Donna Robinson Divine, *Politics and Society in Ottoman Palestine: The Arab Struggle for Survival and Power*, Lynne Reinner Publishers, Boulder 1994, pp. 191-215. (with author's permission, September 2025)

J. C. Huyewitz's classic, *The Struggle for Palestine*, begins with the assertion that "Palestine, as a modern geographic and political unit, was the creation of World War I and its peace settlement."[1] Palestine may have been mapped for the first time after the British conquest, but it was not a newborn politically. Great Britain governed Palestine for thirty years beginning in 1918 and was charged with the responsibility "for placing the country under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home . and the development of self-governing institutions."[2] But Palestinian Arabs did not start to define their political culture in reaction to Great Britain's sponsorship of the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine.

The Ottoman Empire may have collapsed, but its political culture was not so instantly eradicated. Palestinian Arabs had learned to organize power in accordance with the terms set by Ottoman politics; indeed, their very sense of how power could be wielded derived from their successes and failures in an Ottoman imperial domain. In learning to live in changed circumstances and in blending old and new ways, Palestinian Arabs had formed deep attachments to an Ottoman political culture. Political orientations were slow to change, even though political conditions had been radically altered by 1918.

I have argued that the last one hundred years of Ottoman rule constituted a period of great creativity in government. The imperial state did not merely introduce new techniques of government. By 1914 the Ottoman state controlled a significant portion of Palestine's resources. The sultan owned vast tracts of land. The means by which he developed that land had a broad economic impact on regional agricultural production. Through various tax-collecting mechanisms the empire could direct the flow of grain supplies, and cereal cultivation was an important staple of Palestine's economy.

The imperial Ottoman state was not centralized, but it also was not Weak. Access to power and wealth followed the lines of provincial administration. The state apparatus was crucial to the acquisition and maintenance of power. Patronage and local influence were linked to Ottoman institutions. Upper-class Palestinian Arabs were deeply versed in the Ottoman system of government, which accounted not only for their sense of a collective political identity but also for their dominance over local resources. The organizational arrangements of the imperial Ottoman state shaped the pursuit of power in Palestine and the capacity of local elites to form enduring alliances. Certain groups in Palestine achieved local leverage not only within an Ottoman political context but also because of it.

The relationship between state and society was achieved through a process of adjustment that was remarkably effective and turned out to be enduring, lasting well into the first decade of British rule. Surely it is fitting to conclude by examining how well Palestinian Arabs were served by their Ottoman political legacy and to what extent the sequence of developments out of which Palestinian Arabs fashioned a particular political culture and social structure affected their capacity to benefit from, if not adjust to, British rule. Where does this history of Palestinian Arab society stand in relation to subsequent political developments?

The end of the Great War marked the beginning of enormous unrest for Palestinian Arabs. Discerning the enormous danger in the map drawn by European diplomats, Palestinian Arabs, along with Arabs from other lands, attempted to block its imposition. When the resistance to the new territorial divisions was broken, Palestinian Arabs redirected their struggle against imperialism into an active strategy of confrontation with Zionism. In riots affecting several cities, Jews came under attack. And Jewish property was destroyed as part of the Palestinian Arab effort to convince British policymakers to abandon their recently proclaimed intentions to encourage Jewish immigration and permit unrestricted Jewish land purchases. Arab resistance collapsed under the weight of British firepower.

The imposition of order by force, however, did not confer on Great Britain the capacity to govern. For a number of reasons, not the least of which was the political impasse between Jews and Arabs, British policymakers decided against creation of a strong mandatory state in Palestine.[3] The weakening of state power in Palestine shattered the economic and political supports that Arab political leaders needed to sustain their own local authority. Although their encounter with Zionism produced a unique situation, the framework of government in Palestine also generated unprecedented conditions: It deprived Palestinian Arabs of their privileged access to the dominant centers of power, and it weakened their control resources.

This chapter reviews British mandatory policies in light of the gap between Palestinian Arab political culture and Palestinian political conditions. Even apart from its endorsement of the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish National Home, Great Britain's system of government was hostile to the political culture so deeply embedded in Palestinian Arab society. For Palestinian Arabs, the difference between the cultural legacy of their past and the political context established under British domination gave rise to enormous confusion and disarray.

If it is important to recognize that Palestinian Arabs were long accustomed to wars, policy reforms, European traders, even Jewish settlers, it is no less essential to see that postwar British rule was not just one more encounter with adversity. In this period, Zionist activities constituted a challenge that Palestinian Arabs knew they had to meet. When Palestinian Arab political leaders turned to the state for support in meeting the challenge (as was their custom), they found, instead, a kind of policy indifference. But first let me explain why Palestinian Arabs saw in Zionist activities an imperative requiring so strong a response.

For Arabs in Palestine the crisis may have been expressed as an issue of political legitimacy, but initially it was one of confidence. The rapid success of many of the Zionist endeavors provoked among Arabs a sense of the weakness of their own leaders. It was less the number of newcomers than their definition of settlement that threatened Palestinian Arabs. Generations of Palestinian Arabs had inscribed on the countryside their own version of an ordered landscape—villages, sacred sites, hills covered with olive trees, plains cultivated with grains but often empty of permanent dwellings. Jews remade the land. They plowed the fields more deeply than the Arabs, and they irrigated more extensively. They enclosed their property with wire fences. On the collective farms, settlers constructed central dining rooms, schools, barns, and stables, adding to the inventory of unfamiliar objects injected onto Palestine's landscape. Ahmad Shuqayri remembers the startling effect of his first glimpse of a Jewish agricultural colony. The remarkable buildings and the clothing worn by Jewish farmers accentuated the differences between the communities.[4]

The use of the land changed as much as the structures placed on it. Jewish settlers were only learning how to be farmers, but they came equipped with modern tools and the capital to purchase the latest agricultural techniques. New crops and methods ushered in not just another way of doing things but also another way of thinking, all of which had a profound and unsettling effect on Palestinian Arabs. Coming at a time of enormous uncertainty for Palestinian Arabs and the need to recover from a long and difficult war, the flourishing of Zionist enterprises was particularly troublesome.

