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Source: *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Feb., 1997), pp. 93-112

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/163853>

Accessed: 27/08/2009 15:20

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Issa Khalaf

THE EFFECT OF SOCIOECONOMIC CHANGE ON ARAB SOCIETAL COLLAPSE IN MANDATE PALESTINE

Between December 1947 and the first four months of 1948, the fabric of a centuries-old Palestinian Arab society unraveled with astounding rapidity, producing 750,000 refugees. The collapse occurred within the context of widespread socioeconomic disruption and dislocation among peasants and migrant and urban workers. The eroding socioeconomic foundation severely weakened this lower stratum's defense against Zionist settlement, colonial state policies, and military pressures. Beginning in late Ottoman times and throughout the British Mandate period (1918–48), the agrarian social economy had been slowly undermined by the urban landowning class and oppressive tax and land-tenure systems. Peasant dispossession, begun in the 19th century and aggravated by Zionist land-buying in the 20th, created a significant landless rural population that was increasingly dependent on wage labor in scattered rural locations and in the cities. During the British Mandate, as Palestine was rapidly incorporated into the world market, communal harmony and social integration were further strained by urban–rural and peasant–landowner tensions, disjointed urban–working–class development, unemployment, and overcrowding. As a result, by the late 1940s Palestinian Arab society was on the brink of disintegration.

Investigations into the causes of the collapse and of the exodus in 1947–48 have so far been confined to political, military, or diplomatic factors. Among them are Zionist expansion through military action and terrorism; the incompetence, corruption, and political ambitions of the Arab states; Arab collaboration with the British; Arab determination to destroy the new State of Israel; and Hashemite–British–Zionist complicity in denying the Palestinian Arabs a state of their own. Recent revisionist works have provided more nuanced and critical interpretations of old causes and explanations: Benny Morris weighs the effect of Zionist policy and actions in contributing to the exodus, while Avi Shlaim mainly explicates Zionist–Hashemite collusion in preventing the emergence of a Palestinian state.¹ These and other, less recent works dealing with Palestinian politics during the Mandate pay superficial attention to socioeconomic changes in Palestinian Arab society and their effects on that society's social cohesion or lack of it.² Moreover, none distinguishes between external (i.e., military or terrorist) and internal (i.e., social) causes. Kenneth W. Stein's study on the role of

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change in the agricultural economy in societal dissolution in 1948 is one of the few exceptions, but much remains to be done, especially for the last decade of the Mandate.³

Though the degree or weight assigned to it is open to question, decades of social change clearly contributed to communal collapse and flight in the months of 1948—that is, rapid and chaotic breakdown and disintegration of village and urban political and social organization and leadership. In the context of an absent Palestinian national authority, the early flight of thousands among the upper and middle classes, and a colonial government that was hurriedly evacuating the country, there was no body that could coordinate and organize resistance and maintain basic public services to avert the widespread collapse of communal institutions and authority. Rather than to diminish the role of politics and the military in the collapse of Arab Palestine, however, the purpose here is to single out endogenous socioeconomic factors that contributed to it. Although a direct causal relationship between social crisis and sociopolitical collapse can only be inferred, there is undeniably a link between a society's fragmentation or lack of internal cohesion and its ability to withstand external pressures.

I argue that the process by which migrant peasants become agricultural wage laborers or proletarians in the second half of the Mandate had a destabilizing effect on Palestinian society. Building on Stein's article on changes in the agricultural economy, the account that follows first describes the pressures that served to undermine the peasantry and weaken the bonds holding together rural Palestinian society, and second, links these disruptions with the dislocation caused by the subsequent increase in the number of migrant wage laborers (particularly the upsurge in wage labor during World War II) and the corresponding rise of an urban working class.

The deleterious impact of rapid social changes on the lowest stratum of Palestinian Arab society was already apparent during the Mandate period. That stratum, made up almost entirely of *rural* Palestinian Arabs, constituted roughly 70 percent of the population.⁴ Peasants, rural and migrant wage laborers, and urban workers alike were buffeted by contradictory and multifaceted developmental processes which directly affected the internal dynamics of Arab society. Efforts on the part of the rural proletariat and urban workers to achieve security and stability amid the disintegration of rural life were impeded by a weak Arab industrial economy, Jewish settlement, and an indifferent colonial policy.

For the most part, pre-1948 Palestinian Arab social and political history was shaped by the interplay of three factors: the imposition of an administratively assertive state, beginning with the Ottomans in the 19th century and considerably strengthened under British colonial rule in the 20th; Palestinian society's encounter with a competing Jewish presence; and the expansion of the world market into Palestine under the aegis of the British.

Beginning in late Ottoman times, administrative reforms designed to centralize the imperial administration and collect revenues had led to oppressive tax and land-tenure systems that benefited large landowners, most of whom lived in cities; merchants; and moneylenders. The peasantry steadily lost land to the members of this economic elite, who in turn rented land back to peasants to raise capital. Therefore, though legally dispossessed, the peasants were not physically deprived of land to

cultivate. Access to land was ensured through tenancy arrangements, which had economic and sociopolitical functions for both landowners and peasants. Under British rule, however, landowners sold a great deal of land at inflated prices to Zionist organizations, and in these cases the peasants were physically displaced. Peasant dispossession was exacerbated by rapid population growth, which put pressure on the communal tenure system and fragmented land into ever smaller plots. The resulting landless rural population survived by turning to wage labor. Even some who remained as tenants had to seek work either in the cities or in agricultural jobs away from home.

This process loosened the ties between peasant and landowner; increased tensions between peasants and land brokers, some of whom were village heads; and therefore contributed to overall communal disharmony.

Growing peasant discontent was directed at landlords and merchants, at Zionists, and at the British. The Mandate administration did little to ameliorate the peasantry's lot or reduce the pressures that were forcing increasing numbers into wage labor, aside from putting them temporarily to work on military projects during World War II. Thousands left the land to live in squalid conditions in the city, which made the British uneasy, but only because they needed to control the political consequences; they made no attempt to deal with the causes of unemployment and poverty. At root, the rural bonds of the peasants had been weakened by their incomplete and disjointed transformation into wage laborers and urban workers.

The growth of urban working-class organizations, such as labor unions, shows this persistent process of uneven changes from the village to the city, which both caused the steady disintegration of village social life and rendered agricultural and urban wage laborers economically insecure. Labor unions that recruited and organized villagers proved unable to absorb the constant influx or to organize them into a new sociopolitical order. As a result, village migrant wage laborers were left to float between the rural and urban economies.

After World War II, this socioeconomic process reached its climax. Increasing unemployment, growing political antagonism between Arabs and Jews, heightened Arab working-class political and social consciousness, simmering peasant resentment against land sellers, severe social disruption, and intensified urban overcrowding weakened and frayed the Palestinian Arab social structure at the very moment, in 1948, when it faced its first military challenge from an organized, determined foe.

AGRARIAN CHANGE AND PEASANT DISLOCATION

Before Britain assumed control of Palestine after World War I, the Ottoman state presided over a land-tenure and tax system that perpetuated wretched living conditions among the peasantry. The tithe under the Ottomans was fixed at 12.5 percent of the gross produce (i.e., payable on the gross yield of the harvest rather than on net income), and thus fell most heavily on those with the poorest land.⁵ Government taxes and payments to moneylenders, who charged interest at a rate as high as 50 percent, increased the oppression, as did poor soil and difficult climatic conditions. Over decades many fellahin lost their land to creditors or sold it to pay off loans. The Ottomans did little to protect peasants' security in land tenure or to restrict the

growth of large estates and the power of the landowning classes. Instead, as is well known, Ottoman administrative reforms from the 1830s reinforced the sociopolitical status quo, based as it was on patronage relationships.⁶ These relationships, however, failed to prevent economic insecurity among the peasants, which was awakening an already parochially divided traditional society. During World War I, general hardship, large-scale conscription of peasant military labor, deforestation (especially of olive trees) for fuel and heat, the forced quartering of troops in villages, and the confiscation of food and livestock compounded Palestine's problems.

