuously denied to governmental authorities that they had landed properties in an effort to save the cost of titled land. Even by 1925, fully three-quarters of all the cultivable land in Palestine was held by unregistered landowners. In addition, mortgaging land meant selling the property to a creditor with the stipulated right to purchase in order to pay their way out of military service. When the British military administration took control of Palestine in 1918, it recognized this widespread practice and forbade all land sales in satisfaction of a mortgage debt.

Since the British military authorities did not know how long they would remain in the Holy Land, they sought to prevent portions of the peasantry from becoming displaced and therefore potential financial wards of the occupying administration. Portions of the Palestinian peasantry gave up their right to "legal" ownership because they either sold large landed estates or were created in Palestine. Conversely, Palestinian Arab peasants (in)voluntarily disenfranchised themselves by avoiding land

By the time the Balfour Declaration was issued in November 1917, Palestinian village peasants had become feeble wards of notable urban and landowning classes. Most Palestinian landowners who had acquired their property over a period of time saw it as a commercial object available for potential revenue, a means to obtain cash, and an irresistible way to turn a fine profit from a previous investment. On the other hand, those who had become tenants on land they or their ancestors had once owned and habitually worked were increasingly susceptible to the planned caprice of land managers, the guile of many urban notables, the greed of moneylenders, and the trade plied by land brokers. Palestine village leaders, such as *mukhtars* or heads of family clans, sometimes enhanced themselves materially in land transactions between Arabs and in transactions involving sales to Jewish buyers.

In addition, it was a regular practice of the urban landowning agent, who often functioned as the intermediary between the landowner and the peasantry, to move tenants or other agricultural laborers from plot to plot within a larger area of land so they could not develop any legal claim to permanence or tenancy on particular parcels of land. Having begun in late Ottoman times, this practice continued with regularity during the Mandate and was refined so that sub-tenants (the land agent in some cases) would not legally be able to receive land as compensation if forced to leave the lands they

w o r k e d . Not surprisingly, moving a peasant from one plot to another after every growing season disadvantaged

The extreme insecurity associated with Palestine's agricultural economy was inherent in the routine of the *musha'* system of land tenure practiced in 45 to 60 percent of the cultivated land area of Palestine during the Mandate. At its core, the *musha'* system embraced a land use method which habitually redistributed a number of shares in a village or specific parcels of land every two to five years. Although this widely practiced scheme greatly encouraged village independence, it also contributed to *hamula* or clan conflicts, a village regularly withstood periods of uneasiness each time unequal village lands were redistributed. Land disputes, encroachment on another's land, and uprooting of trees were not uncommon where cultivable lands were sparse and the local village population increased over time.

Ultimately, the combination of periodic indebtedness and uncertainties in agricultural yields led to the sale of *musha'* shares to urban interests. Peasants participating in the *musha'* village redistribution process gradually exchanged their parcels or shares for debt relief or for additional loans. It was common for Arab landowning interests, particularly after 1929, to sell previously collected *musha'* shares or parcels to Jewish companies and individuals for considerable profits.

Impact of Jewish Land Settlement upon Palestinian Arab Society

Economic, social, and political circumstances compelled many Palestinians to dislodge or uproot themselves. Over decades, "landlessness" was caused mainly by the peasants' overwhelming indebted condition.

Eventually, the peasantry found itself almost totally subservient to urban landowning interests. Bonds that did exist between the urban elite and rural peasantry were forged almost exclusively through economic and financial arrangements which were dominated by crass profit motives and the peasant's inherent fears of government taxation and conscription. As a proletarianization process unfolded, former landowning peasants became agricultural tenants, then per diem urban laborers, and perhaps, ultimately, displaced or "landless."

However, "landlessness" was not due primarily to Jewish land purchase or Arab land sales. A large plurality of Palestinians who were engaged in rural occupations were in fact not landowners, though many may have been in previous decades. According to the *Census for*

Palestine, 1931, Palestine's total population numbered 1,035,821, of whom 759,712 were Moslems, 174,610 Jews, 91,398 Christians, and the remainder, Druze, Bahais, Samaritans, and others. Some 465,000 earners and their dependents, or 60 percent of the Muslim Arab population of Palestine, were primarily reliant for their livelihood upon ordinary cultivation and pasturing of flocks. Of the 115,913 earners or heads of households, 50,552 were owner-occupiers; 29,077 were agricultural laborers; 12,638 were agricultural tenants; 7,889 raised, bred, and herded flocks; 7,530 were growers and pickers of fruits, flowers, and vegetables; 2,000 were citrus growers; 43 were agent-managers of estates and rent collectors; and the remainder hunted, fished, or raised small animals. Already by 1931, at least 40 percent of the Muslim Arab population, which was dependent upon