Zionist activities quickly became a focus of protest, but it was the British framework of government that ought to have claimed the attention of Palestinian Arabs. Already set in the first decade of British rule were the trends that eroded the economic and political structures sustaining Palestine's Arab leadership. As power and position depended heavily on control over agricultural production, any assessment of Palestinian Arab politics during the period of British rule must begin with a discussion of regulations regarding land.

Despite a determination not to intervene directly in the countryside,[5] the British elaborated new principles of determining landholding and land ownership—principles that accorded with European rather than Ottoman notions of measurement and boundaries. New terminology charted territory with a geometric precision alien to a terrain customarily divided along natural and familial lines.[6] Once in control of the most fertile areas of land — formally or informally — upper-class Palestinian Arabs now had to be willing to pay a high price to own it. Success in holding on to the lands depended, in part, on putting political needs ahead of economic viability, on being willing to invest in new technologies or to assume unprofitable financial burdens.

Agricultural conditions varied dramatically across different regions of Palestine. Mandatory policies solidified rather than diminished regional economic diversity, certainly a

factor impeding the consolidation of political authority among Palestinian Arabs. During the British Mandate period in the Jewish sector, land became a commodity freely traded by Arabs but not by Jews.

Though conscious of the political consequences of land sales, Palestinian Arabs found it difficult, for many reasons, to refuse to sell land. First, a significant rise in the Palestinian Arab population, the result of a declining infant mortality and increasing life expectancy, meant that not all those born in the countryside could be absorbed on the land.[7] In Palestine, land was expensive, and the price rose considerably in some regions as a result of expanding Jewish interest and increased purchases.[8] In 1930 two different inquiries into economic conditions concluded that traditional methods of extensive cereal cultivation could not accommodate both an increasing Arab rural population and continued Jewish colonization.[9] For many Palestinian Arabs, the choice was to sell and reap a quick profit, to intensify cultivation, or to farm at the very margins of arable land. The latter two options, however, were likely beyond their means or without potential for a reasonable return on their investments. Without substantial aid from the government or from external financiers, the political economy of Arab agriculture in Palestine would have been hard-pressed even in the absence of Jewish land purchases.[10]

Narrowing the access to land had reverberations in other sectors of the economy. Consider the circumstances in the northern regions of Palestine. When the lands in the Plain of Esdraelon were sold to the Jewish National Fund, not only did the ownership of the lands change, but their agricultural base was transformed as well. Various forms of intensive agricultural production and stockbreeding supplanted an extensive cereal cultivation and herding. For that reason, the economies of nearby Nazareth and Jenin, both of which had served as market towns for the grain trade, suffered. Instead, the ethnically mixed city of Haifa profited, oriented as it was in the 1920s to the servicing of farm machinery and the marketing of cash crops. Jewish land purchases, particularly along the coast, threatened the economic security of both the Arab upper and lower classes. As Scott Atran points out, “In the competition for economic control of Palestine that pitted the capital of the Arab landlord against Jewish capital in a depressed agricultural market, it was the latter that proved more in tune with the market forces then prevailing in the world.”[11]

In areas where Arab landowners could afford to modernize and thus benefit from British programs for agricultural development, small landowners were uprooted not so much by Jewish land purchases as by the consolidation of larger amounts of land in Arab hands. In the hinterland, the acreage of cultivated land expanded, with satellite villages acquiring a settled permanent status.[12] Even as the population of the hinterland region grew, however, many seized opportunities for employment in cities or on construction projects. Sometimes the opportunities for employment as either agricultural or urban laborers produced peasants who lived in their village but did not necessarily work there. A diminished pool of reliable labor imperiled the incomes of the large urban absentee landowners.

Contractual arrangements between some of the largest landowners and their sharecropping clients began to favor the latter as absentee landlords became more dependent than ever upon the peasants willing to work their land. Sharecroppers likely received a higher percentage of the crops harvested, and tenants might have been granted status as coequal partners with their landlord. Not only rising land prices served as a tempting inducement to sell land: A falling return from rents also encouraged landed notables to consider selling their properties.[13] Particularly for landed notables who lived in cities, squeezed by inflation and by pressure to absorb more of the expenditures, the higher cost of maintaining their style of life could leave too little working capital to invest in agriculture. Landowners who relied upon tenants to farm their lands often had difficulty achieving a profit sufficient to maintain their lifestyle after paying for livestock, seeds, and tools.

Related to land purchases in terms of impact were British Mandate policies on debt and credit. The strictures on expenses emanating from London inhibited certain kinds of economic development in the Arab sector. At the outset of British rule, a military government had run up expenditures—underwritten as loans to the Palestine government to feed Palestine's hungry population.[14] Even these expenditures unsettled British political leaders, who insisted that they be repaid. Other former Ottoman territories occupied by the British had received substantial financial grants. As one authority in Palestine observed by contrast, “owing to a very strict adherence to the laws and usages of war, expenditure had been kept very low and the British administration has refrained from many obvious improvements.”[15] Following the army's military conquest and occupation, British policymakers insisted that the Palestine government assume responsibility for a portion of the Ottoman debt.[16] For many years, Palestine was the only country repaying this debt. In 1920 Herbert Samuel embarked on a countrywide development plan based on deficit financing, but the Parliament only reluctantly and belatedly (in 1927) guaranteed the necessary short-term loans for some of the projects.