Conditions worsened during the Mandate period. By 1930, the average annual income of a fellah family that owned its own land was only about P £35, which nevertheless was much higher than a tenant farmer's. Interest on loans averaged 30 percent a year.⁷ Peasant farmers remained at the mercy of rents, which took roughly 30 percent of the income from cultivation, and other production costs, including taxes, seed, animal fodder, food, clothing, and fuel, leaving them with meager net incomes and liable for additional burdens in taxes and debts. In the early 1930s, successive poor harvests, droughts, cattle diseases, plagues of locusts and field mice, and a global depression caused prices and cereal-production levels to collapse. Peasants commonly defaulted on loans, rents, tithes, and taxes. Peasant farms remained mere subsistence units (the rural surplus, depending on the crop and region, varied between 20 and 30 percent), but fellahin dependence on merchants, moneylenders, and landowners in an increasingly monetarized economy placed them in an extremely vulnerable position.⁸ Economic insecurity among a rising number of destitute peasants explains why during the Mandate they held urban landowning interests responsible for their frustrations. Anger exploded into violence in 1936–39, when a rebellion was led by peasant commanders and sustained with the participation of some 5,000 fellahin.⁹

During the Mandate, the agrarian situation was also aggravated by land pressures. Substantial natural increases in the Arab population were a major factor in rural areas. From about 600,000 in 1918, the Arab population had risen to 1,319,434 in 1947, with between 700,000 and 800,000 living in the countryside.¹⁰ Continued enforcement of Islamic inheritance law (i.e., equal shares for the sons) at a time that the Arab extended family was multiplying rapidly increased the number of owners and progressively broke the land into ever smaller plots. Further, bigger proprietors bought into *mushāʿ* (communal tenure), and some of the better-off peasants gained larger shares.¹¹

Measuring the effects on fellahin of inheritance, family growth, and *mushāʿ* purchases remains problematical. Although all of these factors contributed to congestion and parcellation, just as communal tenure inhibited production and efficiency, each may also be regarded as a peasant adaptation to poverty and land scarcity. As Rosemary Sayigh has noted, “[Both] communal tenure and equal inheritance [could be seen as] a way of coping with poverty, through which both resources and poverty are fairly equally distributed throughout a peasantry, which thereby is enabled to stay on the land.”¹² To a degree, tenancy arrangements along with co-cultivation among extended family members and surviving *mushāʿ* helped alleviate poverty. *Mushāʿ* holdings did decrease gradually from 56 percent in 1923 to 46 percent in 1930 to 40 percent in 1940.¹³ The slow rate at which communal ownership declined enabled the landowning class to exert its influence over the peasantry. Peasant resis-

tance to *mushā*^c parcellation reflected in part the unwillingness of the landowners to give up their leverage (i.e., to sell their land), as well as the peasants' ignorance and fear of the tax implications of individual registration. Nevertheless, the aggravations of communal farming, marked by periodic redistribution of village lands, population growth, and inimical inheritance practices, strained to the breaking point village relations that already were beset by familial and clan divisions and disputes over boundaries and grazing rights.

As their landholdings became ever smaller, peasants often turned to tenancy or rent arrangements with landlords to sustain themselves. Such arrangements constituted an additional adaptation, by both the landlord and the tenant, to difficult and changing rural conditions and to changes in market conditions. They enabled some landlords to maintain, as patrons, their influence and ties with the peasants, a group increasingly inclined to work outside agriculture, and to meet changing demands in the commodity market by determining which crops were produced. Consequently, peasants gained some relief. In particular, joint farming and share-rent (a process by which the landowner provided the land, and the farmer supplied the capital) offered the landless peasant (and peasants with some land) the opportunity to share in the production process and to retain access to land.¹⁴

Regardless of any benefits that these essentially sharecropping arrangements provided to peasants and to the patronage system, the agricultural economy in general suffered from lack of investment. Although the land under cultivation increased from about five million *dunums* in 1921 (one *dunum* equals a fourth of an acre) to at least eight million *dunums* in the early 1940s, intensive farming methods were adopted only by citrus growers. Arab merchants adhered to traditional rural tenancy arrangements, and few peasant tenants had direct contact with the commodity market. In other words, landless peasants gained access to land but failed to improve their chances for a better life and long-term security. Thus, in the second half of the Mandate, the patronage system declined.

In the late 1930s, as more peasants supplemented their meager incomes with wage labor, peasant grievances against land sellers were heightened, particularly after the number of Jewish immigrants fleeing Nazi-controlled Germany and arriving in Palestine accelerated. The peasantry was particularly disillusioned with urban notables, rural landowning families, merchants, moneylenders, and village heads, some of whom sold land to the Zionists even while publicly condemning such transactions.¹⁵ Those who asserted themselves as voices for the Palestinian Arabs had for decades helped perpetuate the peasants' perennial indebtedness through usury, dispossession, and burdensome taxation. They had made possible, moreover, the Zionist land purchases that so aggravated the long-standing internal socioeconomic processes that were undermining the peasantry. In 1920, land in Jewish possession was 456,003 *dunums*.¹⁶ In 1930 that figure reached 987,600; in 1940, 1,322,338; and by 1945, 1,393,531. Since the 1929 Wailing Wall disturbances, a procession of commissions and investigative bodies had acknowledged the increasingly deleterious impact of land scarcity as a restless peasantry.¹⁷

Land shortages were most acute in the limited arable areas. Of the 26.3 million *dunums* that made up Palestine's land surface, only a third was cultivable. Aside from the plain of Beersheba (and state-owned lands, of which more than 900,000 *dunums* were cultivable), arable land totaled some seven million *dunums*.¹⁸ Jewish

land purchases were concentrated in these areas. As early as 1935, Jewish land purchases in the coastal plain and Jezreel Valley (Nazareth/Jenin area) amounted to 71.6 percent of the total Jewish ownership.¹⁹ Loss of land to Jews and subsequent evictions contributed to congestion in areas still owned by Arabs. In the early 1930s, those unable to work the lands on the coastal plain because of Zionist purchases began migrating into the central hills.²⁰

By World War II, overcrowding in Arab-owned lands had reached critical levels. A 1943 memorandum to the Cabinet by Colonial Secretary Oliver Stanley noted as much. In comparing national concentrations of Arabs and Jews, Stanley used the lot viable categories into which rural lands had been divided by the Palestine Royal Commission (based on the Johnson–Crosbie report) for taxation purposes; he showed that rural land under Arab ownership that was capable of supporting a population of 342,979 was actually supporting a population of 676,150, or nearly twice the sustainable number.²¹ In contrast, rural land under Jewish ownership that was capable of supporting 85,596 persons was actually supporting 85,285, nearly an exact congruence.