The influence of urban Palestinian landowning interests was strengthened by the acquisition of land. Later, from the 1880s onward, when they or scions from their families chose to sell lands to Jewish immigrants, profound changes occurred within the Palestinian Arab community. Some former rural workers were attracted by more stable wages in Palestine's burgeoning urban areas. Agricultural tenants who were displaced by Jewish land purchase found additional work in agriculture. The importation of Jewish capital and HMG's focus on infrastructure development in the 1920s and 1930s provided elective work opportunities and stimulated an Arab urban labor force. The transformation of the agricultural peasant into urban workman was prompted by HMG's expenditures on railways, roads, Haifa harbor development, other government employment, and, in the 1940s, wartime expenditures. Palestinian peasants who totally abandoned occupations in agriculture from the 1880s onwards were not yet "political refugees," because they had not yet left their patrimony to take up residence in another country. Nonetheless, in the decades before the partition resolution, many Palestinians were disenfranchised and then displaced from villages and from lands which they, their fathers, or their grandfathers had either regularly or periodically worked. Well before November 1947 there were significant shifts in Palestine's Arab population.

Villages were not evacuated for the first time immediately prior to the partition resolution. Prior to that time, they had been slowly depopulated or vacated from areas where Jewish land acquisition and settlement had focused. Jewish land buyers preferred that the intended land be handed over free of Arab tenant encumbrances. Generally, it was the Arab vendors (not the Jews) who were responsible for obtaining eviction orders to give vacant plots. Whenever Arab tenants had to abandon land because of Jewish purchase, they were indemnified

In the 1920s and 1930s, there were hundreds of examples of Palestinian Arabs voluntarily emigrating away from new or imminent Jewish settlements and enclaves because of economic reasons, Arab sales, and Jewish purchases. For example, when the Palestine Land Development Company purchased land for the Jewish National Fund (JNF) in the Acre area and

Jezreel Valley in the 1920s, more than 688 Arab tenants and their families from more than twenty Arab villages comprising more than 250,000 dunams (one dunam equals a quarter acre) vacated their lands after each tenant received financial compensation from Zionist buyers. Most of these former tenants remained in northern Palestine; some were given the option of purchasing other lands with money they had received as compensation; others remained as tenants on the same land for a period of six months. In testifying before the Shaw Commission, which investigated the disturbances in Palestine in 192

A[n Arab] vendor would come along and make a contract for sale and purchase with the Jews. We would know nothing of this until four, five, or six months later when the transaction would come to the office. We then instructed the District Officer to report on the tenants. He would go to the village and in some cases he would find that the whole population had already evacuated the village. They [the tenants] had taken certain sums of money and had gone, and we could not afford them any protection whatever.

Arab sales to Jews of land where Arabs were in residence began to change landowner-peasant relationships. When rural peasants became urban laborers, their social ties with their "home" village and with predominantly urban landowning interests were frayed and sometimes irrevocably broken. Moreover, these changes almost always led to peasant disillusion and ultimately village dissolution.

In a prolonged gestation period, well before the "official" birth of the Palestinian Arab refugee issue in late 1947, Palestinian Arabs progressively became detached from lands habitually worked. First they were administratively and legally dispossessed. Then some who owned their own land during the Mandate were physically displaced from lands they habitually worked when land was sold to Jewish buyers or Arab land brokers. After selling their lands, some former owner-occupiers migrated to other parts of Palestine for employment in either rural or urban occupations. Others lived in "their villages" but worked in urban areas when village lands, but not the residential portion of a village, were sold. Some left the rural environment altogether for life in the cities. When land was sold, agricultural laborers, tenants, and mere casual laborers on someone else's land lost an opportunity to earn a portion of their income from that land. As tenants left agricultural occupations, the traditionally entangled connections between them and landowning interests changed. In most cases they began to unravel and eventually were severed. Many landowning patron and peasant-client relationships ended, some not amicably.

For decades, security of tenure for the Palestinian Arab peasant had been greatly compromised by landowning interests. General rural disdain for the urban landowning elite originated in Ottoman times and did not abate during the

M a n d a t e
. Landowning interests showed little or no sense of social obligation to assist in the amelioration of

The social and physical distance which developed between the urban landowner and the rural peasant population was unbridgeable. There was real animosity and even outright hostility between them. Not surprisingly, the peasants' antagonistic feelings toward landowning interests increased in vocality and frequency when, with HMG sanction, Jewish immigrants and land acquisition slowly displaced the agricultural classes from their villages, the peasant's bastion and political environment.

Palestinian village autonomy was jealously guarded against the intrusion by outsiders. But once the boundaries of the peasants' village were pierced by urban landowners, land brokers sometimes purchased their shares or parcels at a very low price and sold them at ten and twenty multiples to Jewish buyers. Peasants who were in *musha'* villages were particularly incensed at landlords, land brokers, or agents after learning that they had been swindled. Commenting in general on the social distance between the notable *effendi* class and the peasantry in Palestine, Herbert Samuel, the first High Commissioner in Palestine, noted in 1920 that there was "a real antagonism between them." In 1923 Sydney Moody, who served in Palestine and in the British Colonial Office, wrote that "the mass of people whose interest is to agree with Government are afraid to speak. A village is at best a personal union and at worst a personal disunion." In October 1935 a Palestinian intellectual, Afif I. Tannous, commented:

The *fellah* until recently has been the subject of oppression, neglect, and ill treatment by his own countrymen and the old political regime. The feudal system played havoc in his life, the *effendi* class looked down upon him, and the old Turkish regime was too corrupt to be concerned with such a vital problem.