Extending credit and obtaining loans had, of course, been enduring features of agricultural life and were vital for the maintenance and improvement of Arab agriculture in Palestine. Whatever the effective rates of interest charged by urban-based moneylenders, the face-to-face credit system normally did not sever the ties between tenants and their land if only because labor was a scarcer commodity than land until the Mandate period. Whether or not they owned small plots or worked as tenants, most peasants lived their entire lives in debt.

Both Arab leaders and British officials argued that Arab tenure on the land could be secured only through the extension of government loans to liquidate debts to private moneylenders whose rates of interest were exorbitant. As shown in previous chapters, imperial policies effectively provided credit to notables and to imperial officials under extremely favorable terms. Although relatively few people could take advantage of such financing mechanisms, low-cost credit indirectly benefited many peasants who worked the land as tenants.

Shortly after World War I, when the legal rate of interest was 9 percent, moneylenders were charging 12 to 15 percent.[17] By the end of the first decade of British rule, however, interest charge on private debt had risen to 25 percent or higher.[18] In 1930 an official inquiry into credit conducted by C. F. Strickland calculated that a fallah might be charged from 30 to 200 percent interest annually.[19] Still, as one scholar has argued, "the absence of such credit facilities, despite the interest rates, would have even been more catastrophic than their much bemoaned existence."[20] A particularly striking example of how adversely affected Arabs were by the new climate for credit appears in the list of municipalities to receive loans after the war. Pursuing an investment strategy of growth, Barclays Bank made funds available to the ethnically and religiously mixed municipalities of Jaffa, Jerusalem, and Haifa but not to the relatively homogeneous cities of Nablus, Gaza, or Hebron.[21]

That the British accepted almost no responsibility for providing long-term credit in order to stabilize landholding had enormous implications for Arab agriculture in Palestine. Great Britain not only controlled Palestine's money supply, it also approved the charters under which banks operated in the country. The terms under which most banks in Palestine functioned left no doubt as to their commercial purpose. Within the Arab community, banks did not ordinarily finance the purchase of land. Property was normally required as security for the loans.[22] The shortage of loan funds and the persistent need for cash not only created a rising demand for credit but also increased its cost. It is possible to see in the British refusal to provide sufficient funds for modernizing Arab agriculture a very powerful instrument of destabilization. The monetarization of the economy only exacerbated the need for ample amounts of credit on easier terms.

**Infrastructure**

Strategic interests shaped British support for Zionism and tended to foreclose the underwriting of expensive programs for local development. At the behest of British policymakers in London and often against the advice of officials stationed in Palestine, only those projects that enhanced the military and political power of the empire were funded.[23] Although some enterprises (such as the expansion of port facilities in the Haifa harbor) had enormous value, they were undertaken primarily to service the British navy rather than geared toward raising Palestine's standard of living.[24] No function of the mandatory government was as important as defending imperial interests. The goal was to capture and hold territory deemed vital for protecting the Suez Canal and the major sea routes to India. Although the Mandate stipulated the duty of bringing Palestine to political independence and of facilitating the establishment of a Jewish National Home, a consensus emerged that, however these two aims were to be accomplished, British taxpayers would not have to pay for them. "The Administration thus costs nothing to His Majesty's Government," stressed one report endorsing the principle of striking "a balance between revenue and expenditure."[25]

The Arab economy in Palestine grew at an impressive rate, but the institutions supporting the economy were weakened. British strategic goals played an important role in undermining the economic structure in Arab Palestine. The fiscal considerations and security needs that placed priority on extending the railroad rather than on paving roads brought soldiers and policemen rather than economic viability to rural Palestine. Building the railroad was expensive, and colonial officials faced a fiscally conservative political leadership in London who demanded not only that revenues match expenditures but also that past expenses be included. Only after fervid protests were voiced by first High Commissioner Herbert Samuel did Great Britain refrain from imposing the costs of expanding the railroad during World War I on the mandatory government.[26] Accordingly, transport costs on the railroad were too high for most peasants and funds for the paving of additional roads were inadequate.[27] Some peasants who lived near large cities could transport their produce to market on the backs of animals. However, such trade increased individual household incomes without strengthening the Arab economy as a whole.

The highly selective pattern whereby areas in Palestine were linked via modern networks of transportation pacified the country but frustrated attempts to integrate it. The transportation network linked cities more tightly than it connected the countryside to the city. For the first time, northern and southern cities in Palestine were drawn together.[28] In the empire's last decades, northern Beirut and Damascus had enclosed northern Palestine via the Hejaz railway, whereas Cairo and Alexandria were accorded centrality in areas south of Jaffa. The Mandate's rail system brought together upper-class men and women in Jerusalem and Jaffa with their counterparts in Nablus and Haifa, but it failed to stimulate corresponding economic growth. Many villages remained not simply autonomous but autarkic, cut off from contacts with regional or city centers. Some villages had more active contact with European markets than with Palestinian cities.

Entire regions differed with respect to the extent of dispersal of rural trade. Of course, the percentage of agricultural production actually marketed depended on the crop. If not consumed in the household, surpluses brought to large regional markets often generated little profit because of the number of brokers necessary for that task. Not surprisingly, near the coast where cash crops such as citrus were grown with easy access to foreign markets, few middlemen were involved in trade. In areas within the hinterland, middlemen could still deny peasants financial returns commensurate with output and expectation. And for many in isolated rural areas, only middleman could provide links to the national economy. Observations on the variance in prices for the same item fill the pages of reports issued by the Department of Agriculture.[29] Often, agricultural products grown in abundance in one region could not be found in the market stalls of others. Between regions, the costs of production differed, sometimes dramatically. From the Arab perspective, then, the transportation system developed by the British was neither rational nor useful.