Intense controversy surrounds the number of Palestinians rendered landless by Zionist land purchases before and during World War II. Thousands were evicted following Zionist purchases from non-Palestinian and Palestinian landowners prior to the 1930s.²² From the early 1930s, many smallholders sold part or all of their land to Jews. Between 1933 and 1942, of 6,207 land transactions, 5,713 (or 92.04%) involved sales of less than 100 *dunums*.²³ Yet Zionist organizations have noted that large, rather than small, holdings made up the bulk of sales. They estimate that by 1936 the Palestine Land Development Company had purchased 89 percent of its holdings from large landowners (non-Palestinian absentees and Palestinians) and only 11 percent from peasants, mainly those who were better off.²⁴

Throughout the early- and mid-Mandate period, small landowners sold land in order to improve their holdings and invest in new equipment (particularly in the citrus belt), to maintain families, or to repay loans to moneylenders. Unlike large landowners, who sold land to increase their liquid capital, levels of consumption, and social status, smallholders acted out of need. Ultimately many smallholders were left penniless and joined the ranks of the landless and urban poor. Once sold, land was alienated permanently, because Jewish owners increasingly denied Arab laborers access to the land that they had formerly tilled. Between 1931 and 1935, when the Jewish authorities and the Histadrut (Jewish Labor Federation) “ferociously” implemented their labor policy, immigration increased dramatically.²⁵ The Jewish boycott of Arab agricultural products, which was especially effective during the 1936–39 Arab revolt, and the eviction of peasants was followed by the dissolution of Arab villages. The combined effect was further reduction in the land available to fellahin for work, rent, or lease.

By the same token, peasants who retained ownership of or access to land were likely to remain impoverished. A detailed survey of five villages conducted in 1944 found that 75 percent of those who owned land had parcels smaller than 10.5 *dunums*, a size well below subsistence needs (estimated at 90 *dunums*), while those owning plots larger than 51 *dunums* made up only 3 percent of the total.²⁶ In the 1940s an estimated 80,000 farms were between 50 to 100 *dunums* in size, which was

barely adequate for subsistence.²⁷ Multiplying this total amount of farmland by an average of five members per family shows that roughly 40,000 people, or 50 percent of the total rural population of 800,000, were barely making ends meet. These statistics illustrate the conditions that prevailed in the latter part of the Mandate.

The majority of rural Palestinians, in other words, were owner-occupiers of insufficient holdings. The crisis was underscored by the fact that practically all rural Palestinians (including laborers) owned a house with surrounding gardens in a village, and that as early as 1931 more than 29,000 cultivators—representing at the time 25–30 percent of the rural population—were agricultural laborers. Many others were tenants. As of the early 1930s, agricultural tenants numbered close to 13,000.²⁸

Even large estates became fragmented during the Mandate, partly because of land sales and partly due to inheritance within extended families—the same process that worked against peasant landholders. By the 1940s very few families possessed amounts of land that would be considered large (e.g., 15,000–20,000 *dunums*).²⁹

FROM PEASANT TO WAGE LABORER: THE UNCERTAIN TRANSFORMATION

The potential labor pool in the countryside was reflected throughout the Mandate in the eagerness of Arab villagers to seek work outside their villages. The wage-labor phenomenon began in the 1920s, when a large number of wage laborers were employed in the building industry, in public works, by railways, and on Arab and Jewish citrus plantations.³⁰ The peak years (particularly 1924–25 for the building industry and throughout the decade for citricultural expansion) were offset by a severe recession between 1926 and 1928, when the building trades slumped. But Arab wage laborers were able to enter the wage sector in good times or return to the villages in bad without serious effects.

A general boom characterized the early 1930s. Between 1932 and 1935, the Haifa harbor was completed, concessions were established and extended, the oil pipeline was laid, the area under citrus cultivation was enlarged, various industrial projects were undertaken in the towns, and quarrying and road work expanded. Also, Jewish immigration drew an ever larger number of peasants seeking work in the towns, on government projects, and on plantations. As of 1931 about 7,000 Arabs worked in the construction industry alone.³¹ By the late 1930s, 3,000–5,000 were permanently employed in Arab citriculture, with an additional 15,000 hired at harvest time, and 4,400 worked in Arab-owned industry.³² Government public-works projects employed about 15,000 workers, including 3,000 on the railways, 1,000 in the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, and 500–800 in the Haifa harbor. The Jewish-labor-only policy before 1936 (i.e., before the revolt) was not completely successful. Neshet Cement Works, one of the largest Jewish cement companies, employed about 300 Arabs by the mid-1930s, and mixed undertakings such as British- and Jewish-owned Palestine Potash employed up to 700.³³

In the late 1930s, as the boom ended and employment opportunities diminished—particularly in construction and citrus—Arab wage labor proved to be a temporary phenomenon that began to reverse itself. The revolt of 1936–39 further diminished opportunities in public works, particularly in the ports and on the railroads. Laborers

employed by external (mainly British) sources were hardest hit, constituting as they did an erratic, seasonal work force that entered the wage-labor sector in order to supplement its peasant income. Such casual workers, skilled and unskilled, also received much lower wages than did the Jews. Arab enterprises in urban centers detached themselves from the agrarian economy, offered more permanent or regular terms for their wage laborers. But most undertakings, including those owned by Arabs, took advantage of the erratic labor pool and the huge reservoir of fresh labor eager to find work by using it to fit their needs and to keep wages low.

Rural migrant workers received lower wages—even lower than those paid to Arab urban workers—because employers and the government determined wage scales without reference to their general needs. Rural migrants were seen as needing less to live on, as willing to accept a lower standard of living in the countryside. Employers also assumed that peasants worked “outside”—for example, in construction or road-building in the off-seasons—merely to supplement or cushion their incomes and needs, as the average peasant owned a small plot of land and could, from the employers’ perspective, easily supplement the income from it by renting additional plots from larger landowners. Countering these disabling notions was difficult for rural migrant workers, because they were recruited informally through village connections and lacked organizations that could strengthen their bargaining power in the market.³⁴ Their cause was also compromised by the constant reserve of workers who could supply the market with more than it demanded at any time.

Development of class cohesion in the 1930s was precluded in the final analysis, employers’ attitudes notwithstanding, by the fact that most migrant wage laborers worked in public-works projects or on plantations close to their villages and within their regions. Although Arab peasant migrant laborers were drawn inexorably toward work outside their villages, any chance that they could be permanently incorporated into wage labor, much less transformed into a more secure and socially conscious working class, did not exist. Arab peasants became extremely vulnerable as they grew insecure in the agricultural economy and uncertain of their social bonds with and dependence on their traditional landowning patrons. At the same time the Palestinian society of which they provided the base became increasingly prone to collapse.

During World War II wage labor expanded tremendously, magnifying and accelerating a decades-old process of dislocation. Apart from agricultural workers and 23,000 in the armed forces, the number of employed rose from 169,000 in 1939 to 285,000 in 1944.³⁵ In 1939, Arab and Jewish males employed in agriculture totaled 183,000, a figure that in 1944 had decreased to 126,000. Correspondingly the number of rural male Arabs deriving a livelihood from agriculture dropped from 180,000 in 1939 to 100,000 by 1944.³⁶ The difference of 80,000 reveals the number of Arabs employed in the war economy and agrees with the usual figure given for Arabs employed during the war of between 80,000 and 100,000. In addition, 30,000 non-manual workers, including those engaged in personal service, were employed by external, mainly British, sources. By the end of the war, permanent wage laborers in the Arab urban economy numbered approximately 8,000, roughly 10 percent of the total Arab work force. The great majority of the peasant laborers employed in the war economy were unskilled. In 1943, for example, the War Department and RAF employed some 27,000 civilian Arab workers on a full-time basis. Of these about 10 percent were classified skilled.³⁷

Rural migrant labor in the 1940s differed from labor in the previous decade in two basic characteristics.³⁸ First, whereas in the 1930s the government recruited labor from villages near work sites, during wartime many rural wage laborers traveled far from their villages to work in military installations and projects across the country and lived in temporary encampments erected near the work sites. Second, the government practice of recruiting informally through village connections gave way to selecting workers more often on the basis of merit. In the 1930s, the middlemen who helped recruit laborers were most often village heads; in the 1940s, village origins became increasingly irrelevant as peasants were more likely to be rounded up by Arab contractors or recruited directly in temporary exchange agencies opened up by the government.