Thus, social affinities and communal harmony between urban and rural Palestinians were exceptionally strained and never fully integrated. By the early 1930s "the obedience of the *fellaheen* to their *effendis* [was] not as it used to be .

" Palestinian Arab villages remained isolated economically and socially from one another. The pre-*musha'* land system, with its participatory rights in land use, contributed greatly not only to the village community's solidarity, but also to the general atomization of Palestinian society. The dependence of the village community upon urban interests virtually excluded rural voices from political affairs. As a consequence, Palestine-wide Arab responses to Zionism were severely circumscribed by rural land use patterns alone, leaving the political arena to a relatively small cadre of urban notables.

British Response to the Creation of a Landless Arab Population

During the Mandate, therefore, the peasantry looked beyond the landowning/political elite for a shield from Jewish immigration and land settlement. The Palestine Arab peasantry fervently expected HMG to assist them, for, after all, *it* was facilitating the Jewish national home. But expectations were often unrealistic. By the late 1920s, when hopes went unfulfilled, a sense of alienation, disillusionment, and melancholy conditioned the political environment.

Palestine's High Commissioner, Sir John Chancellor, wanted desperately to redirect the Mandate's course in favor of the Arab population's interest and away from the Jewish national home. Chancellor's ideological ally was Sir John Hope Simpson. After investigating the issues of land and

When one Arab sold to another in the years prior to Jewish land purchase, the landowner changed but the Arab tenants remained as sharecroppers. But when Jews purchased lands and wanted to eliminate Arab peasant encumbrances for the purpose of creating a new Jewish settlement, the peasants were most often compelled to move. The process by which Arabs were understood to be made "landless" due to Arab land sales and Jewish settlement, and an unprecedented number of Palestinian laws were proposed or enacted which focused exclu-

While the reports and statistical inquiries which were issued aimed at evaluating and enumerating the economic well-being of the rural population, the ordinances which were either proposed or promulgated focused on every conceivable means to keep the peasant leashed to his land. These Palestine laws included the 1928 Land Settlement Ordinance, the 1929 and 1933 Protection of Cultivators Ordinances and their amendments, the 1931 Law of Execution Amendment Ordinance, the 1932 Land Disputes Possession Ordinance, the proposed but not passed 1933 *Musha'* Lands Ordinance, the 1934 Usurious Loans Ordinance, the proposed but not passed Damages Bill of 1935, and the 1936 Short Term Crops Loan Ordinance. In the face of social, economic, and political pressures that they could not influence or control, the British naively believed that they could resort to legislative solutions to keep an Arab tenant or agricultural laborer on his land or the land of an Arab landowner. Until the late 1920s, mostly Arab tenant and agricultural laboring classes were displaced because of Jewish settlement; but in the early 1930s, individual Arab small property owners were the dominant source of land sales made directly to Jewish buyers or indirectly to them through intermediary land brokers. There is irrefutable statistical proof which shows that from 1933 through 1942, 90 percent of all Arab

land sale transactions to Jewish purchasers were made by owners of areas of less than 100
d u n a m s
. In one sub-district in the hill regions of Palestine, an estimated 30 percent of the land was transfer

So widespread was the alienation of land by Arab small property owners that, on the eve
of the 1936 Arab disturbances and general strike, the Palestine administration sought to arrest
small sales. It contemplated introducing a law to require the peasant to retain a minimum land
area or "lot viable" in order to provide for the subsistence of himself and his family. Palestine
administration officials believed in January 1936 that, if this legislation were not introduced (and
it ultimately was not), "the result would be further disturbances in Palestine and probably a good
d e a l o f
b l o o d s h e d ." Certainly, a major motivation for Palestinian Arab participation in the 1936–39
rebellion was despair created by a sense of irrevocable displacement.

Throughout the country, during the revolt, many members of the Palestinian Arab
leadership were either killed, or exiled by the British, or fled to neighboring Arab capitals,
Europe, Latin America, or the United States in an effort to escape economic and political
insecurity. Other Palestinian political leaders were discredited publicly for selling the most
cultivable portions of Palestine to immigrating Zionists and Jewish
institutions. Before the 1936–39 Arab revolt against British imperialism and Zionist
development had ended, traditional Palestinian Arab communal structure and authority
splintered, and bonds between social classes fragmented.

Even with support in the Palestine central administration, as personified by Chancellor
and Hope Simpson, and among many British officials in the eighteen sub-district offices
throughout Palestine in the early 1930s, the Palestine Arab leadership failed to capitalize on
Chancellor's advocacy. By 1935 the Palestine Arab Executive divided into separate political
p a r t i e s d o m i n a t e d b y i n d i v i d u a l a n d l o c a l
i n t e r e s t s
. While political fragmentation occurred among the amorphous notable leadership, the peasantry gr
A majority of the Arab rural population was already at the poverty line, pauperized, drifting
between rural and urban proletarianization, and deeply disenchanted with its political leadership.