The geographic division of the Arab world also had negative consequences for Palestine's Arab economy. Palestine had served as a transit area for many goods exported from the Arab heartland. European goods destined for Damascus often began their overland journey in one of Palestine's port cities. These commercial activities generated employment for hundreds of Arabs. Marketing had created a host of ancillary trades, particularly in northern Palestine. The need to mount large caravans with sufficient protection mobilized urban trader, Bedouin, and villager. The compatibility of food production with a wide range of urban trades created a sense of the mutuality of economic interests.

With the establishment of separate Arab states under the tutelage of Great Britain and France, economic developments in the Arab states reflected the interests of the Great Powers and often developed out of the latters' political and economic rivalries. In these circumstances, transit trade in Palestine could not quickly or easily recover its prewar status, let alone surpass it. As Fuad Saba notes, "The transit trade [to Egypt] has been decreasing heavily…from L.E.67,247 in 1921 to L.E.48,015 in 1922 and to L.E.45,607 in 1923, while the transit trade to Syria decreased from L.E.721,800 in 1921 to L.E.347,699 in 1922 and to LSE.189,680 in 1923."[30]

Borders cut off traditional trade routes just as rapid systems of transportation opened new commercial opportunities. Faced with such new choices, however, urban merchants began to lose their sense of command over the flow of exchange. Their long-standing contacts in Damascus or Cairo could no longer supply credit or customers in a trade between independent states with conflicting economic interests and burdened by separate fiscal regulations.

**Economic Development**

Although the British aimed at "achieving administrative stability without altering existing social relationships."[31] British programs to distribute seed, remit or lower taxes, and extend educational services for farmers acted as assaults on the bastions of the Arab economy in Palestine. Lacking adequate funding, these programs generated intense rivalry with the British, who were disposed toward weighing the outcome in favor of a particular class of Palestinian Arabs.

The enhancement of agricultural productivity in some few villages only exacerbated cleavages within Palestine's Arab countryside. Strapped for resources, the mandatory government channeled benefits to small numbers of cultivators who were able to find a place in the new commercial economy, but most were untouched and left behind. The following rosy picture portrays the situation for the few, not the prospects for the many.

> The progress in the citrus industry has also helped to improve the position of the farmers as a whole...It has also given an impetus to the adoption of more intensive methods where extensive farming has been practiced hitherto. Thus, for example, the farmers in the

> Tulkarm district have gone in for potato-growing since the market for watermelons, principally Egypt, has become rather restricted. In the hilly region fruit growing is also becoming an important branch and the use of chemical manure is being extended considerably.[32]

Seeds were distributed to those willing and able to undertake improvements in farming. To the extent that the British encouraged agricultural development, they courted richer landowners who were able to irrigate their lands and introduce improved techniques of farming "without government loans."[33] If these landowners established reservoirs, they defrayed their expenses by increasing water charges to villagers who had to purchase water for their own lands. Landowners who undertook heavy capital expenditures rarely resisted the impulse to pass on the costs, if not to their own tenants, then to peasants working adjacent lands, the latter often dependent on the area's largest landowners for one service or another.[34]

The seeds distributed were not only grains, which ensured immediate subsistence, but also olive and fruit tree seedlings, which had the potential to create unwanted surpluses that sometimes undermined market prices.[35] Olive and citrus trees did not produce commercial yields for many years, and schemes to increase quantities of fruit sometimes crumbled by the time they could actually be implemented. Surpluses failed to translate into profit for another reason as well: Road construction did not provide ready access to lucrative markets. Nowhere were the interests of rich and poor, of large landowner and marginal tenant, so clearly opposed than in areas where surpluses could be produced but not brought to market. Conflicts were generated over whether particular parcels of land ought to be used for cultivation or for roadways. In one petition, a village mukhtar pleaded, "We cannot describe the difficulties encountered by us and our children by not using this old road."[36]

Exploiting their long-established dominance in Egypt, the British structured their economic control of Palestine initially through Anglo-Egyptian financial institutions. Egyptian money became standard currency for Palestine, and the Anglo-Egyptian Bank acted as "official treasurer in Occupied Enemy Territory (South)."[37] So clearly linked were Palestine and Egypt that one study reported, "The prices of foodstuffs rise or fall with prices in Egypt, whence such staple articles as rice, sugar, sesame, and peanuts are almost exclusively obtained."[38] Sharing a currency with a polity bent on achieving its own independence and pursuing its own economic interests was not without adverse consequences for Palestine.

British policies effected a new economic differentiation in Palestinian Arab society. What emerged was not simply a more marked differentiation between rich and poor but, rather, new diversities altogether. Areas along the coast were enriched during the Mandate's first decade, whereas the economy of the hinterland declined. Agricultural conditions were _particularly disappointing for hinterland cultivators—peasants and landowners alike. Notwithstanding the hardships of the most recent war, many peasants in the hinterland region had experienced

material prosperity in the last years of Ottoman rule. Significant numbers had done well during the war. Before World War I, many Palestinian Arabs had profited from trade with other Arab capitals. Craftsmen in Palestine had been able to hold their own against European competition. But prosperity had often rested upon a foundation of low production costs, which mandatory policies increasingly eroded.[39]