In wartime, the rural economy enjoyed more prosperity than ever before. Inflationary prices pressed heavily on the poorest rural and urban strata, but high prices paid by the government for agricultural produce alleviated the peasants' lot substantially. The index of Arab farm prices rose from a base of 100 in 1938–39 to 320 in 1941–42, to 450 in 1942–43, and to 560 in 1943–44.³⁹ Wage rates in agriculture, as in migrant wage labor, climbed steadily. And peasants responding to market forces in the war economy improved their lot. The national income for both Arabs and Jews rose from P £5.59 million in 1939 to P £19 million in 1943, mainly because of higher production and higher prices. (Taking 1939 as a base year, the cost-of-living index reached 259 by the end of 1945). Thus, after its inquiries through district authorities, the *Survey of Palestine* reported that rural indebtedness declined during the period 1939–45. The *Survey* examined eight subdistricts. In four the decline was estimated at between 60 percent and 90 percent, and in one at 25 percent. No improvement was reported in two subdistricts. No evidence was found that usurious indebtedness of the fellah constituted a "pressing problem."⁴⁰ It may be assumed that, with a fall in agricultural prices and competition from cheaper and higher-quality foreign produce after the war, fellahin resorted to moneylenders on a large scale, particularly as no credit institutions or marketing facilities were formed. The government's efforts to cushion the economic transition from war to peace eased this process, but in the postwar era the fundamental social and structural problems that had existed before it began remained.

Despite the material benefits that many peasants received during the war, several factors worked against their transformation into permanent wage laborers. Most peasant laborers were unskilled. Skilled labor was heavily concentrated in the three largest military camps situated within close reach of the urban centers: Sarafand, Bayt Naballah, and Rafah.⁴¹ Furthermore, during the war—as in the 1930s—public-works labor in the countryside was largely unskilled, while technical training remained underdeveloped. Wages for Arab laborers rose but were kept below those of urban workers, craftsmen, and Jewish workers. The brief wartime surge in village migrant wage labor meant that the recruitment of villagers into wage labor was hasty and temporary. Migrant labor was employed largely on a casual basis, which impeded the development of occupational differentiation and a distinct identity. The rural concentration of the work force and the instability of wartime employment caused erratic recruitment patterns that also militated against a general working-class identification.⁴² Another factor was the Arab urban economy, which, despite

its relatively impressive growth in the 1940s, was too small to provide proper jobs for tens of thousands of rural migrants.

In the 1940s, more migrant laborers remained in the towns and cities than did so in the 1930s. Urbanization, while more pronounced along the coast, also became a countrywide phenomenon. Growth was related directly to the location of wartime employment in the public sector. Thus, many rural migrants settled in small Palestinian towns such as Tulkarem, Nazareth, and Majdal, where traditional or small industries expanded.⁴³ Within the Arab urban social structure, many worked in the service industry, while many others searched for temporary jobs. Fast growth and uneven absorption meant that a large number of marginalized migrants lived in wretched slum conditions, particularly in bigger coastal cities.⁴⁴ Of an Arab population of more than 72,000 in the various quarters of Jaffa by 1945, 70 percent lived in slum conditions. A block of 34 rooms in the Manshiyye quarter, for example, contained 33 families and 151 persons. In the Irshayd quarter near the sea (a built-up area of 68 *dunums* with a population of 5,800), a randomly selected one-*dunum* block was found to contain 173 persons, adding up to 34 families living in 39 rooms. In Haifa, 41 percent of a 1945 population of at least 65,000 was living in slum areas. In the city's eastern quarter, many families erected flimsy structures of mats and sacking on the roofs of houses already crammed to capacity. In this area 2,000 persons were living in large caves, with three or four families to a cave, each paying rent. Within the municipal boundaries of Haifa, a number of Hawrani "squatters" erected primitive dwellings of tin, sacks, or boards wherever convenient. On the outskirts of the city, families lived in deplorable conditions without sanitation, lighting, and heating. Their huts, made from discarded gasoline tins, were packed together on low-lying ground. (Many living there in such wretched conditions were non-Palestinian migrant laborers: Hawrani porters, Syrian fisherman, and Egyptian railroad workers.)

Palestinian Arab society in the 1940s was, then, dislocated on a huge scale, with the lower social stratum acutely vulnerable to collapse. The rural economy lacked the capacity to reabsorb many of the people who had shifted to urban areas for work. And displaced peasants, as with urban workers, had neither social nor job security. As war-related employment began to disappear, the government feared that tens of thousands of rural migrants might become a jobless mass floating throughout the country. Works projects were stretched out, therefore, as the government delayed relinquishing its control over the economy. The military protracted its works so that it could progressively discharge its civilian workers.⁴⁵ Despite these efforts, wage labor declined. As early as 1946, Arab unemployment reached 15,000.⁴⁶

CONTINUITIES OF INSECURITY AND DISJOINTED DEVELOPMENT: MIGRANT WAGE LABORERS TO URBAN WORKERS

Arab urban workers were also affected by the uneven and disruptive changes occurring in Arab rural society, particularly during the economic transformation of the 1940s. Given the relatively low level of urbanization and industrialization in Arab Palestine, as compared with that of developed societies, Arab-owned industry had limited capacity to absorb the rapid influx of migrant workers. By 1944, the manufacturing sector of the Arab urban economy was able to employ more than 8,000 permanent wage laborers, up from 4,400 in 1939, or an increase of 45 percent—yet well

below the number seeking work. In contrast to the unorganized, mainly unskilled migrant laborers employed during wartime in or near towns far from their villages, skilled urban workers were relatively well organized, cohesive, and politically and ideologically aware. However, their dependence on the state and mainly non-Arab industries, as well as divisions within their own ranks, made them especially weak. They had no firm socioeconomic foundation with which to anchor themselves and, like migrant laborers, added to the structural fissures in Arab society.

Since the 1920s, trade unionism had been on the increase among urban workers. The principal unions were the Palestine Arab Workers Society (PAWS) and the Federation of Arab Trade Unions (FATU). PAWS was the oldest union, established in 1925 in Haifa. Social-democratic in orientation, with branches in the major cities, principally Jerusalem, Acre, Jaffa, and Haifa, PAWS had additional branches in the villages of the coastal plain and Galilee by the 1940s. Among the lesser unions, the independent Nablus Arab Labor Society (in Nablus and surrounding villages) claimed a membership of 1,013. The Nablus Society was akin to a trade union, embracing numerous small retailers and independent craftsmen. Still smaller labor societies were based at Nazareth and Ramallah.⁴⁷

Without a significant Arab industrial sector, prewar workers were too economically unimportant to make their presence felt. Only in the mid-1930s, when social and economic dislocation became national in scope and land sales to the Zionists elicited widespread criticism from all sectors of Palestinian society, did PAWS leaders become politically vocal. Workers played an important role in the general strike preceding the 1936–39 revolt, especially activist branch leaders, many of whom were Christians.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, such efforts generated little increase in membership and organization.