Rural poverty did not abate through the late
1 9 3 0 s
. Already in 1931, 25 percent of the Arab rural population of 108,000 earners indicated that without
particular relevance of this statistic is that, of these 27,000 earners, almost 25,000 of them found
their subsidiary income in some non-agricultural activity such as selling groceries or oils or
w o r k i n g i n t h e b u i l d i n g i n d u s t r i e s i n t h e d e v e l o p i n g u r b a n
a r e a s

. With neither economic viability nor residential stability and a severely divided political leadership

At the end of the Arab revolt in 1939, local Palestinian Arab political leadership had virtually disintegrated, due in part to flight and exile. With the May 1939 White Paper, HMG wanted to protect the Palestinian Arabs against Zionism. Downie of the British Colonial Office in 1940, "whose right the Mandatory Power is bound to respect and it is just because Zionist policy is what it is that HMG is compelled to introduce abnormally restrictive measures. Zionism in fact, has to be contained."

Another Colonial Office official, Sir John Shuckburgh, said when speaking after the implementation of the 1940 Land Transfer Regulations, "The Arab landowner has to be protected against mass dispossession." In 1930 under Chancellor's influence and again in the 1939 White Paper, HMG wanted to protect British paternalism neither stopped the development of the Jewish national home nor did it inhibit

Chancellor's staunchly pro-Arab inclinations were effectively blunted by Zionist interests in London. Pledged economic assistance by HMG in the form of a large development loan for Palestine never materialized in the 1930s. In the 1940s, when HMG relinquished its unchecked executive authority and status as communal umpire in running the Mandate in 1946 and 1947, the Palestinian Arab population was left totally disconnected from any paternal authority. It was essentially defenseless against a demographically inferior but institutionally and organizationally superior Jewish community.

Conclusions

What and when did Zionists and Arabs know about the process of dispossession and the interaction of land and money that existed between Arab landowners, Arab tenants/peasants, and Jewish buyers. In 1922, he wrote:

The Arab large landowner quickly recognized that he could now do much better business with his land than continuing to have it worked by tenants. The land had been purely a source of revenue for him which provided him with a work-free income, in the crassest sense of the word. Now it became a welcome object for speculation. It was valid to sell it to the newly arrived [Jewish and German] colonist and indeed for the highest possible price. What was to happen to the renter from whom the land was, so to speak, sold from under his feet concerned the effendi very little. The tenant was just tossed out onto the street and had to take to his heels. So the colonization became an uninterrupted source of tenant tragedies. On the other hand, the price of land rose in an unimaginable manner.

The pursuits of the effendi became ever more shameless since there was no competition feared.

Despite their noisy patriotism—which they have discovered only within the last years; the danger began to threaten in earnest because orderly conditions would appear in the country which would make further exploitation of the [peasant] inhabitants impossible—they would indeed rather sell the land for a high price to the Jews than for a lesser price to the Arab farmers.

By the early 1930s, Zionist officials decided for the first time to embark upon a concerted land settlement policy aimed at creating territorially contiguous Jewish lands and to consider seriously the transfer of Palestinian Arabs to Transjordan. As head of the Jewish Kisch sent a seminal letter to his Zionist colleagues in February 1931 seeking their advice on where to resettle Arabs displaced as a result of Jewish land purchase. The consensus Zionist response to Kisch's letter came from Zvi Botkovsky of the Jewish Agency's Settlement Department. He said in March 1931 that if HMG did not allow Zionists to use Transjordan to settle Palestinian Arabs, then the Jewish Agency would be compelled to reserve certain defined areas of the hill country in western Palestine for the resettlement of Arab cultivators. Jewish leaders, Jewish buyers, Arab land sellers, Arab politicians, British officials, and Arabs working on lands fully understood that Arab land sales and resettlement of Arabs working those lands were in the midst of process of making portions of Palestine demographically dominant by one community or the other. To state that the physical Arab transfer from areas of Palestine to others began only in the late 1940s is fully incorrect. Even the Peel Report of 1937 called for the transfer of populations from one part of the country to others.

Like most of his colleagues, Botkovsky believed that the valleys and coastal regions were the only parts of the country suitable for Jewish agriculture. "And on no account," said Botkovsky, "should enclaves separated by strips of [Arab] tenant colonies be agreed to."
" Later, in early 1936, at a joint coordinating meeting of the Jewish Agency, Jewish National Fund in order to save areas for contiguous Jewish settlements. Physically and demographically dividing Palestine into Jewish and Arab areas was also a policy .

At the same time that the Zionists were contemplating geographic borders for the Jewish national home in the early 1930s, Palestinian Arabs of all classes articulated their gloom in the face of Zionist growth. The Palestinian newspaper *al-Hayat* noted in September 1930 that "an Arab village shall tomorrow be a Jewish one. Where is the [Supreme] Moslem Council? Where is the Arab

E x e c u t i v e ?
" Regardless of political leaning, virtually every newspaper in Palestine throughout the early 1930s expressed the deep concern of the Palestinian Arab peasant in light of Jewish presence and Zionist growth. Intense fears were expressed regularly.