British economic policies changed the concentrations of wealth. At the individual level, moneyed families could now build handsome houses in newly established urban suburbs, import European furniture; and send their children to European-sponsored schools.40 Education had a clear impact on mobility and employment options. But most Palestinian Arabs did not have ready access to education even at the primary level. Tuition was expensive, and those who wished to enter high school often had to bear the costs of room and board. Palestinian Arabs castigated the mandatory government for not providing funds to spur the expansion of a system of public education. The British government itself acknowledged failure in not building a larger number of elementary schools across the Palestinian countryside:

> In a report on the history of school buildings in Nablus, the distinguished Arab educator, Ibrahim Sunaubar, says: . . . What caught my attention, when I was appointed inspector of education for the district of Samira in 1945, was that the number of government buildings for schools had remained the same, from 1918 to 1945. All expansion in the educational field was being carried out in rented buildings that had been built as houses, not schools.[41]

Seeming to imitate European tastes, some Palestinian Arabs created tangible signs for new distinctions between the few and the many. Ordinary Palestinian Arabs sometimes expressed great bitterness at the ostentatious displays of wealth and the apparent unqualified admiration of European culture. But for the newly enriched, this trend offered the possibility of widening the ambit of political influence. The closer the fit between the Palestinian Arab elite and their British colonial masters, the greater their impact on British policies—but the less deference they exacted in their own community.

British and Jewish economic activities also induced a larger proportion of the Arab population in Palestine to move to the cities, even if only to work.[42] A significant portion of young male workers labored for several years in the city while their families remained in the village, to which the workers periodically returned. The new mobility and movement detached Arab workers from their once-powerful sense of belonging to a community with a common set of interests and values.

Evidence of the weakening of community ties can be found in almost all sectors of the rich and poor in the countryside. Consider the case of those wealthy villages able to irrigate land and plant vegetables and fruit trees. A more constant labor supply was required to tend these crops, but fewer villagers were available. The increased burdens were routinely imposed on peasant women whose workloads grew heavier. Reports of peasant women refusing to marry

men who owned or worked land on which vegetables were grown surfaced during this period.[43] Equally problematic was the situation of the newly established villages that had emerged so as to accommodate the expanded population. Peasant women who married men from these villages were forced to live at greater distances from their families and were thus denied important networks of emotional and practical support.[44] In general, marriages were more difficult to arrange, and complaints were often attributed to the difficulties of British rule.

Despite the common grounds of their opposition to Zionism, then, Arabs in mandated Palestine had strikingly different economic interests. In the several decades before the outbreak of World War I, the imperial political system had accommodated old and new values and economies. By contrast, British policies intensified the disparities. Where the profits of market agriculture and/or industrial employment reached Palestinian Arabs, benefits were often accompanied by direct exposure to rapidly changing market forces and the need to make painful adjustments to an urban society.[45] Because British policies intensified economic inequalities, the rich as well as the poor evinced sensitivity about their status. Jewish land purchases raised the price of land. Urbanization contributed to a higher cost of living. Palestinian Arabs who worked in cities, even temporarily, had to spend more money for food and shelter. International market forces produced severe changes in the local economy. Indeed, not just hostility to Zionism but also uncertainty and confusion shaped the experience of Palestinian Arabs.

For many years population growth, administrative reforms, new forms of transportation, and increased European trade had gradually reworked the structural underpinnings of Arab society in Palestine. But the new dislocations associated with the impact of international market forces during the British Mandate period had a much swifter and more severe impact than all of the previous changes introduced during Ottoman rule. Surprisingly little in their background of hardship and toil had prepared Palestinian Arabs for the kind of economic insecurity generated by mandatory policies. Cheap European goods had never before so compromised the status of traditional occupations. Many local crafts such as pottery, glassmaking, and textiles were either destroyed or marginalized as tourist items.[46] New trade routes enabled European mercantile companies to expand their control over Palestine's international commerce at the expense of Arab merchants. These merchants lost even more ground when changes in trade routes led to an abrupt end to overland caravans.[47] The near monopoly on raising and marketing of grains once exercised by urban notables gave way under the impact of Great Britain's determination to maintain cheap and ample supplies of food.

British policies were much more hospitable to commercialized agriculture and industry than to the subsistence farming activities of most Palestinian Arabs. Highly marketable cash crops such as citrus fruits or bananas could be exported and earn significant profits. The limited credit advanced by the British “on easy terms (six and one-half percent on the security of the land, repayable over a period which may extend to five years) . . . so far has [mostly] gone to save the orange gardens at Jaffa.”[48] Although British officials described such loans as “an

element of much value in the agricultural development of the country,"[49] for most Palestinian Arabs they were unavailing. And even the financial burdens imposed on relatively successful agrarian capitalists were substantial. It was difficult for orange growers to retain their competitiveness during this decade. The costs of production were higher in Palestine than in California or South Africa. Heavy decay in transit eroded profits. Larger crops per tree were harvested in the United States within a shorter number of years. Jaffa lacked adequate storage facilities, and a high percentage of the fruit was damaged at the dock before being shipped.[50]

The pattern of European exchange may have benefited some individual merchants, but it did not secure the long-term interests of Palestine's Arab economy.[51] British officials typically remarked that Palestine's economic problems stemmed from too many "merchants … with small capital" and a trade consisting "of a number of small orders [rather] than of large orders for individual merchants on any single line of goods."[52] According to mandatory authorities, circumstances neither warranted nor permitted commerce on a scale sufficient to spur economic development.