The war economy, however, propelled trade unions to national influence and prominence. From P £100 in the early 1930s, the central office budget of PAWS had reached P £2,000 in 1943.⁴⁹ Its membership, which was no more than 2,000 in 1939, reached 4,500 by January 1943 (the peak of war-related employment), and by the end of 1943 had leaped to more than 9,000. Other small branches were located in the villages near Acre, Sarafand, Safad, and Qalqilya. By late 1945, PAWS's membership approached 15,000, a 100 percent increase in less than two years.⁵⁰

The growth of organized Arab labor in the 1940s, though due in part to wartime employment opportunities in Arab-owned industry and the example of the Histadrut, was also a response to the government policy of encouraging the formation and expansion of Arab labor unions. A particularly able and enthusiastic advocate of Arab labor-union formation was R. M. Graves, appointed in 1940 as adviser to the government's new Department of Labor, which itself was created in 1942. Both the Palestinian government and the Colonial Office concluded that establishing Arab unions would help Arab workers recover from their position of inferiority vis-à-vis Jewish workers and employees in general.⁵¹

The government's influence was apparent early in the war, when Arab trade unions complained that they were comparatively helpless in the face of the Histadrut, particularly regarding the supply of labor to army workshops. Graves argued that "Arab workers have been open to exploitation in all directions, and, in particular, have been helpless in the face of the organized power of the Histadrut. This has been especially marked in the northern parts of Palestine. The Department . . . has been able to do

little to alleviate this situation.”⁵² Graves proved instrumental in supervising labor conditions, expanding labor legislation, and regulating the trade unions.⁵³

PAWS vigorously asked for changes in the Municipal Corporation Ordinance laws on voting rights in 1946, when the government announced its intention for the first time since the revolt to hold municipal elections. In particular, PAWS complained that many were excluded from exercising their rights to vote by the stipulation that they pay an annual registration fee of P £1. PAWS requested that the fee be dropped to a nominal annual rate of 100 mills, and that persons exempted from payment on account of poverty should also be allowed to vote.⁵⁴ It requested these reforms partly in response to the government’s announcement that the public should submit proposals or ideas on change in local self-government. Some PAWS leaders were also becoming more involved in politics. They viewed municipal and council elections as a way to gain support for themselves and for PAWS. The organization attracted the largest number of workers because it remained independent of factional politics and took a nationalist stand. “Wage increase is no longer our principal aim,” Hanna ʿAsfur, a member of the Executive Committee, asserted in a 1945 May Day speech. “Our moral and legal obligation is to support the Arab cause. . . . [A nation’s success] depends on the intense efforts of its united workers. . . . Imagine what power and . . . influence you can have if it were possible for each of you to induce 5 persons to join the Society.”⁵⁵ Although apparently none of PAWS’s local leaders were elected to the municipalities in 1946, PAWS successfully renewed its drive that year to recruit members in the small towns and villages, particularly those of the Galilee (Acre sub-district).

Between June and October of 1946, PAWS enrolled hundreds of new members in such towns and villages as Mi^claya, Suhmata, Bayt Jan, Zeeb, Tiberias, and Safad. In Safad alone, where PAWS had a branch since the late 1930s, at least 500 new members were enrolled.⁵⁶ Administrative-committee members in these rural or village branches were young, the majority between the ages of 25 and 35, and were mostly small farmers. The balance was made up of teachers, barbers, small merchants, laborers (i.e., carpenters, mechanics, stone crushers), drivers, tailors, and clerks.⁵⁷ The PAWS recruitment drive in towns and villages may have been an attempt to use its new members as a counterweight to its slipping influence with its Jaffa and other southern branches. By the summer of 1945, these branches became autonomous societies whose policies were more in line with those of FATU. It also reflected a renewed awareness of the need to counter traditional political forces in the countryside, even though it meant that most new members in the villages were farmers and that some even belonged to the petite bourgeoisie.

Of greater significance in tracing the fault lines of structural and social divisions, such elements joined PAWS because many of the young had grown dissatisfied with local clan leaders. Perceptions of authority changed within villages in some regions during the war because relative prosperity accelerated change and, with it, changes in the social structure. Younger, better-educated men began to complain about the illiteracy, incompetence, and corruption of some of the *mukhtārs* (village heads) and about the domination of affairs by single families.⁵⁸ In the 1940s, as Ylana N. Miller notes, “Villagers began to assert their own priorities, to request councils, and to question the legitimacy of electoral lists.”⁵⁹ Urban working-class organizations tried to

recruit these disaffected elements after notable-led national parties took little initiative. PAWS's influence in the villages, however, was concentrated in the Galilee area, reflecting the fact that Haifa was its central stronghold and that a high proportion of migrant workers who worked in the Haifa industrial zone hailed from that area.

The second-largest union and PAWS's rival, FATU, was communist-led. FATU was a PAWS offshoot formed in November 1942, following a Nablus conference of PAWS. It was led by radical intellectuals who regarded PAWS as conservative. They criticized PAWS for devoting too much attention to developing Histadrut-like institutions and neglecting the organization of workers in large industrial undertakings of the north, and for being altogether too timid in its union policy.⁶⁰ FATU concentrated on skilled workers and was composed of individual members and affiliated registered associations from Shell, IPC, Consolidated Refineries, Ltd., and the Nazareth Arab Workers Society. Workers were organized in Haifa harbor; the Royal Depot at Haifa Bay; the Public Works Department in Haifa; and Steel Brothers, transportation contractors for the government. In addition, FATU had influence in PAWS branches in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and southern Palestine (e.g., Ashdod). In 1943 FATU's membership was estimated at 4,500, with paid-up membership at 2,000.⁶¹

In 1942, after PAWS based its organizational structure on an autonomous and decentralized branch system, FATU members worked within PAWS branches quite effectively. This reflected the nascent stage of the workers' movement as well as that of the wider society. From the beginning, the various PAWS branches were heavily influenced by organized and coherent FATU radical activists. Notably, the Nazareth branch and the southern branches of Jaffa, Jerusalem, and Gaza were led by either leftists or communists. Radical activity forced PAWS to reorganize and centralize its organizational structure and pursue labor activism more vigorously. By 1946 PAWS was challenged openly by a rival, radically influenced body, the Arab Workers Congress (AWC). The Executive Committee of the AWC was elected at a meeting of the secessionist PAWS branches (Arab Workers' Societies in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Bethlehem, Bayt Jala, Ashdod, and other villages) attended by FATU and independent labor groups. By the late 1940s, the strength of radical elements in Arab society was unquestionable, and was reflected in working-class ideological divisions.⁶²

In spite of labor-union achievements, rural migrant laborers remained substantially outside urban labor organizations. PAWS and FATU's combined memberships of 17,000–18,000 (15,000 for PAWS and 2,000–3,000 for FATU) in late 1945 might indicate some accretion due to rural migrant wage laborers residing in towns. It is small, however, if the size and nature of the permanent urban work force are taken into account. More than 8,000 worked in the Arab manufacturing industry. When the mainly urban transportation, railway, port, War Department, and municipal employees are added, a figure of 17,000–18,000 union members from the permanent, resident urban work force appears reasonable. FATU's membership was small because it was made up mainly of skilled, long-time urban workers. PAWS made no attempts to recruit rural migrants, and many of its member societies—bakery, municipal, transportation, refinery, and port employees—ignored rural migrant wage laborers. The latter worked mostly on roads, buildings, camps, and airfields. Assuming any accretion from the 80,000–100,000 rural migrant workers to the dominant labor unions, the total could have been at most a few thousand. Most Arab agricultural

laborers, handicraft and cottage-industry workers, and service employees (domestic servants, street vendors) were simply difficult to unionize. Also hard to co-opt because of their geographical isolation were villagers, rural farm and plantation workers, and migrant wage laborers employed on public-works projects away from towns. Arab labor unions lacked the strength, finances, and organization to absorb migrants. They were, after all, feeble newcomers to labor-union formation.