Two particular articles from the Palestinian Arab press exemplify the deep concern felt at that time about the peasant's future presence in Palestine. One newspaper noted in 1931:

We are selling our lands to Jews without any remorse. Land brokers are busy day and night with their odious trade without feeling any shame. In the meantime the nation is busy sending protests. Where are we going to? One looks at the quantity of Arab lands transferred daily to Jewish hands, [one] realizes that we are bound to go away from this country. But where? Shall we move to Egypt, Hijaz, or Syria? How could we live there, since we would have sold the lands of our fathers and ancestors to our enemies? Nobody could show us mercy or pity, were we to go away from our country, because we would have lost her with our own hands.

Another newspaper at the end of 1934 remarked:

Those who adopted this profession [land brokers] aim at becoming rich and at collecting money even if they take it from the liver of this country. . . . Is it human that the covetous should store capital to evict the peasant from his land and to make him homeless or even sometimes a criminal? The frightened Arab who fears for his future today melts from fear when he imagines his off-spring as homeless and criminals who cannot look at the lands of their fathers.

Whether HMG could have instituted any policy to block the fraying of Palestinian Arab social bonds is a moot question. Nevertheless, there were several remedies that HMG could have executed to stabilize or to reduce the size of the formation of an Arab "landless" class. First, implementation of drastic land reform may have provided the peasantry with stability in land tenure on parcels of land which were not constantly divided up due to inheritance or to application of the *musha'* system. This first alternative was avoided because it would have been perceived as a British effort to turn Arab land over to immigrating Zionists. A n o t h e r possibility was continuous governmental provision of monetary loans necessary to sever or reduce the enfeebling addiction between the impoverished tenant and the greedy usurer. But this second alternative was only partially enacted because HMG preferred to spend British or Palestinian taxpayer money on bolstering Britain's strategic interests in Palestine and not on ameliorating the rural population's economic condition specifically or social services generally. As a third option, the imposition of land transfer prohibitions throughout the country was not considered seriously because it would have been contrary to the Mandate's purpose of facilitating the development of the Jewish national home and because it was greatly opposed by many of the

Arab landowning classes and Zionist officials.

The 1939 White Paper which included land transfer restrictions but not total land transfer prohibitions was another example of HMG's recourse to legislative antidote in order to correct a fundamentally incurable problem. By 1939, many rural Palestinians were distanced from their political leaders, disconnected from their urban patrons, and increasingly wards of British protection. Frustrated and overwhelmed by economic political conditions they could not influence or change, they were seen by Zionists, for the most part, as nuisances. Socially and financially, their rural environment was collapsing around them.

What then are the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem? No attempt has been made here either to exonerate or to assert or prove complicity for what happened after 1947. Nevertheless, there is conclusive evidence that before the outbreak of World War II, Palestinian Arab society was at an advanced stage of disintegration. Before the Ottoman reform movement commenced, systematic administrative and physical disenfranchisement of the Palestinian Arab from his land had occurred. Peasant security and constancy in the use of a specific parcel of land were rare. Peasants were regularly moved from plot to plot by landowners, and *musha'* shares were periodically redistributed. Between planting and harvesting seasons, it was customary for peasants to find work outside of agriculture.

After the 1870s when land registration was introduced, the Palestinian peasant did not know or foresee that the process of having land registered in other peoples' names would deprive him of legal rights when the land was sold decades later to immigrating Zionists and Jewish settlement organizations. Insecurity in land tenure and the development of large estates preceded administrative dispossession. This was the first step toward physical displacement and the extensive strain that ensued between landowning interests and the peasantry.

For their part, the peasantry feared all conventions that involved record keeping. Ottoman and British administrative systems encouraged and protected landowning interests when the owners interacted with local governmental authorities. Landowners had the patience, energy, money, and knowledge to register land and . Arab moneylenders, land agents, and land brokers relentlessly pillaged the peasantry prior to mod

A Zionist preoccupation to hire exclusively Jewish labor eliminated some alternative employment opportunities and inflamed passions among Arabs displaced because of land sales. When Jewish land purchases took place, village harmony was aggravated and relationships between urban and rural Palestinians were eventually broken. When land brokers assembled small parcels of land by buying them inexpensively from the peasant and then sold them to Jewish buyers, Arab peasants felt their lands had been "stolen" while intermediaries benefited.

Among some Palestinians with landowning interests, personal gain often prevailed over national priorities. Furthermore, a severe rural economy exacerbated life for the peasant. Peasant dejection, frustration, and anger, articulated through numerous and protracted land disputes, culminated ultimately in the 1936–39 Arab rebellion. Civilian unrest also resulted in the 1939 White Paper, which was one more British effort to protect the Palestinian Arab from Jewish national development without ending the Mandate or stopping Zionist growth totally.