By lowering the prices of agricultural goods, the mandatory customs policy radically disadvantaged the Arab population, most of whom relied upon the land to supply their needs. An inflation of three years' duration followed the war's end; then came a severe depression.[53] By the time most peasants in Palestine had reestablished prewar levels of output, world prices had already begun to drop. The British insisted that grains be imported duty-free even after world prices fell sharply in 1923.[54] Imperial preferences hurt other Palestine producers as well. Abrupt swings in the trade cycles during the postwar period—the ups and downs occasioned by an international market—bred enormous uncertainty and confusion.

Needing to stimulate their own economic development, Arab states eventually began levying tariffs on many goods imported from Palestine. In 1927 Egypt instituted duties on imported soap that plunged the Palestinian Arab soap industry into a depression.[55] The crisis for soap manufacturers illustrates the weakness of Palestine's Arab elite, who were now unable to secure the government credits necessary to recapture their competitive share of the market.

The organization of soap manufacture in the Arab sector had not changed in more than a century. Olive oil provided the basis for production. Because so many olive trees had been cut down for fuel during World War I, the local crop was insufficient in the early years of the Mandate. Olives had to be imported during the first few years after war's end. Most factories owned by Arabs were still small; none were mechanized. The entire process of production was arduous and inefficient. According to one estimate, all of the factories in Nablus produced between 500 and 1,000 tons annually. A single Jewish mechanized factory that had opened at the turn of the century produced 200 tons per year.[56] Particularly as European soap factories expanded, mechanized, and began to manufacture soap from cheaper materials, Palestinian soap simply became too expensive. Only in Egypt did the market preference for Palestinian soap

continue through the end of World War I. Egyptian women preferred Palestinian soap for washing their clothes because it dissolved well and could be used for overnight soaking. But Egypt was also anxious to support its own burgeoning soap industry and so began raising tariff barriers to reduce the demand for imported soap. According to one report, “Exports of olive oil soap to Egypt have fallen from 5,512 tons with a value of LP 238,118 in 1925 to 1,064 tons with a value of LP 38,380 in 1933.”[57]

During the first decade of British rule, Palestinian Arab soap manufacturers found themselves constrained both by their loss of political clout and by their own underdevelopment. Market demand for olive oil soap depended on price. Profitability derived from sufficient demand and low production costs, the latter sustained by reliance upon labor power. By opening new employment opportunities for Arab laborers, the British had already increased labor costs. As if to underscore the weakened position of soap manufacturers, policies continued to underwrite the planting of olive trees long after the demand for soap had diminished and new markets were unlikely to be opened.[58]

The difficulties of soap manufacturers illustrate the more general economic problems of the upper classes in Palestine. To end their disadvantaged position in the international market, Palestinian Arab soap manufacturers would have had to mechanize and build large factories, a risky venture because the costs of private financing were high. But these soap manufacturers, once able to exert enormous leverage in setting tax rates, did not have sufficient influence to secure government-guaranteed low-cost loans for modernizing their plants. Moreover, British policymakers were already inclined against draining their already limited budgets. When Great Britain placed the power of the state behind economic activities, government policies invariably worked at cross-purposes for Arab and Jewish residents. In turn, conflicting interests facilitated British resistance to any policy proposal that jeopardized Palestine's balanced budget.

**Taxation**

Mandatory tax policies also had a differential impact on Arab and Jewish communities in Palestine and undermined the capacity of Palestinian Arabs to hold on to their landed resources. From the first twelve years of their rule, the British retained the Ottoman Empire's taxation system with only a small number of amendments.[59] Under mandatory conditions, however, the familiar taxation system had a pernicious effect on social relations. Customs duties generated half of the tax revenues in the Mandate's first decade. The British policy of ensuring ample supplies of food through imports had clear financial benefits for the British administration. The increase in customs revenues was “derived mainly from the import of staple requirements of the country,”[60] and it attended the decline in the significance of the tithe as a contribution to total tax revenues. Although the British continued to rely upon the participation of local notables in fixing the tithes, such activities seemed much less important in the new financial context.

As a source of revenue, custom duties were at first "based exclusively on fiscal considerations"[61] but when the British adopted a tariff policy to protect nascent industries, lower prices for many raw materials left more money for investment in the hands of Jewish entrepreneurs. Arab manufacturers reaped few rewards because they tended to rely upon labor power rather than on machines in the process of production. In 1928 only 5 of the 296 olive presses in Palestine's heavily Arab Judaean district were operating with motors.[62] Moreover, only 6 percent of all textile factories had machines, and those were owned by Jews.[63]

In addition, Arabs in Palestine criticized the land tax rate as being too high and noted that far too few services had been extended to the community in return for these fees. Arabs charged the mandatory government with placing much too heavy a tax burden on peasants, thus attributing chronic indebtedness in the countryside to what were widely perceived as unfair tax policies.

**Culture**

No less disconcerting for Palestinian Arabs were the cultural trends of the time. Yet, even if the British support for the Zionist goal of establishing a Jewish National Home in Palestine undermined trust, it did not destroy hope. Many educated Palestinian Arabs expected significant improvements to follow the assumption of British authority, Palestinian Arabs believed it likely that Great Britain would encourage economic growth and expand education.[64] Their hopes had been so aroused by the principles of self-determination and progress enunciated during the war that Great Britain's seeming indifference to them in peacetime was all the more painful. Where the British saw the purpose of government in Palestine as the preservation of their military balance of power, many Palestinian Arabs entertained expectations of the dawning of a new age of prosperity and enlightenment.

Expectations of emancipation did not prepare Palestinian Arabs for their encounters with new kinds of restrictions. They initially possessed little understanding of how to bridge the gap between their political traditions and the system of government instituted under the British Mandate. Many notables and shaykhs expended much energy on trying to find a means of restoring their former dominance. Their one obvious method—to ground their struggle for power in a firm and close alliance with the British—would have required such unequivocal support for the Mandate and its policies as to be virtually unacceptable. The British support for a Jewish National Home in Palestine gave unexpected impetus to the disestablishment of political elites. The experience of having to resist the British Mandate in order to oppose Zionism forced Arabs to appear to be defending what they had come to regard as traditional institutional forms.