Most important, the majority of rural migrant wage laborers had one foot in the modern economy and the other in the underdeveloped agrarian economy. Thus, with the deceleration of war-related employment, many would have returned to their villages. Also important, perhaps, was the relatively sophisticated urban proletariat's resistance to integrating the rural proletariat, as reflected in the condescending attitude of urban industrial workers. Graves observed that Arabs of the urban working class whom he spoke to about the migrants had "frequently suggested that it would be wiser and kinder to leave the workers alone and increase their prosperity by the scientific development of agriculture and irrigation."⁶³

At the end of the Mandate, Arab labor scored impressive gains in terms of growth, activism, and independence. Though it ignored rural migrant laborers, it had succeeded in forging a relatively strong urban working-class culture. Both PAWS and the AWC were vigorous in this regard. Yet after the war, labor experienced much frustration with government, which heretofore had nurtured the union movement, and friction between the government and labor increased steadily. Government labor policies were predicated on a philosophy that ultimately proved detrimental to Arab labor.⁶⁴ As in the countryside, its policy emphasized social order and harmony and avoided intervention. Though willing to help labor unify industrial-relations standards and improve labor conditions, the government resisted progressive social legislation. Instead the Labor Department encouraged peaceful conciliation and cooperation between Arab employees and employers. The government did not help to encourage workers to fight for better wages. Nor did it frame laws governing trade unions and the conciliation of trade disputes. The government declined to create labor exchanges, alleging that political involvement and expenditures might ensue. During the war, the Arabs were at a strong disadvantage in the face of a developed Jewish exchange and were adversely affected at the close of the war.

Without progressive labor legislation, labor relations remained temporary in character while Arab labor's position became increasingly ambiguous. The urban drift was the first step toward unemployment, social disaffection, and politicization. The war economy had precipitated irreversible social change, just as an uneven government policy, averse to social legislation and programs that would solidify labor's achievements and social transformation, had amplified the growing paradox. As happened in each sector of Arab society, this interplay of internal and external forces contributed to the weakening of Arab society and to its ultimate fragmentation.

CONCLUSIONS

Social and economic changes and disruptions in Palestinian Arab society, ongoing since late Ottoman times, continued and accelerated under British rule and sustained Zionist colonization. Palestinian peasants, migrant wage laborers, and urban work-

ers under the Mandate, particularly during its latter half, were buffeted by forces beyond their control. This resulted in massive dislocation and disjointed or uneven development. Altogether these changes contributed substantially to the weakening and fragmentation of the Palestinian Arab social structures, facilitating the rapid collapse of Arab society in 1948.

Ottoman administrative reforms and attempts at land registration for the purpose of more efficient collection of taxes led to the consolidation of the growing urban-notable elite's power and privileges through a gradual process of land accumulation. Though patronage ties between landowner and peasant were reinforced as a result of the development of large estates, the highly unequal socioeconomic relationship between these two classes progressively disenfranchised the latter. An archaic and oppressive land-tenure system, as well as fellah indebtedness and an ineffectual state, eroded peasants' rights to land, reduced their security, and rendered them economically vulnerable. In order to sustain their high social status and level of consumption, Arab landowners, merchants, and urban notables placed heavy burdens on the peasantry long before the peasants felt any significant Zionist impact under the British Mandate. Even before the demise of the Ottoman state, relentless pressure on the fellahin had resulted in the structural fragmentation of an already parochially divided Palestinian rural society.

The British presence in Palestine and the influx of Jewish settlers under their patronage exacerbated the ongoing structural fragmentation and social fissures in Palestinian society. Under the Ottomans, peasants lost legal rights to their land, though most continued to till it; under the British they lost the land itself. They were dispossessed as Arabs sold land to Zionists, who in turn excluded all others from landownership. The Zionist demand for land enabled Arab land brokers, merchants, moneylenders, land agents, and middlemen to sell land to Zionists and thus thrive at the expense of the fellahin. Peasants who for generations had tilled the land stood helplessly as their agriculturally-based, albeit difficult, life became increasingly a mobile struggle for mere existence. Construction and expansion of the Jewish national home displaced many fellahin and dissolved whole clusters of their villages. Bereft of traditional means of support, the fellahin and their plight received little sympathy and no assistance from the Mandate administration.

Growing peasant resentment toward landowners led to divisions between town and country, worsening social and class divisions. At the same time, peasants were under relentless pressure to find wage labor, a process that undermined rural patronage ties and loosened the links between urban laborers and their villages of origin. Inexorable land dispossession occurred alongside rapid Arab rural population growth and land fragmentation and division through the process of inheritance. Increasingly unequal land holdings and a stagnating Arab agricultural economy, in which very few of the many displaced persons found work, aggravated these processes.

The weakening social ties and patronage between landowner and peasant especially visible in the late 1930s, were disguised by the war economy. So acute was peasant destitution and political and social tension in Arab society of the 1930s that a peasant rebellion erupted in the face of increased Jewish immigration and land buying. In short order the revolt took on class dimensions as urban landowners, merchants, creditors, and the upper classes in general became targets of peasant guerrilla attacks. As early

as 1940, however, tensions eased as jobs became available in the war economy and tens of thousands of peasant migrants sought wage labor in Arab industry and public-works projects. A temporary lid was thereby put on the process of social and economic fragmentation within Arab society. Meanwhile the growing working class, which became a nationalist and anti-Zionist voice, was itself becoming discontented with the traditional elite.

Like the peasantry, labor was a weak political force because it was dependent on employment, not in Arab undertakings, but in government shops and projects. Labor's development was fragile and disjointed, just as its progress in joining forces with the rural migrants was feeble. Labor was too anxious about its own security to be able to create a solid front with migrants, much less to organize and incorporate them. Labor unions' attempts to expand their numbers from migrant and village wage-labor elements were doomed to fail, at any rate, because a feeble Arab industrial economy could not incorporate these eager souls. It was the Jewish economy that was growing and becoming competitive, and British employers, who hired Arabs, closed shop after the war. As early as 1946, thousands were unemployed.

Soaring postwar unemployment doomed many urban laborers and, especially, migrant workers. Desperate rural migrants left their villages by the tens of thousands, thereby increasing tensions between themselves and urban wage labor. The social distance grew between urban labor and the newly dislocated peasants. Wage labor's dependence on a state which did not wish to see such vast disruptions in traditional social life for fear of the political consequences was its foremost weakness. The vast majority of wage laborers, having left their villages because of the pressures in the rural economy, were economically insecure. Their living conditions were also unpromising: slums, which had existed on the outskirts of cities since the 1930s, grew dramatically thereafter, while more wretched ones sprang up in such coastal cities as Haifa, Jaffa, and Acre.