From the 1850s through the early 1940s, an unknown number of displaced Arabs was created by all these factors; and dozens of Arab villages were dissipated in the process of creating a Jewish national home. Thus, by 1947, Palestinian Arab society had become highly susceptible to insecurity and flight. Indeed, a combination of reasons caused hundreds of thousands of Arabs to leave Palestine after November 1947, not the least of which was the internal societal changes that led to a slow disintegration of communal bonds. Although Palestinians became refugees in the 1947–49 period, the origins of their social collapse can be partially attributed to the fractious nature of Arab society and its steady dissolution over the previous century. That social collapse influenced the difficulties they encountered where and how they settled after May 1948.

NOTES

1. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge, 1987), 128, 288.
2. *Ibid.*, 59, 286.
3. Morris, *Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 286–98, especially 293–94; and Don Peretz, *Israel and the Palestine Arabs* (Washington, 1958), 5–8.
4. Morris, *Palestinian Refugee Problem*, xiv–xvii; and Abraham Granott, *The Land System of Palestine History and Structure* (London, 1952), 168.
5. See Neville Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I* (Berkeley, 1976), especially 223–31.
6. Mary C. Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan* (Cambridge, 1987), 112; Avi Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, The Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (New York, 1988), 53, 123.

7. Shulamit Carmi and Henry Rosenfeld, "The Origins of the Process of the Proletarianization and Urbanization of Arab Peasants in Palestine," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 220 (March 1974): 470–85; Joel S. Migdal, "Urbanization and Political Change: The Impact of Foreign Rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 19 (July 1977): 328–49; Ylana N. Miller, *Government and Society in Rural Palestine* (Texas, 1985); Taysir Nashif, *The Palestinian Arab and Jewish Political Leaderships* (New York, 1979); Yehoshua Porath, "Social Aspects of the Emergence of the Palestine Arab National Movement," in Menahem Milson, ed., *Society and Political Structure in the Arab World* (New York, 1973), 93–144; James Reilly, "The Peasantry of Late Ottoman Palestine," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 10 (Summer 1981): 82–97; Kenneth W. Stein, "Palestine's Rural Economy, 1917–1939," *Studies in Zionism* 8 (1987): 25–49; Rachelle Taquq, "Peasants into Workmen: Internal Labor Migration and the Arab Village under the Mandate," in Joel S. Migdal, ed., *Palestinian Society and Politics* (Princeton, N.J., 1980), 261–85; Elia Zureik, "Reflections on Twentieth Century Palestinian Class Structure," in Khalil Nakhleh and Elia Zureik, eds., *The Sociology of the Palestinians* (New York, 1980), 47–63.
8. See Zureik, "Reflections," 49.
9. Cooperative Societies in Palestine, *Report by the Registrar of Cooperative Societies on Developments during the Years 1921–1937* (Jerusalem, 1938), 10.
10. Kenneth W. Stein, *The Land Question in Palestine 1917–1939* (Chapel Hill, 1984), 217.
11. Migdal, "Urbanization and Political Change," 338–39.
12. Leon Schulman, *Zur türkischen Agrarfrage Palästina und die Fellachenwirtschaft* (Weimar, 1916), 44–45; and Zureik, "Reflections," 49.
13. Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford, 1969), 119; Kemal H. Karpat, "Land Regime, Social Structure, and Modernization," in William Polk and Richard Chambers, eds., *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East* (Chicago, 1968), 86; Moshe Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840–1861* (Oxford, 1968), 162.
14. Amin Rizk (Palestine Department of Lands), remarks on a note of the Governor of Samaria on Werko and Land Registry, 2 February 1923, p. 1, Israel State Archives (hereafter ISA), Box AG755/File L3/Folio 39.
15. S. Kaplansky (Jewish Agency settlement specialist), *The Land Problem in Palestine, 1930*, Central Zionist Archives (hereafter CZA), Record Group Z4/3444/File III. See also Palestine Government, F. G. Horwill, *The Banking System in Palestine* (July 1936), 80.