During Ottoman rule, notables had enjoyed preferential treatment in entering government service. In fact, the Ottoman system had supported a style of politics in which landed wealth often coincided with administrative office. Although Ottoman reforms had begun to provide

more effective government with more highly trained officials, they had not eliminated the advantaged access of the landed notability.

One could argue that, by defining duties and responsibilities, Ottoman reforms had anticipated some aspects of the mandatory administration. But imperial political changes had never established such a clear line of bureaucratic authority as to eclipse the discretionary influence and power of local officials. Administrative offices in 1914 were quite different from such positions a century earlier. Still, Ottoman changes were gradual and piecemeal, and had been worked out in partial deference of local interests and demands. Great Britain transformed Palestine's administration, instantly creating a radical disjuncture between status and power.

The modern administration imposed by the British denied Palestinian Arab notables a vast arsenal of political resources. Precise descriptions of official duties and clearly defined hierarchies confined government officials to the implementation of policies formulated in London by British political leaders. Arab officials now had to operate under what for them were distinctly unique forms of supervision and control. British mandatory service had increased the burdens of office and lowered its status. Political authority could not loom large at a time when claims to authority were so diverse and contradictory. No wonder that some Arab officials found themselves at odds with the policies they were supposed to apply while others became targets of abuse in their own community.[65]

Although Arabs of all classes now had the opportunity to be appointed to government posts, we ought not to minimize the problematic aspect of serving in a political system where power was highly circumscribed. Central policies were formulated in London. Whatever measure of influence a mandatory official could wield, it bore no relation to the discretionary power of provincial officials in the Ottoman Empire. Nothing turned out to be more subversive of deference than having to operate within the frame of reference erected by British policymakers, If Arabs in Palestine exercised power, they now did so without exercising commensurate dominance.

British legal norms released peasants from forced-labor duties and from all forms of corporal punishment, but they also effected a dispersion of social authority by eroding the attachments of peasant clients to their urban notable patrons. Equality before the law mandated a politics of shrinking opportunities for private gestures and privilege. Palestinian Arabs of the upper classes could no longer anticipate a life of continued dominance in a polity that was officially blind to status distinctions.

Deprived of easy access to office, consigned to inferior roles in recommending tax rates, denied their monopolies over food and the peasant work force, many notables fought to restore their former preeminence and status through the creation of social service associations. Scholars have yet to remark fully on the significance of Palestinian Arab social service organizations.[66] Permitted by Ottoman legislation to organize voluntary nonpolitical associations, individual

groups of Palestinian Arabs were driven by Mandate conditions to vest in them extraordinarily high hopes. Some of these organizations in Palestine traced their origins to the last decades of Ottoman rule, many stimulated by the example of elections held after the Young Turks restored the Ottoman Constitution in 1908.[67] Relatively small numbers of upper- and middle-class men and women participated. Literary evidence as well as official records indicate that such organizations met and sponsored activities in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Gaza before the establishment of British rule.[68] During the period of British rule, the act of establishing a public organization was a telling example of the survival of Ottoman political culture and the expectation that old strategies would continue to be effective.

Unable to take inherited status, wealth, position, and privilege for granted, many Arabs used social service organizations rather than political parties as a vehicle for recapturing power. Though ostensibly founded as charitable fund-raising mechanisms, some of these organizations became vehicles for turbulent political activities.[69] Very often their memberships divided along religious lines or, within the Christian community, among the several denominations represented in Palestine.[70] Almost always, the organizations were segregated by gender. The Orthodox Christian institutions, representing the largest Christian group in Palestine, were particularly well organized and funded. Their activities focused as much on church as on British Mandate politics.[71]

Organizations sprang up for quite diverse purposes. Some consisted of people bound together by a common interest, Confining their activities to sports or drama or literature, certain groups had something of a private character, but still they issued from a change in thinking about human association. No longer could family structure or neighborhood form the grounds for leisure-time interaction. Rather, individual Palestinian Arabs felt the need to reach out on the basis of common education or shared interest. The most common organizations had clear philanthropic goals and were associated with particular institutions: hospitals, orphanages, schools. Many performed functions once fulfilled by families: care of orphans and the aged, funding for education, vocational training, and health.[72] Others, called Societies for the Preservation of Good and Forbearance of Evil, suggest a consciousness of the breakdown in functioning of religious institutions.

Many groups drew in Arab youth either by attracting young men living alone in the cities or by mobilizing boys in secondary schools. In the mobilization of numerous students or young workers, there was at least the appearance of control. Active club members communicated, They saw to it that their resolutions and proceedings were published in the newspapers at a time when newspapers were beginning to penetrate rural areas.[73]

The proliferation of voluntary associations during a period of intense social change suggests that this activity had deep cultural roots. For many Palestinian Arab men and women, organizational activities served as an important means of translating core values into action.

Some associations seemed to function as cushions against the difficulties arising from economic and social change. Others, particularly those in villages, helped raise money for small-business ventures or for local educational improvements.[74] Some organizations were even permitted to import goods duty-free.[75] Organizations devoted to extending financial aid to orphans or to the indigent generally emerged within a religious framework, identifying themselves by name as either Muslim or Christian. Their aims seemed supportive of venerable religious traditions.