Uneven changes within Palestinian Arab society, caused by the underdeveloped nature of Arab socioeconomic structures and the impact of Zionist settlement, were exacerbated by colonial social and economic policies. Colonial programs in the countryside aimed at migrant labor and the nascent urban working class tended to aggravate contradictory social processes. In order to minimize their responsibilities and costs, British officials attempted to maintain traditional social and economic relationships in the countryside in the face of local peasant discontent and migrants' struggles to find work outside the rural economy. The British pursuit of social order with a minimum of government involvement stood in sharp contrast to changing socioeconomic conditions. Nevertheless, Palestinian Arabs became increasingly dependent on the state for jobs and social justice, a role that the state was unwilling to fill. Dependence stemmed from the relatively low level of industrialization and urbanization in Arab society, which, as is typical of underdeveloped societies, relied on official support and as a result suffered from state domination. In this case, moreover, the state was a colonial alien serving the interests of the metropole.

While rapid transformations in the 1940s heightened rural social mobility and awareness, the state was disinclined to accommodate these changes. Nor was Palestinian Arab society strengthened by the newly emerging strata, such as labor unions,

which themselves were impermanent and insecure. Intensified uneven development at the lower levels of the social structure also contributed to the lack of cohesion in Palestinian rural society, leaving a severely disrupted traditional social organization vulnerable and fragile in the face of enormous external political, social, and economic pressures.

In effect, British pursuit of the status quo created its own impediments to wider social and structural integration. Rather than ease processes of change, the state tried to contain them, thereby obstructing the trend toward national integration. Britain's priorities were maintaining control, protecting imperial interests, and fulfilling promises made to the Zionists, rather than installing a progressive regime concerned solely with the welfare of the indigenous people.

Clearly, a society that had been characterized by generations-old rural institutions had undergone vast social changes. Arab Palestine experienced severe disruptions and dislocations as a result of these social changes and conflicting colonial policies. New social patterns were emerging as old social institutions and cleavages were changing, particularly in the latter half of the Mandate. Solidarities at the clan, religious, and village levels were threatened by newly emerging class solidarities and tensions between the lower classes and elites.

Certainly, the combined effects of the physical and economic ravages of war; Zionist terror, atrocities, and expulsions; the breakdown of social order and urban economy and the return of migrants to their villages; the lack of central-government direction; and national leadership all contributed to Palestinian society's dissolution in 1948. And this did not happen overnight: the Palestinian refugee problem was a prolonged affair, unfolding over many months and encompassing several phases. However, while opposition to Zionism united almost all segments of Palestinian society, that society, particularly in the 1940s, was in flux—unstable, dislocated, unorganized, without collective authority, and vulnerable to disintegration. The structural and social divisions outlined in this article precluded effective unity and the cohesive organization necessary to confront the challenge to survival. This, perhaps more than other factors, helps to explain the ease with which Jewish forces cut through Palestinian society and set off a chain reaction of communal collapse.

NOTES

¹Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

²More general works of Palestinian political history during the Mandate include Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian Arab National Movement, 1918–1929* (London: Frank Cass, 1974), and *The Palestinian Arab National Movement, 1929–1939* (London: Frank Cass, 1977); Ann Mosely Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine, 1917–1939* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979); Abdul Wahhab Kayyali, *Palestine: A Modern History* (London: Croom Helm, 1978).

³Kenneth W. Stein, "One Hundred Years of Social Change: The Creation of the Palestinian Refugee Problem," in *New Perspectives on Israeli History*, ed. Laurence J. Silberstein (New York: New York University Press, 1991); also idem, "Rural Change and Peasant Destitution: Contributing Causes to the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–1939," in *Peasants and Politics in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Farhad Kazemi and John Waterbury (Florida: Florida International University Press, 1991). For recent studies on social

and economic history, see Roger Owen, ed., *Studies in the Social and Economic History of Palestine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Macmillan, 1983); Kenneth W. Stein, *The Land Question in Palestine, 1917–1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Ylana N. Miller, *Government and Society in Rural Palestine 1920–1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); and Issa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine: Arab Factionalism and Social Disintegration, 1939–1948* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991).

⁴The much smaller, principally urban elite has received virtually all the attention in the standard studies of Palestinian Arab society during the Mandate period.

⁵Before the early 1880s, the tithe was fixed at 10 percent; Stein, *Land Question*, 16.

⁶Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, 13–18; Stein, “One Hundred Years of Social Change,” 61.

⁷Government of Palestine, *Report of a Committee on the Economic Conditions of Agriculturists in Palestine and the Fiscal Measures of Government in Relation Thereto* (Jerusalem: Government Printers, 1930), 29.

⁸By the 1930s money rent in tenancy arrangements became increasingly prevalent. See Stein, *Land Question*, 142–46; and *Report of a Committee*, 42–44.

⁹Among the many sources, see Stein, “Rural Change and Peasant Destitution,” esp. 145–53; Wasef F. Abboushi, “The Road to Rebellion: Arab Palestine in the 1930s,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 8 (Spring 1977): 23–46; and Ṣubḥī Yāsīn, *al-Thawra al-ʿArabiyya al-kubrā fi Filasṭīn* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab, 1967).

¹⁰Janet L. Abu-Lughod, “The Democratic Transformation of Palestine,” in *The Transformation of Palestine*, ed. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 155.

¹¹By 1923 nearly 75 percent of *mushāʿ* lands were owned by individuals living in the towns. Somewhere between 2.6 million to 3.3 million *dunums* of *mushāʿ* land were owned by absentee landlords. See Stein, *Land Question*, 15.

¹²Rosemary Sayigh, *From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Press, 1979), 48.

¹³Sarah Graham-Brown, “Political Economy of the Jabal Nablus, 1920–48,” in Owen, *Studies*, 109; High Commissioner (HC) Sir Harold Macmichael to Colonial Secretary (CS) Oliver Stanley, Colonial Office (CO), 30 April 1941, Public Record Office (PRO), File CO 733/76048/41/42/43.

¹⁴Graham-Brown, “Political Economy,” 121. See 113–37 for a detailed discussion of the issues relating to land tenure and agricultural production.

¹⁵Abd al-Wahhāb al-Kayyālī, ed., *Wathāʾiq al-muqāwama al-Filasṭīniyya al-ʿArabiyya dīd al-ihṭilāl al-Baritani wa al-Ṣahyūniyya, 1918–1939* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1968), 357–58.

¹⁶Although controversy surrounds Jewish ownership, Stein’s *Land Question* is the most recent and best researched on the issue (see app. 2, 226). The figures are based on registered purchases and exclude government concessions.

¹⁷Shaw Commission (1930), Johnson-Crosbie (1930), Hope-Simpson (1930), Lewis French (1931–33), and the Peel Commission (1937).

¹⁸See Stein, *Land Question*, 83, 105–8, noting land scarcity as early as 1930.

¹⁹Porath, *The Palestinian Arab*, 85.

²⁰Stein, *Land Question*, 186.

²¹Arab-owned lands consisted of all citrus, banana, and “other” plantations; taxable and untaxable cereal land; and uncultivable land, equaling 10,325,833 *dunums*. Of the total, 4,807,260 *dunums* were uncultivable. Jewish-owned lands, which included the same types of land, totaled 1,193,253 *dunums*. Memo by CS Oliver Stanley, 9 September 1943, PRO, File Foreign Office (FO) 371/35040.

²²Stein argues that the final tally of 899 landless (or about 5,000 earners and dependents) made by Lewis French and the Development Department in the 1930s was not “demonstrative of anything except a Jewish Agency political victory”; *Land Question*, 157. The department, which was formed to deal with the landless problem, relied heavily on the Jewish Agency for documentation and opinions. All claims before the department were sent to the Jewish Agency before a final decision. Though Stein ventures no estimate of Arab landlessness caused by Jewish land purchases, he notes that the 1929 purchase of Wadi Hawarith lands, about 30 miles south of Haifa, alone caused the eviction of 900 of the 1,200 tenants at Wadi Hawarith (see Stein, *Land Question*, 76–79).