16. Gad Frumkin, *Derech Shofat BeYerushalaim* (The path of a judge in Jerusalem) (Tel Aviv, 1973), 305.
17. Harry Sachar of the Anglo-Palestine Bank to Norman Bentwich, Attorney General for the Palestine Administration, 17 March 1925, CZA, Z4/771/File II.
18. Stein, *Land Question in Palestine*, 39–43.
19. See Granott, *Land System*, 34–84; Alfred Bonne, "Die sozial-ökonomischen Strukturwandlungen in Palästina," *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 63, Part 1 (1930): 327; and Schulman, *Zur türkischen Agrarfrage*, 43–56.
20. For examples of *mukhtars* seeking personal enrichment in village land matters, see *al-Jami'ah al-'Arabiyyah*, 22 April 1931; Gaza Settlement Officer to Commissioner of Lands, 17 June 1938, ISA, Box LS274/File 4/Folio 33; "Land Speculation," ISA, Box 2637/File G536. See also Miller, *Government and Society*, 56–62; and Gabriel Baer, "The Office and Functions of the Village Mukhtar," in Joel S. Migdal, ed., *Palestinian Society and Politics* (Princeton, N.J., 1980), 103–23.
21. For these practices exercised in Palestine prior to World War I, see George Post, "Essays on Sects and Nationalities of Syria and Palestine-Land Tenure," *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* (April 1891), 106; Alfred Sursock, *Memorandum on Sursock Lands*, 30 September 1921, ISA, Box 3544/File 21; and Arthur Ruppin, *Syrien als Wirtschaftsgebiet*, (Berlin, 1917), 64–65.
22. See Stein, *Land Question in Palestine*, 14–16, 142–43; Joanne Dee Held, *The Effects of the Ottoman Land Laws on the Marginal Population and Musha' Village of Palestine, 1858–1914* (Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1978).
23. Hubert Auhagen, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Landesnatur und der Landwirtschaft Syriens* (Berlin, 1907), 49–51.
24. Hilmi Husseini, Inspector of Lands, Northern District, to Director of Lands, 14 July 1923, ISA, Box 3317/File 6; Ernest Dowson, *Progress on Land Reforms, 1923–1930*, 1931, 27–28, Colonial Office (hereafter CO) Series 733/Box 221/File 97169; "Report on the Work of the Ghor Mudawarra Demarcation Commission," 19 March 1932, ISA, Box 3548/File 1; and Albert Abramson, former Commissioner of Lands in Palestine, "An Aspect of Village Life in Palestine," *The Palestine Post*, 6 July 1937.
25. For a definition of "refugees" where there is a component of indirect compulsion resulting in their status, see Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues, *Refugees: The Dynamics of Displacement* (London, 1986).

26. See Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables," in William Polk and Richard Chambers, eds., *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East* (Chicago, 1968), 41–68.
 27. Palestine Government, *Census for Palestine, 1931* I: 291–92; II, Table 14: 282.
 28. Taqqu, "Peasants into Workmen," 261–62.
 29. League of Nations, *Permanent Mandates Commission Minutes*, remarks by J. H. Hall, Chief Secretary of the Palestine Administration, Twenty-fifth Session, 1 June 1934, vol. 25, p. 28.
 30. Arthur Ruppin, "Jewish Land Purchase and Their Reaction upon the Condition of the Former Arab Cultivators," 1929, CZA, S25/4207.
 31. Great Britain, *Report of the Commission on the Palestine Disturbances of August 1929*, Cmd. 3530, March 1930, 115; League of Nations, *Permanent Mandates Commission Minutes*, Seventeenth Session, 6 June 1930, p. 61.
 32. See Lawrence Oliphant, *Haifa or Life in Modern Palestine* (New York, 1887), 194–95; for a sampling of Palestine Arab press comment on the deteriorating attitude of the rural peasant for the urban landowner, see *Filastin*, 29 January 1931, and *al-Jami'ah al-'Arabiyyah*, 30 July 1934.
 33. See Cooperative Societies in Palestine, *Report by the Registrar of Cooperative Societies on Developments during the Years 1921–1937* (Jerusalem, 1938), 10; and Philip E. Schoenberg, *Palestine in the Year 1914* (Ph.D. diss., New York University, vol. 1, 1978, 163–67).
 34. Heinrich Margulies, Anglo-Palestine Bank, to the Palestine Jewish Agency entitled, "The Tenant's Question in Palestine-*fellaheen*-landlord Relationships," 9 November 1931, CZA, S25/7619.
 35. Herbert Samuel to Lord Curzon, 2 April 1920, Herbert Samuel Archives, ISA; Note by Sydney Moody, Political Report for January 1923, Minute Sheet, 23 February 1923, CO 733/42/8933.
 36. Afif I. Tannous, "The Arab Village Community," *Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institute* (1943), 236.
 37. Zureik, "Reflections," 49.
- I. Chizik, "The Political Parties in Palestine," *Royal Central Asian Society Journal* 21 (1934): 94–128.