With respect to Islam, however, the creation of these organizations had radical implications. Although their sponsors did not challenge the institutions that were traditionally mandated to fulfill charitable functions, they were nevertheless in competition with those institutions for funds and for active supporters. The very existence of voluntary charitable societies questioned, if not the legitimacy, then certainly the adequacy of customary ways of performing charity functions. For many centuries, pious endowments (awqaf) had generated funds for the poor, the sick, and the orphaned; Muslim clerics had presumably provided all the necessary authoritative moral guidance the society needed. Ostensibly, the aim of these associations was to ensure to the degree possible that discipline not be breached and authority not be challenged, but their very founding indicated that the traditional aids to certainty and order were no longer considered sufficient. Some of these organizations played a crucial role in providing Palestinian Arabs who felt alone and alienated in the cities with common

experiences and values. But these associations, so responsive to individual needs, had no common political strategy, Nor could they devise one. The organizations remained vulnerable to regional differences, ancient family feuds, and class conflicts. No broad-based membership could be mobilized, nor could any ideology be forged that cut across competing constituencies, They could induce action but not sustain direction. They could neither seize control of the state nor totally ignore it, But as long as economic interest Palestinian Arabs to seek individual rewards, political culture focused their demands toward unattainable goals.

**Final Remarks**

By the end of the first decade of British rule, the Arab and Jewish economies were marked by two distinct sets of attributes. Jewish factories were relatively large, mechanized, and concentrated in the four largest cities: Haifa, Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Tel Aviv. Arab factories were small, with few exceptions not mechanized, and widely dispersed throughout the country. The range of Arab enterprises in 1928 would have seemed familiar to those Arabs in the region a half-century earlier.[76]

Not surprisingly, industrial developments reflected a growing competition between the Arab and Jewish sectors. Both Arab and Jewish industries concentrated on the processing of locally grown agricultural products; but the Jewish factories were heavily financed and able to take advantage of economies of scale unachievable by their Arab counterparts. In many cases, Arabs availed themselves of Jewish processing plants because they were cheaper and more

efficient, thereby inadvertently helping to drive many small Arab manufacturing plants out of business.[77] Almost any scheme that advantaged the economic interests of one community threatened those of the other.

Where politics invited national solidarity, economics nurtured localism. Strong community ties had not been perfectly maintained during Ottoman rule. But the empire did manage to bring a measure of unity to Arabs with its vision of a single Muslim religious identity. The Ottoman framework of government had supported norms that sanctioned both the force of custom at the local level and a familiar set of controls over labor and family. In Ottoman Palestine, family structure and function had the effect of regulating supplies of available labor. Even if privileges were withdrawn from specific families, the idea of privilege was sustained. Patterns of deference were preserved.

Although the distance was great between rich and poor, urban dweller and peasant, it was not necessarily a source of conflict under Ottoman rule. Customs were naggingly persistent even in the midst of enormous upheaval. Some peasant villages had pasts measured in centuries; others only in decades, Peasants acquired strong attachments to village communities in which they farmed, just as their ancestors had done. Or, where peasants lacked deeply rooted ties to place, they had supportive kin or tribal networks. The authority of the patriarch brought a measure of stability to individuals in turbulent times. Patriarchs helped arrange marriages, control inheritance, and mediate disputes, and they used both law and social custom to subordinate individual desires to the interests of the larger family group. Those peasants who were uprooted from the villages of their birth often preserved their traditional way of life by replicating important aspects of family structure, albeit with new masters. Family was an important element of social control. Necessity knit Palestinian Arabs into kin networks. To belong to a family meant to be under a social and economic umbrella. Membership carried obligations, but it also offered privileges.

The contrast between these conditions and those under the British Mandate is striking. The politics that assaulted Palestine's Arab economy also weakened its family structure. Networks of patronage no longer operated with the same effect. As British policies precipitated economic and political dislocations, they could not avoid upsetting social and family life. A significantly longer life expectancy delayed economic emancipation for many Palestinian Arabs, provoking family disputes and dividing generations. Bride price increased, and complaints that financial exigencies prevented or postponed marriages were widespread.[78] Although marrying outside of hamula or village significantly raised the bride price, spouses brought from other villages became more common.[79] People may have had more employment options, but they also had fewer social choices. The divorce rate climbed, particularly in cities.[80] Wealth became increasingly detached from status, even in the countryside.

British policies induced conditions that were alien to the experience of most Palestinian Arabs and consequently placed unprecedented pressures upon their economic and social structures. Arabs in Palestine had a common interest in trying to block the establishment of a Jewish National Home, but after a decade of British rule the institutional weapons they could deploy in the political struggle were much weaker and more fragmented. British rule in 1918 opened a new era of politics for Palestinian Arabs.

The differences between Ottoman and British rule were huge. Although Palestinian Arabs were alert to the dangers inherent in British support for the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine, they were slow to recognize the Mandate's potential for transforming their social and economic order.

Few Palestinian Arabs were prepared for so sudden a change in their landscape. Despite the new framework of government, they continued to rely upon political stratagems from their past and failed to identify both the new pressures and the new possibilities that had emerged. Schooled in Ottoman politics, they drew on lessons that turned out to be irrelevant or counterproductive in the new context.

**Notes**

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6. Abraham Granott, *The Land System in Palestine* (London, 1952).
7. Government of Palestine, *Statistical Abstract of Palestine 1944-1945,* p. 26; Uziel O. Schmelz, “Population Changes in Judea and Samaria: Analysis of Their Demographic Determinants,” in *Yehuda ve-Shomron*, edited by Avshalom Shmueli, David Grossman, and Rechavam Zeevy (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 81—92. During the years of the British Mandate, the Arab population in Palestine doubled.
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