²³Calculated from *ibid.*, 182 (table 13).

²⁴Lesch, *Arab Politics*, 69.

²⁵Porath, *The Palestinian Arab*, 129. The word is Porath’s. Jewish labor policy originated in the 1920s. In the 1931–35 period, the Jewish population increased from 175,000 to 355,000.

²⁶Palestine Government, Department of Statistics, "Survey of Social and Economic Conditions in Arab Villages, 1944," *General Monthly Bulletin of Current Statistics* (December 1945): 756.

²⁷Robert R. Nathan, Oscar Gass, and Daniel Creamer, *Palestine: Problems and Promise* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Public Affairs, 1946), 196. The figure is useful only as a rough indicator, because no clarification is given as to how it was arrived at.

²⁸Palestine Government, *Census of Palestine, 1931*, 2 vols. (Alexandria: Whitehead Morris, 1933), 1:282.

²⁹An assumption borne out by the table on ownership size, based on Rural Property Tax records, in Stein, *Land Question*, 28. In the Safad subdistrict, a mere 1.6 percent of the landowners (76 of 4,657) held more than 500 *dunums*. Scarcity of large landholders was even more apparent in the subdistricts of Acre (0.06%, or 57 out of 9,308) and Haifa (0.08%, or 25 out of 3,276).

³⁰See Rachele L. Taquq, "Arab Labor in Mandatory Palestine, 1920–1948" (Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1977), 54–56. There are no dependable figures on wage labor for the 1920s.

³¹*Ibid.*, 58.

³²Government of Palestine, *A Survey of Palestine*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Government Printers, December 1945 and January 1946), 1:336–42. According to Jewish sources, the number of Arabs who worked on Jewish-owned groves at the peak of the season was as high as 8,000, clearly an exaggerated figure. See Taquq, "Arab Labor," 59.

³³Colonial Office (Economic Affairs section, no specific author), note on Arabs employed in Jewish and mixed undertakings, 27 May 1941, PRO, File CO 852/499/1941.

³⁴See Taquq, "Arab Labor," 84–98, 106–12, for a detailed discussion of these and related points.

³⁵First Interim Report of Employment Committee, 27 October 1944, PRO, File CO 733/469/76284/45.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷Taquq, "Arab Labor," 182.

³⁸This paragraph is based on *ibid.*, 172–73, 177–82. Also see Rachele L. Taquq, "Peasants into Workmen: Internal Labor Migration and the Arab Village Community Under the Mandate," in *Palestinian Society and Politics*, ed. Joel Migdal (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), 272–81.

³⁹Nathan, Gass, Creamer, *Problems and Promise*, 213.

⁴⁰*Survey*, 1:364–68. The *Survey* listed data for only seven of the eight subdistricts.

⁴¹Taquq, "Arab Labor," 182; *idem*, "Peasants into Workmen," 279–80.

⁴²Taquq, "Arab Labor," 187–88; *idem*, "Peasants into Workmen," 281.

⁴³Taquq, "Arab Labor," 189–92.

⁴⁴Data on Arab urban slums from *Survey*, 2:691–96.

⁴⁵Taquq, "Arab Labor," 223–24.

⁴⁶Jerusalem Regional Inspector of Labor, report to Director of Labor, 3 November 1945, Israel State Archives (ISA), Record Group (R.G.) 2 (Palestine Chief Secretary's Office), File I/LAB/1/45. ("I/LAB" is for Labor section.)

⁴⁷Annual Report of the Department of Labor, 13 December 1942, PRO, File CO 733/441/75430/42–43. The Labor League, affiliated with the Histadrut, claimed 500 members.

⁴⁸For an account of PAWS's and the Arab labor movement's history and its political interaction with the established leadership, see 'Abd al-Qādir Yāsīn, "al-Ṭabaqa al-ʿummāliyya wa al-ḥaraka al-siyāsiyya fi Filasṭīn," *Shuʿūn Filasṭīniyya* 33 (1976); and Ḥanī al-Hindī, "Mulāḥazāt ḥawl awḍāʿ al-ṭabaqa al-ʿArabīyya al-ʿāmila fi Filasṭīn fi ʿahd al-intidāb," *Shuʿūn Filasṭīniyya* 32 (1974).

⁴⁹Inspector General of Labor, Jerusalem Region, note to HC, 13 September 1943, ISA, R.G. 2, File I/LAB/31/42.

⁵⁰*Survey*, 2:764.

⁵¹Confidential note from CS Stanley to HC Macmichael, 14 August 1942, ISA, R.G. 2, File I/LAB/31/42.

⁵²Labor Department Director's Report on Labor Exchanges, 8 July 1944, PRO, File CO 733/459/754302/44.

⁵³On government patronage of Arab trade unionism, see Taquq, "Arab Labor," 194–212. Also, Annual Report of the Department of Labor, 13 December 1942, File CO 733/441/75430/42–43.

⁵⁴Memo from the Central Committee of PAWS, meeting at Nazareth, to HC, 14 January 1946, ISA, R.G. 2, File G/41/45, 1945/46. ("G" is for Local Government section.)

⁵⁵I. Khattar, Assistant Inspector of Labor, Haifa, to Inspector, Northern Region, 19 May 1945, ISA, R.G. 2, File I/LAB/31/42. For activities and conferences of PAWS and other unions, see ISA, R.G. 2, File I/LAB/31/42; ISA, R.G. 2, File I/LAB/1/45; also, al-Hindī, "Mulāḥazāt."

⁵⁶Jamal Hamid, Safad Arab Labor Society Secretary, to Safad District Commissioner (DC), 24 February 1937, ISA, R.G. 27 (District Commissioner's Office, Galilee), File S225:27-2681.

⁵⁷Regarding the formation of numerous PAWS branches, see DC reports (under "Societies"), Galilee District, ISA, R.G. 27. The government and CO were suspicious of, but did not try to stop, these developments. The CS wrote to the HC that "it is difficult to see the object of trade unions in villages, and it will be recalled that other prima facie harmless organizations (e.g., the Boy Scouts) have been turned in the past to illicit purposes." CS (Stanley) to HC (Macmichael), forwarded to Galilee DC, 28 September 1943, ISA, R.G. 2, File I/LAB/31/42.

⁵⁸Miller, *Government and Society*, 147-48. *Mukhtārs* included a wide range of individuals, from men of little status to large landowners, from those representing narrow kinship or religious groups to those representing a whole village or villages (see 146).

⁵⁹Miller, "Administrative Policy in Rural Palestine," in *Palestinian Society*, 140.

⁶⁰E. M. Chudleigh, Inspector General, Jerusalem Region, note on FATU, 15 July 1943, ISA, R.G. 2, File I/LAB/31/42.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²Regional Inspector of Labor, Jerusalem, to Director of Labor, 3 November 1945, ISA, R.G. 2, File I/LAB/1/45. See also Palestine Government report on the development of Communism in Palestine, 27 April 1946, PRO, File FO 371/52621.

⁶³Graves report in HC (Macmichael) to CS (Stanley), 19 June 1941, PRO, File CO 733/75430/21941.

⁶⁴Part of the following discussion is based on Taqqu, "Arab Labor," 212-21.