38. See Sir John Chancellor's famous dispatch of 17 January 1930 in CO 733/183/77050/Part 1.
39. Palestine, *Report on Immigration, Land Settlement and Development* (hereafter Hope Simpson Report), Cmd. 3686, (London, 1930), 59.
40. Letter from High Commissioner Sir Arthur Wauchope to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Philip Cunliffe-Lister, 22 December 1932, CO 733/219/97072/99.
41. For the published reports, see Great Britain, Palestine, *Commission on the Disturbances of August 1929* (hereafter Shaw Report), Cmd. 3530 (London, 1930); Hope Simpson Report, 1930; Palestine Government, *Report by Mr. C. F. Strickland of the Indian Civil Service on the Possibility of Introducing a System of Agricultural Cooperation in Palestine* (Palestine, 1930); Palestine Government, *Report of a Committee on the Economic Conditions of Agriculturalists in Palestine and Fiscal Measures of Government in Relation Thereto* (Palestine, 1930); Palestine Government, Lewis French, *First Report on Agricultural Development and Land Settlement in Palestine* (hereafter First French Report) (Palestine, 1931); and Palestine Government, Lewis French, *Supplementary Report on Agricultural Development and Land Settlement in Palestine* (Palestine, 1932).
42. The landless inquiry carried out between 1931 and 1939 showed by a very restrictive definition of a "landless" Arab that only 899 Arab families or approximately 5,000 earners and dependents were landless as a direct result of Jewish land purchase and Arab land sales. For a review of the landless Arab inquiry and its procedures, see Stein, *Land Question in Palestine*, 142–72; High Commissioner Wauchope to Cunliffe-Lister, 6 May 1935, CO 733/270/75049/1; Lewis Andrews, District Officer, to J. M. Martin, Secretary to the Peel Commission, 4 March 1937, CO 733/345/75550/33; High Commissioner MacMichael to Colonial Secretary Malcolm MacDonald, 24 May 1939, CO 733/405/75720.
43. See Stein, *Land Question in Palestine*, 178–82.
44. First French Report, paragraphs 70–73; Arthur Ruppin, "Comments on the French Report," p. 13, 30 June 1932, CZA, S25/7600.
45. Memorandum on points likely to be raised with the Secretary of State for the Colonies by the Arab Deputation from Palestine, January 1936, CO 733/297/75156/Part 1.

46. Theodore Swedenburg, *Memories of a Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Struggle for a Palestinian Nationalist Past* (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1988), 174; Tom Bowden, "The Politics of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine," *Middle Eastern Studies* 11 (May 1975): 149; Porath, "Social Aspects of the Emergence of the Palestine Arab National Movement," 132. My own research of the last fifteen years also supports this conclusion that the effects of Arab displacement from Arab land sales and Jewish land purchases contributed to the Arab peasant participation in the 1936–1939 revolt.
47. See Stein, *Land Question in Palestine*, 65–70, 182–84, 228–39.
48. Yehoshua Porath, "The Political Awakening of the Palestinian Arabs and Their Leadership towards the End of the Ottoman Period," in Moshe Ma'oz, ed., *Studies on Palestine during the Ottoman Period* (Jerusalem, 1975), 351–81; Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement 1918–1929* (London: 1974), 208–40; and Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement 1929–1939* (London, 1977), 49–79.
49. See Stein, "Palestine's Rural Economy, 1917–1939."
50. Palestine Government, *Census for Palestine, 1931*, vol. 1 (Alexandria, 1933), 291.
51. Issa Khalaf, *Palestine Factionalist Politics and Social Disintegration, 1939–1948* (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1985).
52. Minutes by H. F. Downie, 29 April 1940, CO 733/418/75072/9.
53. Minutes by J. E. Shuckburgh, 14 June 1940, CO 733/425/75872/12.
54. For examples of Arab circumventions of the 1940 Land Transfer Regulations, see A. F. Giles, Assistant Inspector of the Criminal Investigation Division to Palestine Chief Secretary, 13 April 1943; Ramadan Mohammad al-'Alami to Jaffa District Commissioner, 12 November 1943; and High Commissioner Sir Harold MacMichael to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir Oliver Stanley (with enclosures), 24 December 1943, CO 733/453/75072/9/1944.
55. Arjeh Tartakower, "Bodenfrage und Bodenpolitik in Palästina," *Der Jude* 6 (1921–1922): 731, 735.
56. Letter from Mr. Bawley, Head of the Palestine Zionist Executive's Colonization Department, to Mr. Sachar, 10 January 1929, CZA, Z4/3450/File III.
57. Frederick Kisch to the Executive of the Histadruth, the Palestine Colonization Association, the Jewish National Fund and Messrs. Botkovsky, Smilansky, Wilkansky, and Thon, 11 February 1931, CZA, S25/6525.

58. Zvi Botkovsky to Frederick Kisch, 3 March 1931, CZA, S25/9836.
59. Minutes of a conjoint meeting of the Jewish Agency, the Jewish National Fund, and the Palestine Land Development Company, 19 February 1936, CZA, S25/6538.
60. Lewis Namier of the London Jewish Agency played an instrumental role in fashioning this geographic and demographic division. See Namier to Mrs. Dugdale, 11 January 1931, CZA, S25/7587. See also Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 20 July 1931, 5th series, 225.
61. *Al-Hayat* (Jerusalem), 8 September 1930.
62. *Al-Ikdam*, 19 January 1931. For other examples, see *Filastin*, 29 January 1931; *Al-Carmel*, 5 August 1931; *Filastin*, 6 February 1932; *Al-Jami'ah al-'Arabiyyah*, 17 December 1933; *Filastin*, 8 May 1934; *Al-Jami'ah al-Islamiyyah*, 7 September 1934; *Al-Difa'*, 27 November 1934; *Al-Difa'*, 3 February 1935; and *Al-Liwa*, 3 February 1936.
63. *Al-Difa'*, 5 November 1934.
64. Schoenberg, *Palestine in the Year 1914*, 147.